Catholic Church Music in England and Wales 1778-1963

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Part 1

English Catholic Music served the needs of a community that grew from roughly 70,000 to 3.7 million. The subject is vast, under-researched and often misunderstood; and we should remember that many Catholics attended Low Mass, where little music was performed. Nonetheless it is a religious-cultural phenomenon of the first importance.[1] No account of English music is complete without it. Furthermore it reflects and is evidence for the changing character of that community, as it articulates certain key themes: namely the changing balance between forward and backward-looking attitudes, between engagement with and isolation from the outside world, and between centralising Ultramontane uniformity versus local diversity, especially in its organisation, liturgy and the tension between National and International allegiances, as expressed through musical style. Its development then can be divided into four phases, roughly corresponding to those in Catholic history generally. These are signalled by the following events:

1778: The First Catholic Relief Act.

1829: The Catholic Emancipation Act.

1850: The restoration of the Hierarchy.

1903: The Motu Proprio *Tra Le Sollecitudini* (TLS) issued by Pius X.

1963: The Constitution *Sacrosanctum Consilium* jointly promulgated by Paul VI and the Second Vatican Council.

1778-1829: A New World

Before 1778 the striking feature is the contrast between music on the Continent and that on the Mission. In Catholic Europe visitors encountered music that was open, well developed and ostentatious. In this respect English seminaries, schools and religious houses were good exemplars. Not so on the Mission. Here music was usually limited, as Penal hostility forced Catholics to keep a low profile. Of course there were exceptions, Lulworth and Wardour under the Welds and Arundells, for example; but these underline how much depended on the musical interests of the gentry, who often held the whip hand.

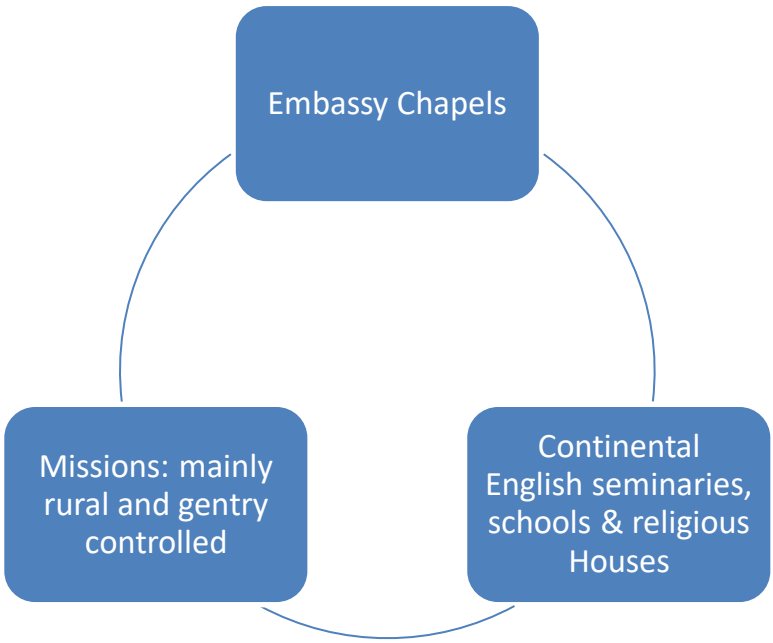
The meeting place between these two worlds was the London Embassy Chapels; substantial evidence for which survives from those maintained by Spain, Portugal, Sardinia-Savoy and Bavaria.[2] Before 1778 these were usually the only places where Catholics could openly worship; so they had significant establishments, including professional composers and singers from the London Opera scene – both native and foreign. In effect they were

Catholic showcases, attracting Catholics and non-Catholics, well-to-do provincials, foreign visitors and immigrant London denizens. Repertoire was eclectic: a mix of native and foreign elements; and much was up-to-date – even with Plainchant!

