

**THE ENGLISH PLAINCHANT REVIVAL
AND ITS RELIGIOUS CONNECTIONS
Summary of a lecture by Dr Bennet Zon**

The revival of plainsong ('the Gregorian Note') in the second half of eighteenth century England is becoming clearer as documents appear, but it is not as easy to follow as it was in the nineteenth century. Small pockets of information exist pointing to influence of religious. In particular there is a collection of letters to and from James Coghlan (1731-1800) in the Lancashire Record Office at Preston [*publication is planned by C.R.S.], which includes letters from James Brown at Abergavenny, where the revival seems to have had marked effects.

The leading mover seems to have been John Francis Wade (1711-86) - the composer of *Adeste Fideles* - who in 1782 published *An Essay in Plainchant*. Graduals and Antiphonals had existed in England since 1737 (Fernham has one). Wade was their calligrapher as suitable type was not available in England, though Wade was able to obtain some in 1794. The ornamentation shows a high degree of Jacobite symbolism and partly conceded expression of support for the exiled king. In *The Evening Office of the Church* (1773) printed by Coghlan strong parallels are drawn between the hymn *Vexilla Regis* and the future triumph of Prince Charles Edward, and the *Adeste Fideles*, composed by Wade, can be made to bear a fairly explicit Jacobite interpretation.

The Abergavenny books (now at Belmont) are the work of Wade (1794, 1799) and their use, and their effect, can be demonstrated from James Preston's letters to Coghlan. Abergavenny was a centre for Franciscans - the Benedictines only took over in 1857 - but may have had a French refugee priest for a while in the nineties, as many did at that time. At Abergavenny, Preston built a gallery, and acquired a 'remonstrance'. Bishop Sharrock (who was a Benedictine) approved the teaching of plainsong (the 'Gregorian Note') by the French priest, and permitted the introduction of Benediction, which was done in the form, and with the antiphons and hymns still in use (*Tantum ergo* etc).

It is interesting to note why people at this time wanted to introduce the Gregorian Note: they valued it because it seemed to unite the congregation because it was easier, it attracted people to services and aroused their devotion when they were there, and it generally raised the tone. In short, Wade was the father of the English plainsong revival.