

A new slant on Heathrow oppositio

When I was appointed editor of the Richmond and Twickenham Times series in 1976, the proprietor David Dumbleby insisted that I live in the borough – as had my five predecessors, including the joint founder, his great grandfather.

At the time I was in Cranbrook Road, Chiswick, within spitting distance of the Brentford and Chiswick Times where I was chief reporter. It was a terraced Victorian house and I had only occupied it for about three years after doing the refurbishing, rewiring and replumbing with my own scarred hands.

So I had mixed feelings about leaving and in my case my heart still belonged in the centre of the capital and particularly Notting Gate where I lived between 1960 and 1973 in a convenient basement flat in an attractive Georgian terrace.

Besides, in Chiswick you could watch

the planes descending to Heathrow in comfort – yet for some freak reason you could hardly hear them. You could have drinks in the garden without being deafened every two minutes by craft arriving from the four corners of the globe.

I plumped for Forest Road Kew – wanting to stay as close to the West End as I could and to be somewhere served by an efficient tube service. Needless to say, Kew, one of the most expensive and sought after parts of the capital, had no such freak sound-proofing battle.

The planes were very much in evidence – and there was another rub, the District and North London line at the bottom of the garden. So further out did not mean more tranquillity for me – but more noise.

The news that the world's largest passenger aircraft flew over the borough

last month and will soon be a regular caller at Heathrow reminded me of my arrival in Richmond upon Thames and just how the airport dominated our lives then and still does.

It supplied a continuous source of topics for editorial comment. I continued the policy of my predecessor Reginald Ward in condemning all moves to expand the airport and in calling for consideration instead to be given to building new airports in the north of England where the economy was suffering and employment prospects were dismal.

I backed readers' concerns about the inadequate infrastructure, safety fears, pollution (plants at Kew Gardens were being damaged by diesel fall out, it emerged at that time) and the mantra that big was not beautiful.

Of course history shows that commercial

pressures for expansion were so enormous that nothing could stop the new terminal being built or the number of flights increasing dramatically.

The protest did however put pressure on the airlines to find quieter, less polluting aircraft and the new A380 Airbus appears to be less intrusive than most of its smaller relatives. Whether the new facilities at the airport will enable 550 passengers through the baggage lobbies and passport control without longer delays however, remains to be seen.

The sad truth about living near Heathrow though is that one becomes desensitised to the noise. When friends arrive to stay overnight they complain about being woken by the early morning flights and wonder how we residents can cope.

The fact most of us just don't hear the

intrusive screech any more shows adaptable human beings are environment and the intrusive modern life imposes.

But it does not change the air that have been put forward newspaper since the sixties, that H has passed its optimum and that th that descends from the skies a mounting effect the planes have a warning means that enough is eno

Climate change has put a new : the arguments and there is less of the anti Heathrow expansion , sounding like a cry from the wil now that even the most react elements in our political establishi looking seriously at the consequer unlimited growth. Which must be news for Hagan and the resid associations that back it.