

Father Owen Cannon

*Died 6 August 2011, in Romsey (England)
aged 89, with 70 years of religious profession*

Father Owen Cannon was born in Liverpool on Christmas Day, 25 December 1921, to parents whose roots were in Ireland. He entered the Minor Seminary of the Montfort Missionaries, Montfort College in Romsey, in 1933. After 6 years there, he crossed the English Channel with a few others to begin his novitiate in Chézelles, even though war was imminent in Europe. After the fall of France to the German army, those scholastics from England who were studying in Montfort-sur-Meu managed to make their escape back to Southampton, but Owen, along with the other novices from the British Isles, was captured by the advancing German forces, and sent to an internment camp. He was lucky enough (unlike others in the same predicament) to be able to claim Irish nationality, and so was released, Ireland being neutral in the War. He could not, however, in those wartime circumstances, return to England, and so he made his first Religious Profession in France on 19 February 1941, and then had to spend the next 4 years at Montfort-sur-Meu, studying Philosophy and Theology with the French students. He entered wholeheartedly into the French way of life, and it is said that when he returned to England on 13 November 1944 after the liberation of France, he spoke English with a French accent.

Owen made his perpetual profession on 19 February 1946, and was ordained priest in Chipping, Lancashire on 29 June 1946. His first appointment was to Montfort College, Romsey, where he taught for a number of years before being sent to University to study Classics. After obtaining his degree from London University, he returned to Montfort College to teach, and in about 1957 was appointed headmaster of the College, then Superior in 1963. He was instrumental in obtaining Government approval of the College as a Secondary School, and in establishing high standards of education there.

In 1966 Father Owen finished his teaching career at Montfort College, but remained in Romsey as priest in charge of the parish there, thus beginning a second stage in his missionary apostolate, that of the care of parishes. In 1977, he was appointed to care for the parish of Twyford in Berkshire, then in 1982 he took on the care of a parish in Homerton in the East End of London, where the British scholastics also took up residence after the closure of the student house in Highgate. In 1993 he retired from full-time parish work, and took up residence in the former Provincial House in Cricklewood, from where he supplied in several of the neighbouring parishes. Then in 2003 he moved to Ashurst to begin a well-earned retirement. But even then, he was tireless in acting as chaplain to the Daughters of Wisdom in Romsey, in conducting funerals on behalf of local parish-priests and assisting the chaplaincy work in the Southampton General Hospital, and for a few more years acting as secretary to the Provincial Council.

Father Owen was indeed a prodigious worker, and very competent in all that he undertook. He approached problems carefully and methodically. He never liked surprises. He preferred serenity and predictability. He was a somewhat private person, who wore at times a mask of gravitas, but occasionally he let it slip especially when holding a glass of his favourite drink in his hand.

Almost to the end Father Owen appeared to enjoy good health, and he was approaching his 90th birthday when, after a fall and subsequent hospitalisation, he was discovered to have an inoperable cancer. Within a few weeks, he was admitted to the Nursing Home of the Daughters of Wisdom in Romsey, where he died peacefully on 6 August 2011, the Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord.