

Mary Berry (1917–2008)

Memoir and bibliography

SUSAN RANKIN*

Mary Berry, scholar, singer and musical director of the *Schola Gregoriana of Cambridge* died on Ascension Day (1 May) 2008, aged 90. After a Requiem Mass at Our Lady and the English Martyrs, Cambridge on 10 May, her life and work were celebrated in Vespers, a solemn Requiem Mass and procession on 11 and 12 May at St Birinus, Dorchester, where she was buried. She had participated in the celebration of the Easter triduum at St Birinus for many years. Mary was born into a family deeply committed to education and scholarship, and she directed that inheritance towards the study of music.

Born on 29 June 1917, Mary was the youngest of three daughters of Arthur John and Ethel Frances Mary Gray Berry. Her grandfather, Robert Berry, had been a Fellow of Trinity College (1850–58) and was later Regius Professor of Law at the University of Glasgow (1867–87), then Dean of Faculties (1888–96), and served as Secretary to the Royal Commission on Scottish Universities (1858, 1876). Mary's father, Robert's youngest child, took his first degree in Glasgow, and then studied Natural Sciences at Cambridge, publishing a monograph on volumetric analysis in 1915 with many other books following. Arthur had already begun teaching chemistry at Downing College in 1911 and his young family occupied a house at 14 Regent Street, on the side of the Downing College site. Mary vividly remembered playing on Parker's Piece as a child. The family later moved to Elmside, 49 Grange Road,¹ where they had more room to spread out and would have been less encumbered by the bustle of central Cambridge.

Mary was educated at the Perse School for Girls and then chose to spend a year studying at the *École normale de musique* in Paris with the composer Nadia Boulanger, already a renowned pedagogue. (Much later in her life, confronted by an undergraduate student who desperately needed guidance on how to write fugues, Mary had chapter and verse on the teaching of the Paris Conservatoire at her fingertips.) By this time, she had already heard the music of the Roman Catholic Church sung at the monastery of Solesmes, and a lifelong interest in Gregorian chant had been awakened. In 1935 she began her undergraduate studies as a Turle Scholar

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I would like to express my thanks to members of the Community of Jesus, Massachusetts and to Newnham College, Cambridge for allowing me access to unpublished material, without which it would have been difficult to capture the many strands of Mary's life and career.

¹ The house was built by E.S. Prior for the mathematician W.W. Rouse Ball in 1885; it is now a part of Clare Hall.

at Girton College, and, in the Part I examination at the end of her first year, was placed at the head of the class list; in 1937 she won the John Stewart of Rannoch Scholarship in Sacred Music and graduated with the degree of Mus.B. in 1939.²

For a generation born during the First World War, and confronted at the moment of graduation from university with another war, the prospects offered by adulthood might have seemed bleak indeed. But to lose heart was something of which Mary was not capable. Now she marched directly towards the enemy, starting her noviciate at the convent of Notre-Dame de Jupille (Liège) in March 1940; within two months fifty young novices had to flee before the advancing German army, concealing themselves in a variety of ways, eventually arriving in Paris on the last train from Soissons. There then followed a series of moves south – escapes from the danger of internment – via Dijon, Toulouse and Madrid, and eventually to Lumar in the suburbs of Lisbon. There the sisters established an order and a school. In the spirit of a true evangelist and without a trace of bitterness, Mary later declared: ‘Whenever we are kicked out of one country we go and establish an order somewhere else.’ These wartime experiences brought strength to her own sense of vocation, and she made her final profession as an Augustinian Canoness Regular in 1945. As a religious, she took the name of one of the great English humanist scholars and martyrs, Thomas More.

She had begun her adult life nursing and teaching, and these activities would continue to dominate her existence over the next twenty years. Moving between the mother house at Jupille-les-Liège and houses in Rome, Dijon and Paris, she juggled the management of infirmaries with programmes of teaching music and English. During this period she both studied and taught Gregorian chant, and it must have been in these years that her extensive knowledge of the vast chant repertory, as well as the liturgy within which it came to life, was so thoroughly laid. It must also have been at this time that she first came into contact with French chant scholars, including several figures based at Solesmes, and Solange Corbin. Whether or not her return to Cambridge in 1962 was immediately determined by the new liturgical directions of the Second Vatican Council, setting aside the older Latin liturgy and music, is not now known; what is clear is that the more practical direction adopted by her order rendered it difficult for her to fulfil vows taken in 1945, and this distressed her. While she came back to Cambridge to live at the house of the Canonesses Regular (Lady Margaret House in Grange Road – now the Margaret Beaufort Institute for Theology), and became the Principal in that House, this decade was to be the last during which she lived within an established religious community. Increasingly she moved beyond the confines of that enclosed life, taking steps back into the academic world which had surrounded her as a child and developing a new place for herself within it. In formal terms, she had obtained the agreement of her

² Technically, she did not ‘graduate’, since women were not awarded degrees at the University of Cambridge before 1949. This was the degree for which she sat the examination; I am not aware as to whether she formally graduated at a later date.

order to be 'exclaustrated', allowing her to live outside the order's houses, but without rescinding her vows.

