

SECOND DRAFT

# A Quiet Bristolian



## **Paul D Sturge 1891-1974**

First warden of the Bristol Folk House, 1921-1935

A brief memoir by his son.

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First warden of the Bristol Folk House

Paul Dudley Sturge was born in Clyde Park, Redland on 1 July 1891. It is said that the birth was so difficult and his mother so ill that straw was placed in Woodfield Road to deaden the sound of horses hooves. She was not able to bear more children though 24 years later a second son was adopted.

Paul's parents both came from long-standing Quaker families. Jane May Gripper, always known as May, was born in Ipswich where her mother was a member of the East Anglian Quaker May clan. Theodore Sturge's ancestor, Joseph Sturge, is recorded as being buried in the Quaker burial ground at Lower Hazel, near Almondsbury, in 1669. Theodore had joined his three uncles, William, Walter and Robert, the "Sons" in JP Sturge and Sons, the firm of land agents and surveyors which dated back to about 1760 when John Player, uncle of their grandfather, Jacob Sturge, had diversified from farming in Stoke Gifford.

Jacob had moved into Red House Farm in Coombe Lane, Westbury-on-Trym in the 1770s and likewise combined farming with surveying and estate management. His sons, Young Sturge and later the younger, Jacob Player Sturge moved into the City and played a prominent role in the development of Bristol and the railways until JP died in 1857 and was succeeded by his son William. In the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century JP Sturge and Sons had expanded their operation substantially and to increase their national and international reach had merged in 1992 with a national firm, Kings, to become King Sturge International. In 2011 it became a part of Jones Lang Lasalle (JLL) a "world leader in real estate services".

Theodore's father, Henry Jacob Sturge, had chosen not to join the family business and started his career as an oilman in Newington Butts, possibly working with his father's cousins who were active in the import of whale oil, subsequently in whaling. After the death of his first wife he married her sister Sophia Dudley. Marriage to a deceased spouse's sibling was not legal in Britain at that time so they had to be married abroad, but legal marriages abroad were recognised in Britain. They settled in Bristol and Theodore, the third of 10 children, was born at 21 St Michael's Hill, close of St Mary Without, in 1858. Henry engaged in the ornamental ironmongery trade and had a chandelier warehouse in Clare Street but by the time Theodore was 16 they had moved again, to Penzance.

At the time of Paul's birth, Theodore was still in a junior position in the firm but he progressed and their residence reflected that. First they moved to Hurle Crescent, crucially across Whiteladies Road into more fashionable Clifton, then to Fern Hollow in Rockleaze Avenue, Sneyd Park. Part of the large garden of Fern Hollow is now a block of flats. In the early 1920s Theodore, who had become senior partner, and May, moved to Winscombe where Theodore was heavily involved with the management of the Quaker School at Sidcot, serving for many years as treasurer. When Paul was in his teens and twenties, they were still living at Fern Hollow so that was an important part of his life. He was enrolled as a day pupil at Clifton College and would walk or cycle across the Downs to school. His younger cousin, Geoffrey Tregelles from Barnstaple came to stay following Paul as a day pupil at Clifton. Geoffrey was to follow Paul to Caius College but before he took his degree

he volunteered in the Devonshire Regiment. As an acting captain in 1916 he was killed in a near suicidal assault at Mametz on the first day of the battle of the Somme.

Paul was destined for a career as a land agent and surveyor in the family business and studied appropriate courses at Caius College Cambridge. He was musical and had been given a boudoir grand piano to take with him to Cambridge, though there is speculation that he may have been too shy to play it much there. After graduation with a First he did indeed join the firm. He was also active in scouting and in the work of the Friends First Day School in Barton Hill, providing courses on Sunday mornings for adults who had had limited educational opportunities. The family would have worshipped at the Friends Meeting House in Hampton Road, Redland. Theodore had used his professional experience in assisting in the purchase of the land for the Meeting House in the 1880s.

Paul's time as a practising surveyor was to be short-lived. In the winter of 1914-15 he volunteered to serve in the newly established Friends Ambulance Unit. In June 1915, after training, he was posted to a hospital behind the lines near Ypres, and served there for a year, alternating months working in the hospital and driving ambulances. His father had taught him to drive some years earlier. We're not told how Theodore learned to drive but it seems likely he was an early owner of motor transport in Bristol. The business in those days was mostly with the big country estates rather than the city commercial property it is known for now, so the convenience and speed of the motor car must have been a benefit.

In 1915, Paul's parents adopted Richard Leonard, privately through the Quakers. It seems likely that Richard's father had been killed in France. Theodore and some of the mother's relatives established a trust fund for her which continued to support her until she died in the 1960s.

In 1916 the position of the members of the Friends Ambulance Unit in France was changed by the Military Service Act. Many of the young men came to feel that the necessarily close working with the military compromised their position. They returned to Britain to face the call-up tribunals. Some held an absolutist position refusing to accept conditional exemption and alternative service; in spite of his service in the unit driving ambulances under fire, Paul's commanding officer was one of those who spent the rest of the war repeatedly imprisoned for refusing to wear uniform. Paul, however, accepted conditional exemption. He stayed in the Friends Ambulance Unit but was posted to work with the Quaker "Emergency Committee" whose brief was to provide support and relief to "enemy aliens", citizens of Germany, Austria and Hungary who had been caught in Britain in 1914, often long time resident in Britain. There was a great deal of persecution and many of them were interned.

Paul never spoke of those years but it is thought that he worked at the internment camp at Alexandra Palace. In 1918 he married one of his fellow workers, Lucy Thompson, and they lived in Holloway, London. There was a difficulty with Paul's parents when Lucy became pregnant. His mother was shocked that they were starting a family and didn't have a house. The estrangement lasted for about two years, in spite of what happened next. In early 1919 both Lucy and Paul became infected in the great influenza pandemic and Lucy died. Paul was too ill to attend her funeral. Although he was still describing himself as a

surveyor, he didn't return to Bristol to take up his post in the firm. For the next two years he worked with the American Quaker teams in Germany, organising feeding schemes for starving children in Cologne and Opladen. When he left in 1921, as well as a set of prints of old Cologne, he received a letter of appreciation from the Burgomeister, one Konrad Adenauer who after WW2 was the first Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany.

Back in Bristol a number of concerned citizens including the Quaker Furniture Manufacturer, Crofton Gane, set up the Bristol Folk House as a Community Education Centre in 1920. Crofton Gane recruited Paul as the Folk House's first warden. This work appears to have suited him better than the commercial world of surveying and land management and he remained there for 14 years. He continued his voluntary work with the Adult School, running classes on Sunday mornings. In those days the Redland Meeting doorkeepers had a seating plan. The Sturge family had to have a place near the door to allow Paul to slip in at the last minute arriving from his Adult School classes. When his colleague from the FAU, St John (Jack) Catchpool, started the Youth Hostels Association, Paul became secretary of the Southwest Region. He also became increasingly involved with Quaker commitments, both in Bristol and nationally. For a time he was Clerk (=chairman) of Bristol Quakers, and he was an active governor of Sidcot School. Towards the end of his time in Bristol he was Clerk of the Meeting for Sufferings, the national representative council of British Quakers. At the Folk House he and his wife had organised a number of visits for the Folk House members to France and Germany. In 1933 British Quakers sent him to visit the small groups of Quakers in Germany to report on the developments following the accession to power of Hitler.

Always an outdoor person, the family holidays were camping variously at Salcombe, Brean and Llangenith on the Gower. The family camp continued as an annual event until 1955, the year before Paul's retirement.

In 1935 the General Secretary of the Friends Service Council, the national body responsible for all British Quakers overseas work in mission and service, retired and Paul was appointed in his place. The Western Daily Press paid tribute to him on his impending departure from Bristol.

Paul had remarried in 1923, to Rachel Graham, daughter of a leading Quaker academic and writer, John William Graham, and by 1933 they had 4 children, between 4 and 10 years old. Their first home was a flat in Berkeley Square lent them by fellow Quaker, Mabel Tothill, who had organised support for conscientious objectors in Bristol, including those in Horfield prison during the war, and became the first woman city councillor in Bristol. After their first child, Lucy, was born in 1925 they moved to a new house in Goldney Avenue, Clifton (subsequently occupied by Professor Cecil Powell whose Nobel Prize for Physics is commemorated in a plaque on the wall).

## **GREAT LOSS TO BRISTOL**

### **Mr Paul Sturge Taking up London Position**

Bristol educational and social work will lose a staunch friend next spring when Mr Paul Dudley Sturge leaves to take up the secretaryship of the Friends Service Council in London.

Mr Sturge is the warden of the Folk House Educational Settlement, and he does yeoman service in a number of educational and social bodies in the district. For two years he was president of the Adult School Union, and he was one of the founders of the Youth Hostels Movement in this country.

He was appointed warden of the Bristol Folk House, in 1921, when the settlement started, since when it has grown and considerably expanded its work.

Mr Sturge, who was born in Bristol, was educated at Clifton College and Caius College, Cambridge, and was destined to become a land agent and surveyor. He took up social work, however, after the war, during which he served in the Friends' Ambulance Unit in France, and the Friends Emergency Committee.

Since 1925 Mr Sturge has been clerk of the Bristol & Frenchay Friends Meeting, and for three years has been clerk of the meeting for sufferings, which is the executive of the Society of Friends.

Western Daily Press (8.11.34)

On Paul's appointment in London they settled in Orpington on the Southeastern fringe of London where their fifth child was born. Paul worked at the headquarters of Quakers in Euston Road for the next 21 dramatic years. In 1937 he was instrumental in setting up the Friends World Committee for Consultation. This new body was charged with building and maintaining contacts between the very disparate groups of Quakers around the world, many of whom had had little contact until the Great War drew them together in relief and reconstruction work and a shared rejection of war as a means of resolving disputes. The work in relief and reconstruction was recognised in 1947 when the Friends Service Council and its American counterpart were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

In 1966, ten years after his retirement, he and Rachel removed back to the West Country, settling in Nailsworth for their remaining years. Still active in his late 70s he served for three years as Clerk of Gloucestershire Quakers. He died in Stonehouse in December 1974 aged 83. When he went into hospital, Rachel had to cancel his appointment to "take old people out in the car".

One of Paul's children, the only one not born in Bristol returned to the City as a teacher and schools adviser and has made his home here. One of his grandsons is active in the Bristol business community, so something of the family tradition is continuing.

Roger Sturge

Bristol  
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