

GROUPS AND OTHER MEETING ACTIVITIES

Sutton Friends have been meeting together in a wide range of groups, outside Meeting for Worship and our monthly business meetings. Elders and overseers meet together every few weeks. Committees, of course: premises committee, children's committee, socials committee, nominations committee.

Less formal groups have included the following:

The Sewing Meeting

The Sewing Meeting was a group of women Friends who met together on Wednesday afternoons every two weeks or so to sew and knit. It may have started in war-time (the days of make-do-and-mend) and they held their final meeting on 16 May 1990 when Christina Holland left to live elsewhere. The work they undertook was at the request of people who needed help with such things as knitting socks for a family of five boys whose mother could not knit and was a busy working architect! They were paid a small amount for their labours, money that was then given to a charity of their choice, probably a Quaker cause. It was a social occasion as well as a 'working' meeting and it's highly likely that many important decisions were taken over the cups of tea and lovely cakes they brought to share!

Bread and Cheese Lunches

Bread and Cheese lunches were started by Ann Mari Finch at the Meeting House in Worcester Gardens in Autumn 1966. The Finches left Sutton in 1969 before our move to Cedar Road and this very sociable mid-week activity was continued by a group of women Friends in the new meeting house. In the autumn of 1999 the holding of the lunches was discontinued as there were no longer enough Friends able to make the lunches and transport older members to and from them.

There was an element of frugality about the lunches: a cup of vegetarian soup plus a slice or two of bread with a small piece of cheese and butter, followed by a cup of tea,

Funds raised from the lunches were used in support of Sutton Meeting's Positive Peace Project. This project arose from a concern of Gwen Bagwell in 1966. The Project was to raise money to support the Cape Town Peace Centre in South Africa and in its first year it raised £442. Accounts from 1970 to 1999 show that during that period the lunches raised an overall total of £11,285.24.

Patricia Steel writes: "On occasion there would be a slip-up, as on 20 June 1990 when I arrived for the lunch to find a group of Friends waiting to eat but no-one there to make the lunch. Luckily there was a store at the end of Cedar Road from where supplies could be quickly rustled up and a make-shift meal prepared".

For seven years Christina Holland made three-fruit marmalade to be sold at Meeting also in aid of PPP very regularly week by week until shortly before she left Sutton in 1990 at the age of 84. This contribution raised a total of £574.

Social evenings

Saturday-evening socials have been held for many years. We do not have a full catalogue of them. One particularly memorable event was the Lord Mayor's Banquet, held in November 1952. The order of events is given in the Miscellaneous Archival Material folder.

New Year parties have also taken place for many years. Between 1957 and 2000 they always included a pantomime, usually involving the children. A list of these pantomimes is in a separate file.

Study Groups

Mid-week study groups have been held in Sutton Meeting throughout its life. As early as 1934 we have a minute 'A Study Circle is started in the home of Margaret Armitage' and in 1937: 'On the concern of the Study Circle, an address by Jessie Ritch on 'Christianity and Education' is printed for distribution, under the title 'With all Thy Mind'.

In the summer of 1967 Sutton Elders agreed to start three mid-week discussion groups: Tuesday at the home of Pat and Gordon Steel; Wednesday at the home of Jack and Isabel Boag, and Thursday with Geoffrey and Shirley Thomas.

The Thursday Group was largely a Bible-study group. It carried on for a few years but in the 1970s Geoff and Shirley moved away from Sutton Meeting.

The Wednesday Group tended to concentrate on international affairs, but with a range of other issues also. This was a thriving group which continued until Jack and Isabel moved home to Edinburgh in 1990.

The Tuesday Group, meeting at 38 Osmond Gardens, Wallington, developed a 'mixed diet' of Quakerism, religion, social, literary, poetry, music, interests of individual Friends, and general interest topics. In 1974 Pat and Gordon moved home to 2 Hill Road, Carshalton, and the group continued there, as it does to the present day. A separate document details the history of the Tuesday Group.