In his retirement, Mary's father had switched from laboratory work as an analytical chemist to historical studies, publishing his last monograph (on the physical and chemical researches of Henry Cavendish) in 1960.³ With her father's strong support, Mary now also turned to historical work – on that music which she had sung daily for almost thirty years – and began studies for the doctorate with Thurston Dart in 1964 (just before Dart left Cambridge for King's College, London). Dart was at the centre of new directions in musicological studies undertaken in England, teaching many of those scholars and performers who came to be associated with the 'revival of early music'. Together Dart and Berry developed a project on the performance of chant in the later Middle Ages and the sixteenth century; this dissertation incorporated extensive study of later medieval notations, sources of chant and theoretical writing on chant. The meeting of minds between these two scholars – both deeply involved in studies of source material and performance practice – is clear, both in the weight and shape of the dissertation Mary submitted in 1969,⁴ as in her thanks to Dart as supervisor and Dart's support of Mary whom he later described as 'a splendid person to work with, bringing great zest to her work'.

By the time Mary was awarded the doctorate, her commitment to full-time academic research and teaching had determined her 'to live outside of her Community as a private person'; she needed therefore to seek independent means of financial support. In March 1971 she was elected to the Old Students' Research Fellowship at Newnham College for a period of three years, an appointment which she took up on 1 October, moving the short distance from Lady Margaret House to Kennedy Buildings on Sidgwick Avenue; appointments as Director of Studies in Music and as Praelector of the College quickly followed. That first research fellowship was then followed by another, named in honour of the Catholic heiress Justine Bayard Ward and supported by the Dom Mocquereau Foundation. In these years of new-found freedom Mary had hoped to write a book for Cambridge University Press on the origins, growth, development and performance of Gregorian chant. Although this never appeared, she wrote on many medieval, liturgical and historical topics – notably contributing twenty-two articles to the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, published in 1980 (of which twenty remain under her name in the re-edited *Grove Music Online*), as well as an extraordinarily sure-footed study of 'The Restoration of the Chant and Seventy-Five Years of Recording' (*Early Music*, 1979).

By the mid-1970s, Mary had developed her contacts with those monks at Solesmes responsible for studying musical palaeography and directing the choir. She was impressed by the new sound of the choir led by Dom Jean Claire, and

³ A.J. Berry, *Henry Cavendish. His Life and Scientific Work* (London, 1960).

⁴ 'The Performance of Plainsong in the Later Middle Ages and the Sixteenth Century', approved 5 December 1969. The examiners were Dom Anselm Hughes and Brian Trowell.

became deeply committed to the research of Dom Eugène Cardine on Gregorian semiology, with all its ramifications for rhythmic performance of early medieval chant.⁵ Such research allowed chant scholars and performers to emerge from what Mary referred to as 'a ferocious controversy' on rhythmic interpretation of Gregorian melodies – a controversy which she had deliberately by-passed in her doctoral work by dealing with a later period. But now, with the development and wide dissemination of Cardine's ideas and – for the use of singers – the publication of the *Graduel neumé*, ways of reading early chant notations opened the eyes of musicians to what she characterised as 'a style of remarkable rhythmic subtlety and freedom'.

In her research proposal for the Newnham Fellowship, Mary had described 'the Gregorian world today' as 'humming with excitement and renewal' since 'the chant is beginning to be sung with a delicate liveliness and freshness unknown since its earliest days'. While in her earlier life she had been extensively involved in teaching music to adults as well as children, she now developed her pedagogical talents in a scholarly manner, drawing on her knowledge of early sources and notations. Indeed, she understood her position in an academic institution as a means to advance her work as an animateur of the chant, explaining to others how to read the early notations, how to sing the complex melodic patterns of the most elaborate chants, how the chant sat within the liturgy, as well as its history. And thus was created in 1975 that organisation through which so many came into contact with Mary – the *Schola Gregoriana of Cambridge*. She now travelled widely, promoting the teaching and singing of Gregorian chant. Among the many organisations by which she was now approached was the Community of Jesus, a young ecumenical monastic community in Orleans, Massachusetts, that was exploring the use of chant in its liturgical worship. A number of the Community's singers were initially sent to Cambridge for instruction, and Mary was later to spend several months of every year in Orleans as a resident teacher. During the last years of her life, she was assisted in Cambridge by two sisters of the Community, who, in addition to caring for the needs both of Mary and of her beloved Pekingese dogs, provided support in her ambitious schedule of teaching and performance in the UK and abroad.

