



*Sutton House Society*

## **S T O P       P R E S S**

**Public Meeting Wednesday 13 March 1991  
8pm Sutton House**

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Although our second jointly produced newsletter, it is our first featuring the new design. The Sutton House Society has adopted a logo which depicts the house and denotes the Society's interest in its history and future use. The management's logo incorporates references to the architectural details found in the house whilst presenting a contemporary and forward looking style to support promotion of the wide range of activities which will take place in the coming years. We would like to thank Audrey Seabrook and John Finn, both Sutton House Society members, for their help and advice in the preparation of these designs.

### **FUNDRAISER APPOINTED**

A second, and key, appointment was made by The National Trust in early February when Martin Kaufman took up the post of Fundraiser. With a target of £700,000 to achieve over the next three years, Martin has a challenging task to secure the finance needed to embark on Phase II in mid 1992.

Martin has experience of a wide-range of commercial enterprises and a long-standing interest in the history and architecture of London. Once the preparatory work on the appeal has been completed, the Sutton House Society will be discussing with him how to help and support the appeal locally.

### **PHASE I BUILDING WORK**

After contracts were signed in the New Year, contractors took possession of the Phase I areas on 14 January. The hoarding and bold notices prominently displayed on it leave no doubt to anyone passing along Homerton High Street that something is at last happening!

The main contractors, Loe & Co. from Maldon in Essex, are an established family firm formed by the present Managing Director, Peter Loe's grandfather in 1919. They specialise in high quality restoration projects on listed and historical buildings and recently completed the refurbishment of an early 18th century house in Smith Square, Westminster. Currently they are working on two City churches, St. Botolph's and St. Margaret's, Lothbury and will soon start on repairing St. Gabriel's, Walthamstow.

The knowledge and enthusiasm of their experienced tradesmen will ensure that vital clues and evidence, which will enable us to complete our understanding of the house and its development, will not be lost or overlooked. Our brick collection is growing rapidly with examples being found of Tudor bricks with dog paw-prints, finger impressions and sunken margins (ask about those next time you visit us!)

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## SUTTON HOUSE LINKS WITH THE PAST

In 1892, Sutton House was purchased by the local Church, renovated and re-opened as a church institute in 1904 when Sir Arthur Lawley, at the opening ceremony, outlined his purpose:-

"The Institute must be a place where all may meet, men of different ages and occupations, of different methods and ideas, Christian men of every stamp, whatever their modes of worship may be; a place for all to meet, and to get to know and to respect their different characters and aims, **and by such** intercourse **to** rub off the rough corners **of** mis-understanding."

John Dyter, who was born in Clapton in 1913 and now lives in Fordingbridge, Hants, reminisces about his years as a member.

### MEMORIES OF THE 1920s AND "THE TUTE"

"In the late 20's I felt the need to widen my horizon by joining a club. The best by far was St. John's Institute affectionately known as "**the tute**". It was difficult, however, to get in. They were very selective and one had to have highly respected sponsors. Eventually I was interviewed and admitted and thus began a most enjoyable (and hilarious) period of my **life**. **Of course that all** stopped when Hitler stepped into our lives.

**I used to walk** from London Road (now Clapton Way) where I lived **at** No. 45, across Hackney Downs to Pembury Road, down Clarence Road then off to Clapton Square, across Lower Clapton Road, along the footpath between the churchyard and the police station to Sutton House - at the end of which and just round the corner was St. John's Institute. Every moment I could, I spent at the club and how happy those moments were.

On entering the building through the porch and the wide oak door, the first room on the left was called the Bar, though only soft drinks were **sold**. It was a plain uninteresting room with cream coloured plastered walls and a large fireplace round which in winter evenings we sat with hot drinks, talking and laughing mostly.

The room on the right was called the Committee Room. This was a panelled room of great interest. Beyond that and past the staircase was a door on the right which led into the caretaker's private quarters and where he did tailoring work. His name was Bob Niblett, a kind man of good humour who did his work well. He lived there with his mother and sister, who was a deaconess of St. John's Church. His brother who lived elsewhere, was the church organist and choirmaster, a fine musician. To the left of the hallway was a door leading to the courtyard and chapel.

Up the lovely staircase to the left was a large panelled room which was used for table tennis and to the right was the Library, another fine panelled room. It had a splendid set of bookcases, polished tables and armchairs. The fireplace was another place for sitting and talking and sometimes singing to Albert 'Ike' Groves playing the piano. Just inside the door from the staircase and on the right was a small stairway which led to a private flatlet occupied by an old lady. I never did know who she was or how she could live up there with what must have been considerable noise at times from us.

Ahead as you reached the top of the stairs was the enormous billiards room which had some fine panelling and a very large Tudor fireplace. This was always a busy room and much fun was enjoyed on Friday nights when knock-out competitions were held. At the far end of this room was a door

*which led into the private quarters of the three assistant clergy who were, at that time, Rev. W. Pening, Rev. Philip Marling-Roberts and Rev. Michael Hocking. The rector at about that time was Canon Robotham.*

*Despite the club being linked with St. John-at-Hackney there was absolutely no pressure upon any member to attend church, in fact religion was seldom discussed. Quite a number did however, regularly go to church and some were in the choir, some sidesmen etc.*

*Sutton House had for me some extraordinary moods and though I am not in any way interested in ghosts etc. it would, I feel, be very easy for someone who knew about such matters to conjure up some spirits there. I have on many occasions been the only person in the club, often after dark, and I must confess to having had some eerie feelings from time to time. The building was full of odd creaks and whispers, but the life of the club seemed to suppress them most of the time. The chapel was not used often, certainly not for religious purposes. I only really remember it being used when we opened the club for the day for charity fund-raising efforts. It was then used as a "ghost-chamber" with hanging cottons and skeletons painted with luminous paint on black sheets.*

*The club was open from 6-11pm Monday to Friday and all day on Saturday. We had our regular cricket and football teams and we played in the London League table tennis, billiards and snooker.*

*The membership was mixed, predominating were the chaps with City jobs in banks and the stock exchange, tradespeople and local government staff. There were a number of members, however, who were manual workers from factories and the building trades. Class distinction just did not exist - no barriers of any sort were put up and everyone was on equal terms. Real friendships were established between the City men and bricklayers, bank officials and factory hands. The ages ranged from 18 to 60+.*

*I suppose it would be nearly impossible to find any of these people now. Some lost their lives in the War and in any case we were split up and dispersed to the far corners of the world during that period - never to return to Hackney in most cases. How I should like to meet up with them again. Most of them will be like me, too old to get about much now. The spirit is so willing but the flesh is so weak."*

We want to hear from other members of the Institute and, through coverage in the Hackney Gazette and Church Times, hope that we can add to Mr. Dyter's reminiscences - perhaps with some photographs.

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