

SUTTON MEETING

The place called Sutton in Surrey was there all right, but George Fox missed it. He got to Mitcham, of fairground fame; was pelted with mud and filth, and took the road to Croydon. If he had taken the road to the south coast later used by George the Fourth, whose coach stopped for fresh horses at the Sutton hostelry, *The Cock*, on the way to Brighton, then Quakerism might have taken root in Sutton before 1932. It was Croydon's gain, and in due time Croydon begat Purley and Purley begat Sutton.

Sutton Meeting today, with 159 members, radiates a certain liveliness. Nothing succeeds like success and inquirers visit Sutton Meeting almost, it seems, without anything very much being done to attract them. There has been extension work; public meetings, a notice on the railway station, Sunday evening meetings with good speakers – recently on 'Friends and their vocations', with a deputy-governor of a prison, a scientist, a Member of Parliament, a social worker and an artist. There is a mid-week discussion group which reaches top form when engaged in the study of the Bible. These activities confirm and convince rather than apply the magnet. It is the liveliness of the people that attracts.

Sutton's members are active in the borough. They have supplied presidents for the Council of Churches and the Free Church Council, a candidate in the local elections, had at one time the monopoly of office-holders on the local Marriage Guidance Council, boast a Brown Owl and a Scoutmaster, help in numerous other activities and organizations. The meeting's members are known and the place is familiar to Soroptimists and Crusaders, Nuclear Disarmers and Pipers, Theosophists and WEA students, to whom rooms have been made available. Friends have accepted invitations to face the questions of sixth formers at local schools, have talked Quakerism to youth clubs, young wives' groups, church meetings and humanists. These contacts have made for freshness of thought; and the meeting, saved from staleness, knows well enough what people are saying about religion in general and Quakerism in particular.

Sometimes it looks as though the transfer market is really going to shake a winning team. A family goes to Birmingham because Woobrooke needs a lecturer; two stars respond to the call of

wardenship elsewhere; others go to a small country meeting through a move of work; retirees go off to the coast; a couple to the States for government service; teachers concerned go to serve in Africa. But the certificates 'in' have a knack of supplying the substitutes; other members blossom and the whole process is seen as part of Quaker development.

Sutton Friends regard themselves as being in the welterweight rather than the heavyweight class. There is a preponderance of youngish couples rising towards middle-age whose families were born and have grown up in the fold, children who for the most part have attended local schools and have introduced their pals. About forty youngsters from nought to seventeen, in five classes, require a teaching rota of twenty, but there is a tradition of support for the work. A Saturday night club, run by one of the 18-year-olds, gets the lads and lasses together during the week. The meeting, with rare good sense, invested in a first-class table-tennis table. The annual pantomime, they say, is a winner. Cinderella and Prince Charming of 1956 are acting out their pantomime roles in real life; Snow-white, Robin Hood, Mother Goose, Aladdin and Dick Whittington and many of the supporting cast are still around.

These same young people get involved in discussion at school and elsewhere with their age group in other churches and, notably, the fundamentalists. An occasional Sunday afternoon tea party with a couple of elders has proved to be invaluable in sorting out where they stand on the meaning of the Cross, sacraments, the authority of scripture.

Sutton is in the suburban sprawl, but the meeting knows that the doors of trim semi-detached houses provide no effective shelter from the basic questions and the realities. The ministry arising from worship week by week reflects the experience of a group well integrated with life. Sutton has known all the sorrows as well as the laughter, and it has its saints who go marching on and whose memory puts new life into the stragglers.

Of course, the meeting has its weaknesses. A shower of rain knocks the attendance pretty hard and ... well, you know the kind of thing. But you could feel pretty confident about inviting someone along next Sunday.

Arthur White