

Farewell to the 'General' and his wife

At the end of January over 100 Friends and attenders celebrated the service of Thomas and Nancy Taylor to Sutton Meeting and to Friends worldwide. Thomas and Nancy Taylor came to England in 1986 when Thomas took up the post of Associate Secretary of FWCC. At first they lived in Streatham and attended Streatham Meeting but in 1987 the wardenship of Sutton Meeting became vacant and they blew into the flat above the meeting house soon after the October gales. So Sutton Friends began to enjoy their friendship, their service, and their welcoming presence. Nancy managed the use of the meeting house and developed warm relationships with many of the outside users, a valuable form of extension work. She has been a sensitive overseer and looked after our physical health with keep-fit classes for Quakers and countless walks in the Surrey countryside, for which Tom and Nancy have a famous affinity. When the local churches began to organise Sunday lunches for drop-outs in Sutton it was Nancy who led the Quaker participation.

Thomas has left his mark on Sutton Friends as an elder and through his remarkable talents in music, having previously been on the music history faculty of the University of Michigan. He carried on the Sutton tradition of hymn singing before meeting each Sunday. He regaled us with talks about a great variety of musical topics. We will remember him for his lively sense of humour and for fronting up for 9 years the annual pantomime, a long-standing tradition at Sutton, bringing it to new heights. But above all he has served the meeting as a wise and widely-experienced Friend, appreciated for his faithful vocal (non-musical) contributions to our worship.

In 1992 Thomas replaced Val Ferguson as General Secretary of FWCC. At the time a frail and somewhat confused woman Friend passed on the news that Tom had become the 'General of the Society of Friends'. In his six years in the post he has travelled widely among Friends and promoted the building of community through unity and understanding, with a special concern that Friends should speak the truth to one another in love. He had a major role in organising the 1991 Friends World Conference and three Triennials. Nancy also did valuable work for BYM in organising the series of Diplomat seminars at the Quaker International Centre.

Sutton Friends sadly said farewell to Tom and Nancy as they go off on round-the-world travel amongst Friends, taking 3 months to make their way back home to Ann Arbor, Michigan. We thank them for their service and wish them well.

G. Gordon Steel