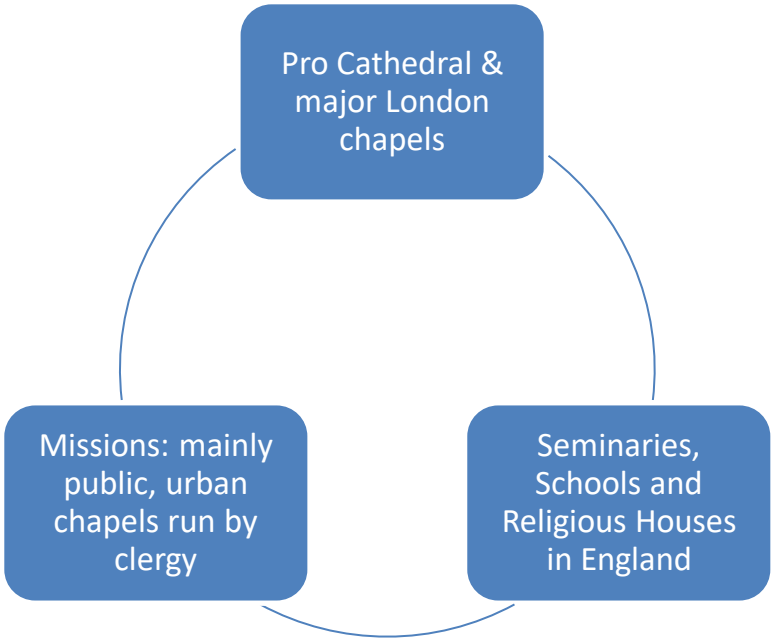
However by 1829 things had changed. One driver was the growth of provincial Catholicism. This began before 1778, but was boosted by substantial Irish immigration and the effects of the 1778 and 1791 Relief Acts. New *public* chapels therefore replaced *private* household rooms, insensibly shifting control from the gentry to the clergy. The latter of course should have acquired some musical experience at the seminaries, particularly Plainchant. Something similar happened in London, as Embassy Chapels gave way before the building of the Pro-Cathedral at St Mary's Moorfields and other major chapels, for example St Patrick's, Soho. In 1829 the last embassy survivor, the Portuguese chapel, was closed down.[3]

Another factor was the French Revolution. Immediately this produced a flood of emigré clergy who were used to open worship and could sing. However, this was only a temporary phenomenon, as most returned home after 1815. More durable then was the arrival of English Continental establishments, bringing their music with them. The net effect was a new triangle of musical activity.

<u>1778: The Old Pattern</u>



1829: The New Pattern



A third aspect, in direct response to Catholic expansion, was the appearance of a London based music publishing industry. Before 1778 Catholics in England depended on manuscript copies, the most important being the series produced by John Francis Wade (1711-1786).[4] This of course was a significant limitation on music making. Meanwhile on the Continent a mix of foreign print and manuscript copying was the order of the day. However, in the mid eighteenth-century things began to change. In 1748 James Meighan and James Marmaduke produced printed editions of Plainchant.[5] These were followed in 1782 by Samuel Webbe the elder's (1740-1816) *An Essay on the Church's Plainchant* using musical type assembled by Peter Coghlan, who published other plainchant collections.[6] All used the largely French system bequeathed to them by Wade, epitomising the proud spirit of diverse Gallican semi-independence from Rome.[7] It was a living tradition, with new repertoire continually being added; and it depended on the slow, majestic, powerful system of measured chant developed from the fourteenth century onwards.[8] This had three basic symbols:

A square (≅) denoting the basic pulse.

A diamond (τ) giving half the length.

A tailed square (9) or square with a dot (≅.) giving double the length.

Equipped with numerous additional 'modern' symbols (accents, accidentals, slurs, dynamics) and often set on a five line stave it was easily 'translatable' into 'modern' music and regarded as fully compatible with it.[9]

The printing of 'modern' part music began in 1766 with Charles Barbandt's *Sacred Hymns, Anthems and Versicles*; the first English publication of such music since William Byrd's *Gradualia* of 1605-7. This was picked up by Webbe with *A Collection of Motetts and*

Antiphons (c. 1785) and *A Collection of Masses* (1792). Most pieces were original and many remained part of Catholic repertoire up till 1963.[10]

The decisive breakthrough though came in 1811 with Vincent Novello's (1781-1861) *A Collection of Sacred Music.* This, and subsequent publications, provides a snapshot of current embassy repertoire.[11] Unlike Webbe, though, he supplied fully realised keyboard parts. This was then followed with a complete set of Haydn and Mozart Masses (some of them spurious), effecting a shift from an Italianate to an Austro-German Classical repertory. Editorially this involved adapting music designed for a major aristocratic or Continental Cathedral establishment to the more limited and very different social environment of the Mission. Keyboard parts (and registrations) were therefore designed for Organs of moderate power that could support a choir unassisted yet not swamp additional orchestral instruments. This was the template followed with subsequent major Mass settings (for example those by Hummel, Beethoven, Weber, Henry Nixon).[12]

Such music had been known before, partly due to the work of Charles Latrobe, and manuscript choral scores survive in earlier embassy collections. As such they made a significant ideological statement against the French Atheist Revolutionary regime that Britain and Austria were fighting at the time. Their performance therefore signalled a move away from the nationally suspect early eighteenth-century Jacobitism of Wade as epitomised by *Adeste Fideles*.[13] Catholic music was ready for Emancipation.

