

Chant Day - Highgate Literary & Scientific Institute
Saturday 29th October 2022 10am-4.15pm

The Highgate Institute is one of the few remaining old societies, devoted to learning, left in the UK. It resembles a gentlemen's club, with the advantage of a large hall, with a high arched ceiling and good acoustics. It runs courses and events on a wide-ranging variety of topics. There were 43 participants, all highly intelligent and successful people from many backgrounds. It was encouraging to see some young people, even if the majority were in the 40-80 bracket. Having several Jewish participants was particularly stimulating. The event originated in the regular chant workshop that SG held in Askrigg, as one of the committee members has a house in Wensleydale. This reminds us that sowing seeds sometimes yields unexpected results!

I decided to maximise on the possibilities offered by not finishing the day with the singing of a liturgy. Events held in Catholic parishes naturally do and, even in Anglican parishes, they are keen to experience what a Catholic liturgy feels like. However, much of the time is inevitably spent on wading through Latin psalms, which are really a tongue-twister exercise between eyes, brain and mouth! An important skill, nonetheless doing little to give newcomers a grasp of the musical wonders of the Gregorian repertoire.

Having discussed the content of the day with monks from Solesmes, Le Barroux as well as with my dear friend and colleague, Martin Baker, it became clear that mode recognition was a wonderful way to thread the work of the day. After an initial historical lecture on the origins of the chant and development of Christianity (up to and including the wonderful providential revival undertaken by the monks of Solesmes), we started by singing the *Gloria Patri...* in all the modes, pointing out the feel of different reciting notes, in relation to the intervals of surrounding notes in each mode. Looking at tones for intoning a short Vespers reading also showed the power of music to communicate text: show commas, full-stops, question-marks and endings. We then did sing a Psalm, in mode 3, as done in the 1980s with the 'c' reciting-note. Having mastered this, I then got them to try a bit again with the corrected 'b' reciting-note. This was startling to them, illustrating the beautiful mystery of mode 3 "*Tertius mysticus*" (DOM Gajard).

We then turned to the vast repertoire of Mass, singing the Kyrie '*rex genitor*', with its inspirational rising ornamentation for the final Kyries. As well as being very satisfying to sing, it is visually useful for becoming accustomed to identifying musical motifs and recurring patterns in chant. The next step was perceiving these in all the modes, each with different cadential and final characteristics.

So, progressively we made the fabulous journey through all the modes, with the help of some of the greatest chants that '*Incertus*' has left us. *Alleluia, Ave Maria* (GR 412) was particularly moving for all (like being under a spell in a tunnel), the *Ecce Deus* (GR 307) was felt as a strong declamation - the power of mode 5 and the Tract *Absolve* (GR 672) was structurally seen to be ornamented from more archaic origins. The presence of a specialist in singing the Psalms to ancient Jewish music in the synagogue was very exciting to me.

As we got to the end of our journey with mode 7 "*angelicus*" and mode 8 "*perfectus*", the sense of accomplishment for us all was palpable and the astonishing enthusiasm, concentration and demands for more of this were most gratifying. The hope expressed by the organisers was to make this a regular occurrence. I hope so too! *Iain Simcock*