

## *From the Earliest Days*

### **A potted history of Sutton Meeting**

As Quaker meetings go, one that started in 1932 is only a stripling, yet for those of us who know it well it is old enough to have built up a catalogue of events and personalities that we would not wish to forget. After 60 years none of the founder members of Sutton meeting survive and there are few of us who knew them.

Sutton Meeting began in a hired hall and it was well into the first world war before the meeting was able to buy its own premises in Worcester Gardens. Friends were already active in support of refugees and later of prisoners-of-war who came to the Sutton area. Jack and Ann-Mari Finch made the wardens' flat a haven of caring for so many people associated with the meeting.

The most poignant aspects of the history of Sutton Meeting are contained in the testimonies, recorded in the minutes of PM and sometimes in Yearly Meeting documents. This is a meeting that has been blessed with a succession of very able and devoted members: the powerful figure of Jessie Ritch, the firmness of John Holland, the concern for temperance of Cecil and Muriel Heath, and the dedicated service of so many others. Percy Cleave was a quiet and kindly barber who ministered to those whose hair he dressed: 'To have Percy cut your hair was a grace'. And Dennis Scott: 'Unforgettable, that rotund, bluff, waistcoated figure rising to minister, the strong deep, vibrant voice reaching all his hearers. He spoke of encounters with people, in buses, on trains . . .' Fred Hannant was a serious and thoughtful elder: 'none of us will forget the sight of him rising to speak, his slumped, arms-folded figure quietly unwinding itself until there he was, balding head slightly bent, hands on hips, and that quiet voice of his coming out of the silence and back to the silence once again.'

In 1958 Ann-Mari and Jack Finch started a correspondence between Sutton Friends and Friends in Sweden, with the extra translational help of Malin Andrews ( the numbers of Friends in these two places were actually similar!). This went on for some years and we have on record some marvelous letters that came to us. Birgitta Sandberg, a dwarf, wrote:

*Do you remember, when as a child  
first you saw your mother weep . . .*

In 1970 the meeting moved to a modern new building in Cedar Road and a new phase of life began. The BBC did a live radio broadcast of meeting for worship in 1980, and meetings continued to have a rich and caring atmosphere. Dennis Scott said: 'This wholesome quality of natural Christianity which I found at Sutton - simple, often profound, sometimes wise and full of gaiety, joy and good humour, has always been the hallmark of our meeting.'

During the last 15 years the life of the meeting has been maintained through the service of many more dearly love Friends, some no longer with us, including Margaret and Maurice Arnold, Ronald Abbott, Gwen Bagwell, Jack and Isabel Boag. Our resident wardens have played an important role in the life of the meeting. This is a history still in the making.