1829-50: **A choice of ways**

In music, as in so much else, Emancipation boosted expansion. As congregations grew, more churches were built, and demand for music burgeoned. Released from the need to keep quiet Catholics could launch forth in *paeans* of extravagant self-promotion. The Classical-Viennese Mass was the ideal instrument for this; so more items on this scale – native and foreign - were added throughout the century (e.g. Masses by Silas, Gounod and Joseph Egbert Turner (1853-1897). More publishers set up shop (Richard Butler, Thomas Richardson, Thomas Boosey and Burns and Lambert). In 1830 Joseph and Vincent Novello established a fully-fledged printing and publishing business (hitherto the two arms had been separated), the largest of its kind by the 1890s.[14]

Nevertheless some short-term limitations should be noted. The building of more and larger churches barely kept pace with growing congregations. They, the choir, organ and other instrumentalists must sometimes have been packed together like sardines. There would also have been problems with training. Choirs (unpaid) could be assembled but most then had to be taught to read music, given the working/lower-middle class semi-Irish composition of most congregations. Crucially there must have been a shortage of competent choir masters and instrumentalists, including organists. Hence the co-option of

non-Catholic specialists on special occasions and the recruitment of foreigners, such as Johannn Benz at Oscott and Meyer Lutz at Southwark Cathedral. An all too familiar gap between musical aspiration and actual execution must have therefore emerged, although this is difficult to assess from newspaper accounts.

What is clear is the shortage of sheet music. With Plainchant this was not too bad; because Coghlan's moveable type was adequate for the job. Liturgical musical books could at least be supplied to the clergy and choirs. 'Modern' notation was more problematical; given the crudity of that type. The answer was engraving, and - slightly later - lithography. This produced excellent editions; but the print runs were relatively short. So copies were expensive, given that engraving is as time-consuming and skilled as print-setting. Musicians therefore tended to purchase single master-copies and make *manuscript* single-line parts from them. Singers performed like instrumentalists, hurdling horizontally across the page and relying solely on their ears to establish 'vertical' chordal connections.[15]

Overshadowing everything was the question of what direction to take. On the one hand Emancipation meant that, for the first time since the Reformation, Catholics were playing on a level playing field in the competition for souls. Logically then they should meet the outside world half way by promoting the modern and making the Faith user-friendly by moving towards vernacular liturgies. The Classical Viennese Mass and simpler Embassy Chapel items *were* up-to-date stylistically and technically. Vernacular hymnody *in the Mass* and psalmody in the Office did the same, given that most Missions offered Vespers on Sunday evenings. Musically this meant that Protestant melodies and Anglican Chant could be drawn on for both.[16]

Such considerations fell foul of the ideals espoused by Ultramontanism. The basic fear was 'wastage'; of cradle Catholics – especially Irish – succumbing to secular and Protestant blandishments. It was essential to insulate them from temptation by creating on every Mission a range of guilds, confraternities, schools and devotions ministering to Catholic spiritual needs 'from the cradle to the grave'. As shall be seen this had important musical effects. More immediately it was necessary openly to proclaim the difference between Catholic values and urban industrial life.[17] This could be expressed architecturally, through interior furnishings, decorations and accoutrements, by using a Latin liturgy, and through musical style.

Haydn-Mozart Masses with their alleged theatricality and modern styles did not fit the bill, not least because they drew attention away from the more vital sacramental moments of the service.[18] Plainchant was the ideal, followed by Renaissance Polyphony. These, it was felt, should be performed *a capella*, or at worst backed by an Organ. Orchestral instruments with their secular overtones could therefore by dispensed with, as Benedict XIV's encyclical *Annus Qui* (1748) had laid down.[19] Both reminded Catholics of the glory days of Medieval and Renaissance Rome. They therefore helped underwrite the priest's claim to supremacy over the laity backed by a chain of command underwritten by

the doctrine of transubstantiation all the way up to St Peter. However, to be fully effective you had to purge existing chant of modernising Gallican notational excrescences, downplay the addition of post-medieval plainchant repertoire and return to the 'Roman' Plainchant associated with Palestrina, but in fact established by Felice Anerio and Francisco Soriano in the Medicean editions of 1614-15. Thus, whereas eighteenth-century Plainchant was felt to be compatible with the Viennese Classical style, a barrier would now be set between them. Instead the link between Medicean Plainchant and Renaissance Polyphony was emphasised. The latter, of course, *had* to be Roman (Palestrina, Lassus and Victoria); so contributions by Byrd, Tallis and other English Masters were largely ignored in early nineteenth-century editions.

