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Concerns remain the same despite changes

I have come to the conclusion that my principal duty as a veteran chronicler of the happenings in Richmond upon Thames and Hounslow is to remind readers there is nothing new under the sun!

As I plough through the paper every week the same subjects fly from the pages as they did when I joined the journalistic team in Chiswick in 1960: Air noise, traffic chaos, parking, inadequate bus and tube train services, disappearing open space, conservation, street robberies, fears of declining school standards.

Despite the dramatic transformation in economic circumstances, social mores, communication and transportation, the concerns of those who live in suburbs like Richmond and Chiswick on the

fringe of the city remain constant.

Most residents love their locality, appreciate its virtues and want to preserve and improve conditions there.

They want their streets to be crime free, their libraries to be well stocked, their buses and tubes to flow freely, to be able to park their cars without hassle and walk to school and shops in safety.

They require their dustbins to be emptied, streets to be litter free, their swimming pools clean and parks to be well maintained and safe, their schools to be disciplined and of academic excellence and roads to be free of potholes and pits.

And they use the columns of their local newspaper to keep politicians, school heads and policemen on their toes

and planners aware of their duty to conserve the best of the many areas of outstanding architectural and natural beauty.

For this they mainly use the letters page. No finer barometer exists if a local newspaper is feeling the pulse of its circulation area. Richard Dimbleby, whose family had nurtured the publications since the 1880s, once spoke of local papers being the flagships of democracy, while his son David stressed the value of the letters pages which provided a unique opportunity for residents to "talk to MPs and councillors".

Today you can still find every aspect of local opinion reflected on them – and indeed tastes, strictures and reflections.

A criticism of authority will inevitably bring a response.

The addition of readers' photographs marks the way technology is providing the opportunity for people to comment without words.

An effective digital camera can demonstrate the virtues and failings of the boroughs sometimes more powerfully than an article.

The pictures bring me back to my original observation of how little things change however much they change.

The show of a car disappearing under the waters of the Thames last week when caught by a high tide at Richmond Bridge is a case in point!

For decades now – ever since the Mini brought the automobile within the reach of all – unsuspecting drivers – together

with those who ought to know better – risk leaving their vehicles illegally on the river front, dinking that the worst that can happen will be a parking fine.

They return from parks, shops or restaurants to find them coated with mud, waterlogged and immobilised.

This despite warning notices that make it clear you are not only breaking the law but risking nature's retribution if you park at the river's edge!

But like all who stop on a double yellow to make a quick purchase or alert a relative or friend, those who cannot resist the temptation to leave their vehicles on the inviting wide open spaces on Richmond's riverbank and slipways live to rue the day.

Nothing really changes does it?