

Petà Dunstan  
**The Labour of Obedience**  
*The Benedictines of Pershore, Nashdom and Elmore.*  
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The first reaction of anyone reading Peta Dunstan's 'The Labour of Obedience' must surely be to wonder at the variety and strangeness of the vessels of clay that the Lord uses to work his purposes out. What an odd lot they seemed to have been, from Dom Dominic, 'called Gertie by his fellow monks because of his sylph-like figure and skill in dancing' to the first Abbot, Dom Denys, a convoluted character often led into duplicity by a naive optimism in the rightness of his cause. Yet a more considered view must be to marvel how they survived at all, given everything that was against them.

They began at Pershore. There was one brother from the Caldey community who had seceded to Rome, who hankered after that security and who after two years returned to them; there were two oblates and a couple of postulants. This was an unlikely beginning, not helped by the outbreak of the First World War. The Bishop was unsympathetic to high church antics, and eventually in 1924 the little community moved to Nashdom. This was a grander house, and the community expanded to fill it, but became distracted by missions in Ghana and the lure of Anglo-papalism.

Africa, as so often, defeated European good intentions, and Vatican II left Anglo-papalism in tatters. Thus pruned, and by now again a small and fragile group, the brothers moved to Elmore. The author ends her story by affirming that despite the small numbers now at Elmore it could be said that the community is closer to a more authentic Benedictine vision than in the glory days of Nashdom.

This is an interesting and well written story by someone who not only knows her stuff but sees the wood as well as the trees, however fascinating the trees were.

***James Anthony SSF***