Plainchant of this sort clashed with the medieval largely Gothic ambiance espoused by A.W. Pugin and his followers. Likewise the Italianate Latin pronunciation favoured by Nicholas Wiseman (future first Cardinal of Westminster) did not fit properly with Medicean chant, which was designed for Classical Renaissance Latin. However J. Danjou's rediscovery of the Montpellier Codex in 1846 opened up the prospect of deciphering genuine staveless neumes from the ninth-tenth centuries and so could shift plainchant styles (with ecclesiastical 'dog Latin') back in this direction.[20] Here the activities of Sir John Lambert with his series of plainchant choral editions were important precursors of work undertaken by Solesmes. *The Little Gradual* by Ambrose Philipps de Lisle should also be noted here.[21]

Throughout ideology trumped aesthetic-technical musical judgements. If the music was Roman or Medieval it 'must' be good; and the earlier the better. Wiseman in particular was blind to the musical deficiencies of 1830s Rome and the technical limitations of some Renaissance repertoire.[22] Many argued – in defiance of musical logic - that unaccompanied Plainchant was easier for congregations to sing. Simultaneously liturgical theology, especially that enunciated by Henry Formby (1816-1884), championed Plainchant for non-musical reasons. This arose from the 'sing the chant as you speak' mantra. Plainchant was therefore inflected oratory, not music; despite the problems with Italian pronunciation noted earlier. No matter, Formby, like Abbot Guéranger at Solesmes in the 1860s, thought it was a Divine Song whereby God's word was delivered to the people and then returned to him in an endless cycle of prayerful praise and incantation. Sacramental worship, expressed through semi-comprehendible Latin Plainchant, therefore downplayed the didactic aspect of liturgy. *That* was something you left to catechetical rote learning![23]

Tensions between 'Liberal' and Ultramontane approaches are vividly illustrated by what happened at the consecration of St Chad's Cathedral, Birmingham on July 21st, 1841. This was a Gothic building designed by A.W. Pugin. Music was performed by a choir of amateurs and students from the nearby seminary at Oscott directed by Benz. It consisted entirely of Plainchant. However, at the Pontifical Mass two days later – the first in England since the Reformation – Benz unleashed a hitherto unpublished Haydn Mass! Like Embassy Chapel musicians earlier he saw no incompatibility between the two styles, even in a Gothic

cathedral. Yet Benz was the author of *Cantica Sacra*, a manual of chants for the Mass Proper, with an introduction by Wiseman, at that time President at Oscott. This advocated the singing of such material by congregations in small churches (but not, by inference, large ones, where the choir could do the job).[24]

Clearly then control of the choir was of the first importance. Usually it performed from a West Gallery, where it could 'lead' congregational singing 'from behind'. Yet simultaneously its distinct identity as a body of specialists was maintained. Here lay the rub. From an Ultramontane perspective its location so far from the High Altar gave too much independence; so one solution was to have a clerical choirmaster who knew the liturgy supported by a lay *musical* specialist at the organ. This though was something that could only be attempted by large establishments.[25]

It was much better then to place the choir and organ in the chancel, or at any rate in or near the Sanctuary. Under closer clerical supervision the separation between liturgy and music would then be broken down, especially if Plainchant was regarded as inflected oratory. It was also easier to adopt the idea of the choir being a body of liturgical ministers, particularly if drawn from an attached community of Religious. In this way a hierarchy descending from priest to congregation was promoted, each performing an allotted role. Furthermore, by standing *between* the two, the choir created a sense of 'distance', enforcing the sense of mysterious awe attached to priestly action.[26]

There were, of course, certain musical consequences. A congregation distanced from the High Altar was less likely to participate actively. The choir, facing itself at right-angles to the congregation, would not promote singing by the latter in the same way as a West Gallery group, even if it was Plainchant! It was also harder to deploy instrumentalists and easier to exclude women (except nuns) on the grounds that they should be kept out of the Sanctuary. Yet for Ultramontanes such aspects were not deficiencies but positive virtues!

