

# Comment

For those who do not know it, Spode House is a rather large, shambling mansion immediately adjacent to Hawkesyard Dominican Priory near Rugeley, Staffordshire. It was once the home of the Spode china family and had been given to the English Dominican province in the late 19th century and used by them for a long time as a school. In 1952 Conrad Pepler OP was sent to Spode House to take on the job, as warden, of developing it as a conference centre. At that time, Conrad, as well as running Blackfriars Publications from Blackfriars Oxford, was also editor of *Blackfriars* and *Life of the Spirit* the predecessors of *New Blackfriars*. It is said that it was with a certain reluctance and heavy heart that he tore himself away from Oxford to obey the assignation, and this July, nearly thirty years later, with probably even more reluctance and heavier heart, he is retiring from that post.

As Donald Nicholl points out in the first article of this issue, the story of Conrad Pepler and Spode House is one of those unlooked for and unplanned, but delightful fruits of religious obedience, and it is with great pleasure that we dedicate this issue of *New Blackfriars* to him, to mark his retirement and also to offer warm thanks for all his work, not forgetting, of course, all those other names like Tina, Joan, Bernard that slip synonymously into mind along with Conrad and Spode House.

Over the years literally hundreds of thousands of men and women have been guests at Spode House. Many of them, like myself, had their Christian faith refreshed, enlivened and deepened. All of them will certainly witness to the warm hospitality and special 'Spode atmosphere' generated by Conrad and his team, (it wasn't always as *physically* warm as it is now of course – the early 'Spodites' remember the early frugal days of chilly and spartan bedrooms and dormitories, but they wouldn't have let *that* put them off, in fact the spartan memories always seem heavily tinged with tearful nostalgia). Many creative and influential groups and movements in the English Church, like PAX which Brian Wicker reminisces about in our third article, found their origin and/or their encouragement and sustenance at Spode, often in times, to coin a phrase of Flann O'Brien's, 'when it was neither profitable nor popular to do so'. There can be no doubt that Spode House has been one of the major institutions in post-War British Catholicism for intellectual and spiritual renewal.

A new warden, Colin Carr OP, is taking over and we wish him every success and happiness. A new era is starting at Spode, but it is hard to imagine that things will be all that different; there are already signs that the new warden has 'caught' the spirit of the retiring one.

Alban Weston O P