Bible Study

Bible study groups have been held at various times in the life of Sutton Meeting. The most recent was initiated by Stan Lee, with the approval of elders, around 2000 and it continues to the present day. The group meets monthly, and sometimes more often, with an average attendance of around ten. The approach has been that advocated in Mary Morrison's book, *Approaching the Gospels Together*. This aims to bring the group to a consideration of the gospel narratives as if reading them for the first time. The parallels of the stories in the gospels have been considered together, fully taking into account all differences in text as well as treatment. It has been a rule that all baggage, theological or otherwise, be left at the door. So how the text speaks to members of the group as individuals, whether they have been familiar with the text or reading it for the first time, has been of equal importance.

In 2011 the leadership of the group is passing to Gerald Moss and Graham Ellis who are broadening the study to include the whole of the Bible.

Women's Group

Set up in about 1996/7 this group ran informally for about 5 years. Founder members were Jennie Fairweather and Ann Janes who regularly attended the national Quaker Women's Group. The group met in each other's homes on a monthly basis to discuss ideas and books and to share women's issues in relation to the Society of Friends and their own lives. It functioned as a practical and spiritual support group for a wide age range within the Meeting in a manner which was not otherwise available. Numbers attending ranged between 4 and 10 on occasions. Other regular members of this group included Meg Barnes, Rosemary Cryle, Joan Jarman, Cathy Nagler, Mary Smith, Lindsay Thompson and Jo Vellacott.

Card-recycling Group

The Card-recycling Group was started by Elizabeth Heap in September 1993. Its purposes were threefold: to reduce the environmental impact of waste paper, to raise funds for Britain Yearly Meeting, and the enjoyment of a group of Friends doing craft-work and valuing one another's

company. Friends have met on a Thursday morning every two or three weeks in the home of Elizabeth Heap.

The 'founder group' was Elizabeth, Betty Morris, Brenda Mallinson and Doreen Morris. Subsequently as members of this group were prevented, they were replaced by Jill Sheppard, Patricia Steel, and Olwen & Raymond Forsyth, and Edmund Dixon.

Cards were sold on a stall in the meeting house foyer, also at Monthly and Area Meetings. In some years there was also a stall at Yearly Meeting, especially when this was in Friends House, Euston. Profit from the sale of cards was very successful in 2005 (£400) when John Nicholson took them up to Yearly Meeting in York and was a very effective salesman!

Singing Workshops

These events started in November 2009 and are held three times a year on Sunday afternoons after a picnic lunch. They have been led by Leslie Bell, Gay McDonagh and Antonia Moxham. The style has been an informal group of 15-20 Friends from across the Area Meeting who meet to share the joy of singing together. The songs are mainly unaccompanied and have included rounds, part songs and harmonies from various traditions and countries.

Sutton Quaker Steel Band

The Sutton Quaker Steel Band was started in 2006 when we realised that Carol Contant, a newly-joined Friend who was brought up in British Guyana still had a collection of 'pans'. They were made by her late husband, a Trinidadian, with whom she had toured the UK and various parts of the world playing the band. Sutton Meeting House has a large sound-proof basement, only partly used for storage, and this has become the practice-room for the Tuesday Steel Band Group. It consists of around ten performers. They have an expanding repertoire including Strauss waltzes, El Pasa Condor, *Bring me sunshine* from the Morcambe and Wise TV show, and a ravishing rendering of Beautiful Barbados. We believe that this is the only Quaker Steel Band in the world!

'Not bad for recycled teenagers' was one of the comments by passers-by when the band performed in the busy Sutton high street in support of Quaker Week and the Quaker Quest stall. Another was: 'Can I join Quakers just to play in the band?'

Local churches have got to know about the band and they have done a number of very successful performances in the Sutton area, no doubt causing puzzlement about what Quakers get up to!

Rambles

Sunday-afternoon walks have been a feature of Sutton Meeting for many years. Friends have started out by car and then rendezvoused in some attractive part of the Surrey countryside. There has been no formal organisation or leadership. We recall Arthur White leading walks in the 1970s and 80s and later Gerald and Beryl Moss. Mike Tucker led occasional 'butterfly walks'. And more recently Louise Murch has been a leader.