In some churches then the two approaches existed 'cheek by jowl'. Lay musicians with the Organ would sing part music from the West Gallery, generally at Mass; whilst in the chancel there would be a largely unaccompanied body of Religious, usually chanting the Office.[27]

By the 1840s at every level battle-lines were being drawn; and the stakes were rising. Irish immigration became a flood, strengthening the case for inward-looking uniformity. Industrialisation provoked a Romantic-medievalising reaction; yet paradoxically for contemporaries this was a novelty, and in music it could be presented using the most up-to-date printing technology. Above all expansion produced diversity, but this in turn necessitated some reorganisation, handing Ultramontanes an opportunity. Music was not immune from this, as we shall see.

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Plainchant: Cathédrale D'Auxerre XVIIIe Siècle. Ensemble Organum, dir. Peres, M. Harmonia Mundi, CD 901319, 1990. This is Gallican Chant, but the style of singing shows Solesmes influence.

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[1] Muir, T.E. *Roman Catholic Church Music in England, 1791-1914: A Handmaid of the Liturgy?* Aldershot. Ashgate 2008/2016 is the only serious study so far, not least because it compares what contemporaries thought was happening with what was actually occurring on the ground, using a relational database of repertoire and performances compiled from a cross-section of different establishments originally assembled for *'Full in the panting heart of Rome: Catholic Church Music in England: 1850-1962*. University of Durham Ph. D. Thesis, 2004. See also 'Catholic Church Music in England: the 1950s' in ed. Collins, Paul: *Renewal and Resistance: Catholic Church Music from the 1850s to Vatican II*. Oxford. Peter Lang 2010. Pre 1850 see his 'Church Music: A barometer of Socio-Religious change' in ed. Chambers, Liam: *The Oxford History of British and Irish Catholicism Vol III: Relief, Revolution and Revival, 1746-1829.* London, OUP 2023. Estimates of Catholic population vary considerably, depending on what yardstick is used (e.g. church attendance). For further discussion of 20th century figures see Keenan, T. Statistical Appendices in ed. Harris, A. *The Oxford History of British and Irish Catholicism*. London. OUP 2023: 357-60.

[2] Olleson, P. 'The London Embassy Chapels and their music in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries' in ed. Wyn Jones, D. *Music in Eighteenth Century Britain*. Aldershot, Ashgate, 1999. Darby, Rosemarie, *The Music of the Roman Catholic Embassy Chapels in London 1765-1825*. M.Mus Thesis, University of Manchester 1984.

