

## **LOOKING BACK OVER THE LIFE OF A NEWISH QUAKER MEETING**

Sutton Meeting is a newcomer within the life-span of Britain Yearly Meeting. Founded in 1932 with the help of Friends from long-established meetings in Croydon, Purley and Mitcham, it has no deep-rooted tradition but it has displayed a certain liveliness. Perhaps surprisingly, its archives have been well-kept and they give a picture of a meeting that flourished during its first two generations but which is now showing the strains of modern times.

For their first eight years, Sutton Friends met in rented accommodation. Then in 1940, in the heat of war, they purchased a large detached dwelling which served them well for the next 30-odd years. In 1959 they added a beautiful new meeting-room to the rear of the property, only to be told two years later that the Borough Council intended to carry out a compulsory purchase in order to build a multi-storey car-park. It took nine years before the meeting was able to move into a brand-new building, provided as 'comparable reinstatement', premises that are now well bedded-in.

The character of the vibrant first 50 years was moulded by a succession of remarkable individuals who devoted a substantial part of their lives to Sutton Meeting. Jessie Ritch was a charismatic and very spiritual Friend at the centre of the early meeting, although we have been reminded in a lovely phrase reproduced as an extract from her Testimony (QFP 18.16) that 'our Friend was not without her human foibles...'. Jack and Ann-Mari Finch were the wardens of the first meeting house but both did far more than look after the premises. Ann-Mari was a grass-roots worker who shunned official Meeting appointments: 'she worked on her own like a whole team of overseers'. Jack had no intellectual misgivings about theological niceties: 'God was Love, Jesus showed the way to live and Jack was a willing disciple'. Dennis Scott was dearly loved: 'unforgettable, that rotund, bluff, waistcoated figure rising to minister, the strong, deep, vibrant voice reaching all his hearers'. Arthur White was widely known as recording clerk of London Yearly Meeting and was a pillar of the Meeting for many years: 'he ministered frequently and his insights were drawn from personal experiences in his daily life. His ministry often had the feel of modern parables delivered with a lightness of touch and a gentle humour but which, nevertheless, carried powerfully affirming and positive messages'. The right conduct of our business meetings was a particular concern of Arthur. Isabel and Jack Boag were a more recent couple at the centre of Sutton Meeting, They combined a loving care for individuals with a concern that

the Meeting as a whole should be effective in addressing some of the major problems of the world around us. These are just a few examples from a wide range of quiet and weighty Friends who have served and inspired the Meeting.

Since the 1980s Sutton Friends have been aware of a gradual decline in membership and attendance. This is graphically shown in the accompanying Figure which also charts the children's contribution to the Meeting, an attendance that peaked at around 35-40 in the early 1960s and now has fallen almost to zero. In spite of this sad state of affairs, Sutton is still a very lively meeting with a good age range of adults and a steady stream of new members.

The history of this relatively young Meeting has been documented in a compilation of 50 pages of text extracted from the minutes (1932 – 2010), extracts from the minutes of record of the lives of 67 Friends and attenders, a large number of ancillary documents about events in the life of the Meeting, and around 600 images of Friends and their activities. Copies are available on a single CD disc from [ggsteel@onetel.com](mailto:ggsteel@onetel.com).