In a real sense it is the many recordings made with the *Schola Gregoriana* and the notes that accompany them that constitute Mary's published legacy to musicology, as well as to recorded liturgical music. She brought formidable skills to bear on the preparation and making of these recordings, uniquely able in a way hardly equalled anywhere else to handle chant performance in a historically appropriate manner – whether that related to Christmas in royal Anglo-Saxon Winchester, Abelard's sequences or to a performance of Machaut's Mass at Reims Cathedral (her last recording, made in 2004). And, in parallel to the monks of Solesmes in the early

⁵ In September 1976, Mary read a paper on Gregorian semiology at one of the earliest summer conferences on Medieval and Renaissance Music, in Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford. The audience was spellbound, so completely new was the approach to performance of chant she expounded. That paper was not published, but parts of it found their way into 'The Restoration of the Chant', published in *Early Music* in 1979, where her support for and admiration of Dom Cardine's semiological research is provided with both a historical and a historiographical context.

twentieth century, she sought out and exploited recording techniques at the cutting edge of sound technology, so that the quality of recorded sound should not only delight but also make acoustic sense.

Friends and students of Mary will remember her as a gifted teacher who spoke with tremendous clarity and command; a quiet determination underlying a warmth of manner allowed her to persuade and lead with ease. Insight into the needs of others combined with an ability to quickly discard the unnecessary rendered her a formidable Director of Studies in Music at Newnham College. While it is for her services to plainsong and Gregorian chant that she was awarded the Papal Cross *Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice* in 2000 and the CBE in 2002, her life had taken numerous other paths before she was able to settle serenely into bringing scholarly knowledge and liturgical experience to bear on musical performance at an age when most people retire, and yet she said of herself 'It seems I have many strands to my life, but it is really unified.'

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'Aevia' (with William Rockstro), 1:134–5;

'Augustinian Canons', 1:696–7;

'Bacon, Roger', 2:4–5;

'Bernard of Clairvaux', 2:618–19;

'Carthusian monks', 3:838–9;

'Cistercian monks', 4:411–13;

'Dominican friars', 5:534–5;

⁶ All retained under her name in *Grove Music Online*, except 'Le Munerat, Jean' and 'Sarum rite, music of the'.

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 'Evovae' (with William Rockstro), 6:321;
 'Flos', 6:657–8;
 'Franciscan friars', 6:776–7;
 'Frere, Walter Howard', 6:823–4;
 'Gerson, Jean Charlier de', 7:304–5;
 'Grosseteste, Robert', 7:742;
 'John XXII', 9:671–2;
 'Le Munerat, Jean', 10:656;
 'Liturgy of the Hours', 11:88–9;
 'Machicotage', 11:437–8;
 'Nocturns', 13:259–60;
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 'Premonstratensian canons', 15:214;
 'Sarum rite, music of the', 16:512–13.

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'Liturgical Music in Anglo-Saxon Times', Deerhurst Lecture 1988, published by the Friends of Deerhurst Church c.1988.

Editions

Palestrina, Giovanni Pierluigi da, *Missa Descendit angelus Domini: for four voices*, ed. Mary Berry, with keyboard reduction by Ann Bond (Orleans, MA, 1986).

Discography of Mary Berry

JEROME F. WEBER

This list of recordings conducted by Mary Berry is preceded by two releases with which she was directly involved. She also reviewed recordings of chant for many years in *Gramophone*, and her longer review articles are particularly interesting: 'Early Music', *Gramophone*, December 1981, 861–62, and 'The Restoration of the Chant and Seventy-Five Years of Recording', *Early Music*, 7 (1979), 197–217. All her recordings are supplied with full texts and at least English translations.

The Gregorian Congress of 1904. The complete chant and speeches recorded by the Gramophone and Typewriter Company in the Vatican in April 1904. (One of Dom Joseph Pothier's two speech discs is omitted, G&T 054775.) Discant Recordings DIS 1–2 (two LPs), issued 1982. Produced by Nick Sandon. Notes by Mary Berry adapted from her article in *Early Music*, 1979. Review: *ARSC Journal*, 14:2 (1982), 72–4; *Gramophone*, June 1982 (MB).

Palestrina, *Missa Ave Maria* a 6 and offertory *Ave Maria*, with Proper chants for the feast of the Annunciation. Choir of King's College Cambridge directed by Philip Ledger. His Master's Voice ASD 3955. Recorded in King's College Chapel on 14–15 December 1979. Notes by Mary Berry and Iain Fenlon.

