

## **THE EARLY HISTORY OF QUAKERS IN THE SUTTON AREA**

In 1781, Foster Reynolds, a wealthy Quaker, bought a tract of land in Carshalton on the border with Mitcham. This was a large estate beside the river Wandle at Hackbridge which included a flour mill and supported a number of the rural industries at that time. The area, which lies between Green Wrythe Lane, Nightingale Road, and the London Road (to Mitcham) has since been developed for housing and there are few remaining signs of this earlier period. Foster Reynolds established an important area of 'bleaching grounds'. The Wandle was used to fill an extensive network of ditches; the cloth to be whitened was spread out on the grass beside the ditches and labourers armed with scoops constantly patrolled the area to ensure that the material was kept damp. At times there was up to 50 acres of land covered with linen.

Foster Reynolds also owned Carshalton House and the land that went with it. This was an important property south of London which previously had many eminent owners, including Dr. John Radcliffe (a physician to the Queen), Sir John Fellowes (a governor of the South Sea Company), Lord Hardwicke (who became Lord Chancellor), and Thomas Walpole (nephew of the great Sir Robert Walpole). The house, and the land immediately around it is now occupied by the Catholic school of St. Philomena's.

After Foster Reynolds' death in 1798, his two younger sons Thomas and Jacob Foster inherited the bleaching grounds but William (the elder son) seems to have inherited enough wealth to live without working. He occupied Carshalton House and had married Esther Morris, who herself was related to two other well-known, and wealthy, Quaker families: the Frys and the Gurneys. At that time the nearest Quaker Meetings were at Mitcham and Purley, to which the Carshalton Friends no doubt travelled.

William Foster Reynolds died in 1838 at the age of 70 and Carshalton House was sold. For the sale it was described as a 'very Capital Handsome and Truly Comfortable mansion in most Substantial Repair with Superior Offices of every Description ... only one mile from the Brighton Road at Sutton [the fast turnpike road] and only 10 miles from the several Bridges' [London, Blackfriars, Southwark, Waterloo, Westminster, and Vauxhall].

In 1837, Samuel Gurney, another Quaker and the brother of Elizabeth Fry, married one of the Reynolds family and acquired the bleaching grounds and flour mill (not Carshalton House). It was he who built the mansion called *The Culvers*. There appears to have been some public protest when he tried to close footpaths that went close to the house. Samuel Gurney collected exotic wildfowl (the Aviary occupied quite a large area on the old estate map) and he is said to have imported the first Black Swan from Australia. In trying to close the footpaths he was perhaps seeking to protect his collection. By 1847 the estate contained *The Sprules* lavender distillery as well as a leather dressing works.

Samuel Gurney was active in philanthropic activities in the area. He founded a 'British School' (in reply to the Church of England's 'National Schools') in Leicester House, an old workhouse at Wrythe Green.

Samuel Gurney's rural luxury was brought to an end by the failure of the family bank: Overend and Gurney's. In 1866 the estate was then sold by auction.

No doubt there were other Quakers resident in the area; for part of the 19th century *Shepley House* in Strawberry Lane was occupied by Alfred Tylor who was also described as a 'philanthropic Quaker'.

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The above information is based on a study by Margaret Arnold for the 50th Anniversary of Sutton Meeting. It is taken from *The Story of Carshalton House* (p79), *The Illustrated History of Old Carshalton* (pp 86-89), and *From Medieval Manor to London Suburb* (p89), all written by A.E. Jones.