[3] *The Catholic Directory, Almanack* (sic) *and Ecclesiastical Register* 1844, London, Charles Dolman lists 26 churches with a further 3 under construction. These include four chapels formerly associated with the French, Sardinian, Spanish and Bavarian embassies.
[4] Zon, B. *The English Plainchant Revival*. London, OUP, 1999: 104-141 for further analysis of Wade's volumes. ibid. 60-71 for Wade's indirect influence.
[5] Marmaduke, J. *A Pious Association…and the true method to learn the Church Plain-Song*. London, 1748; Meighan, T. *The Art of Singing.* London, 1748.
[6] For Coghlan's work see Zon, 1998: 76-87 and Muir, 2008, 7-71.
[7] The most important French eighteenth-century Plainchant specialist was François de La Feillée in *Méthode nouvelle pour apprendre parfaitement les régles du plain-chant et psalmodie*. Poitiers 1748 followed by numerous reprints and sub editions.
[8] For recent work on fourteenth-century developments in Polyphony, its notation and relationship with Plainchant see Bent, M, Hartt, J. and Lefferts, P. *The Dorest Rotulus: Contextualising and Reconstructing the Early English Motet.* Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Music 23. Woodbridge, The Boydell Press 2021. A central point is that the balance of surviving sources suggests that this began as a largely English phenomenon.
[9] Guidetti, J. *Directorum Chori* Rome, 1582 sets out the basic system. Subsequent elaborations in England, Flanders and France are discussed in Zon, 1999: 22-36, 89 and 113. Muir 2008: 65-69 .
[10] Olleson, 2000: 107-113.
[11] Novello,V. *A Collection of Sacred Music*. London, 1811; *Twelve Easy Masses*, London, 1816; *A Collections of Motetts for the Offertory* (c. 1818); *The Evening Service* (1822): *Convent Music* (1834).
[12] Muir, T.E. 'The reception of Joseph Haydn's Music in the Roman Catholic Community'. *Haydn Society of Great Britain*. No. 24, 2005: 2-17 for a general survey. Cooper, V. *The House of Novello: Practice and Policy of a Victorian Music Publisher*. Aldershot, Ashgate, 2003: 30-33, 54-5, 64-5.
[13] For a summary of this thinking see Muir, 2023: 299-300. For the research see Stephen, John: *The Adeste Fideles, A study of its origin and development.* Buckfast, 1947. See also Zon: 'O Come All Ye Faithful' – Bonnie Prince Charlie and the Christmas Carol'. https://www.dur.ac.uk/news/newsitem/?itemno=7328 (accessed on 6/06/2021) for a spectacular example. Latrobe's contribution and the extra-musical interpretation of Haydn's Masses is discussed in Muir 2023: 299-300.
[14] Hurd, M. *Vincent Novello and Company*. London, Granada 1981: 31-33. Palmer, F. *Vincent Novello (1781-1861), Music for the Masses.* Aldershot, Ashgate, 2006: 86-7.
[15] Muir: 2008: 79-80. For discussion of publishing costs see Palmer, F. 139-144.
[16] St Cuthbert's, Durham into the 1860s is a detailed example of this. Tweedie, J.M. *Popish Elvet Part Two.* Private Publication, Durham, 1981, 14. For analysis of the extensive mss collection there and its links with Frederick Lingard's Chants at Durham Cathedral see Muir, T.E. 'Music for St Cuthbert, 'Parton Saint of the Faithful North': The musical repertory of St Cuthbert's Church' in ed. Cowgill, R. and Holman, Peter. *Music in the English Provinces, 1690-1914.* Aldershot, Ashgate 2007: 279-282. Lingard, F. *Antiphonal Chants for the Psalter as ordered at Morning and Evening Prayer and for the Proper Psalms, Hymns and Anthems appointed to be used in the Daily and Occasional Offices of the liturgy of the united Churches of England and Ireland*. London, J.A. Novello, 1842.
[17] See Pugin, A.W. *Contrasts: Or, A Parallel between the Noble Edifices of the Middle Ages and the Corresponding Buildings of the Present Day; Shewing the Present Decay of Taste*. London, 1836/1841R
[18] Muir, 2008: 42. For further discussion of the wider implications of this, and in particular the way Mass settings 'frame' the service see Muir, T.E. 'Sacred Sound for a Holy Space: Dogma, Worship and Music at Solemn Mass during the Victorian Era, 1829-1903' in ed. Clarke, M,V. *Music and Theology in Nineteenth-Century Britain.* Aldershot, Ashgate : 42-43.
[19] *Annus Qui* in Hayburn, R. *Papal Legislation on Sacred Music 95 AD to 1977 AD*. Harrison, NY 1979 ,92-108 esp.103.
[20] 'ALP', 'Discovery of a complete and authentic copy of an original antiphonary of St Gregory', *The Rambler,* 3/11 (November 1848): 174-8 quoting several extracts from Danjou's report.
[21] Muir, 2008: 98, 101-103.
[22] Wiseman, N. *Four Lectures on the Office and Ceremonies of Holy Week as performed in the Papal Chapel delivered in Rome in the Lent of 1837.* London, Charles Dolman, 1839. Compare this with Berlioz' critical assessment at about the same time. Cairns, Trevor ed. and trans. *The Memoirs of Hector Berlioz*. London, 1969, 183-184.

[23] Formby, H. *Plainchant, the image and symbols of the Humanity of our Divine Redeemer and the Blessed Mary*. London, 1848. For a general survey of his ideas see Zon, 1999: 231-232, 235-86. Guéranger, P. trans. Shepherd, L. *The Liturgical Year*. Stanbrook 1867/R1895. 1-11.

[24] Anon. 'St Chad's Cathedral, Birmingham': Consecration and Dedication', *Orthodox Journal* 13 (July-December 1841): 400-402.

[25] For examples see Comp. Cathedral Clergy. *A History of St Chad's Cathedral, Birmingham 1841-1904.* Birmingham, Cornish Bros. 1904: 143 and Muir, T.E. *Stonyhurst* . Cirencester, St Omers Press. 2006: 124

[26] Muir. 2012: 45-50.

[27] For examples see St Dominic's church, Newcastle. There were also several variations. At St Peter's, Stonyhurst, a Perpendicular Gothic structure, a lay choir and organ roared forth from the gallery at the back, whilst the Jesuit community sang from the Sanctuary and enclosed transepts on either side. At St Walburge's, Preston there is not just a large West Gallery with Organ, but a small gallery above the Sanctuary for the Convent Community. As a result the congregation is relatively close to the High Altar, neatly circumventing the participatory deficiencies of having a chancel choir.