The chant is sung from Giunta's *Graduale Romanum*, dated (according to the misprint on the title page) MDLXI but actually published in 1611. (See Theodore Karp, *An Introduction to the Post-Tridentine Mass Proper, Part One*, page 17, and the British Library catalogue cited there.) The chant demonstrates, probably for the first time on records, the style of singing proposed in her dissertation, 'The Performance of Plainsong in the Later Middle Ages and the Sixteenth Century' by Mother Thomas More (Mary Berry), 1969. Reviews: *Fanfare*, 6:2 (November–December 1982); *Gramophone*, June 1982.

Anglo-Saxon Easter, Archiv 413 546–1. Schola Gregoriana of Cambridge directed by Mary Berry. Recorded in St Mary's Priory Church, Deerhurst in November 1983. Notes by David Hiley.

The Ordinary and Proper of Easter with tropes, including some polyphony, are sung from the Winchester tropers and a variety of insular and French chant sources. The record was produced in connection with the British Museum exhibition, 'The Golden Age of Anglo-Saxon Art, 966–1066'. Review: *Gramophone*, November 1984.

Easter Day Mass, Glorïae Dei GDCD 002. Glorïae Dei Cantores directed by Elizabeth C. Patterson and Mary Berry. Recorded in St Andrew's Church, Chesterton, Cambridgeshire in February 1989. Notes by Mary Berry.

The *Messe Solennelle* by Jean Langlais and *Missa Aeterna Christi munera* of Palestrina are directed by Elizabeth C. Patterson. Propers for Easter sung from *Graduale Triplex* (1979) are inserted into the Langlais Mass, and Propers for St John the Evangelist sung from 'a late-16th century post-Tridentine Roman *Gradual*'

(perhaps Giunta 1611 as above) are inserted into the Palestrina Mass, both directed by Mary Berry. Review: *Fanfare*, 13:5 (May–June 1989), 371.

'Like the Sun in his Orb...', Herald HAVPCD 148. Schola Gregoriana of Cambridge directed by Mary Berry. Recorded in Salisbury Cathedral on 28–30 January 1992. Notes by Mary Berry.

The title of the disc, a reference to the Salisbury cathedral, is a quotation from Bishop Giles de Bridport (1256). Chants of the Sarum use are sung including the responsory *Aspiciens a longe*, the antiphon *Venit ad Petrum*, and the Easter herald *Exsultet*. The notes apply the Sarum antiphon *O Thoma Didime* to St Thomas Becket rather than to St Thomas the Apostle. Reviews: *Fanfare*, 16:3 (January–February 1993), 289–90; *Gramophone*, December 1992.

Anglo-Saxon Christmas, Herald HAVPCD 151. Schola Gregoriana of Cambridge directed by Mary Berry. Recorded in Charterhouse Chapel in April 1992. Notes by Mary Berry.

The Ordinary and Proper of Christmas (third Mass) with tropes, including some polyphony, are sung from the Winchester tropers and a variety of insular and French chant sources. The invitatory for Christmas is added. Review: *Gramophone*, April 1993.

Pentecôte à Pontigny, Herald HAVPCD 161. Schola Gregoriana of Cambridge directed by Mary Berry. Recorded in Pontigny Abbey Church in October 1992 [not 1993]. Notes by Mary Berry.

Chant and polyphony in honour of three archbishops of Canterbury – Thomas Becket, Stephen Langton, Edmund of Abingdon – also Pentecost chants (for Edmund's translation to the abbey) and Cistercian chants (for Pontigny abbey). Review: *Gramophone*, November 1993.

12th-Century Chant, Herald HMVPCD 168. Schola Gregoriana of Cambridge and Choristers of Winchester Cathedral directed by Mary Berry. Recorded in Winchester Cathedral in February 1993 (for *Sponsus*, with the cathedral choristers) and May 1993 (for the rest). Notes by Fr Chrysogonus Waddell, OCSO and Mary Berry.

The music of Abelard, as well as *Sponsus* and *Samson dux fortissime*. Review: *Gramophone*, March 1995.

Marcel Dupré: Fifteen Antiphons for Vespers, Herald HAVPCD 170. Schola Gregoriana of Cambridge directed by Mary Berry, with David Hill, organ. Recorded in Notre Dame, Paris in February 1994.

Dupré's organ pieces (played by Philippe Lefebvre on the grand organ) are integrated into a Marian Vespers. Review: *Gramophone*, April 1995, with a feature article.

Mass of the Annunciation, Herald HAVPCD 189. Schola Gregoriana of Cambridge directed by Mary Berry, with James O'Donnell, organ. Recorded in Fitzalan Chapel, Arundel Castle in November 1994. Notes by Mary Berry.

The recording preserves a celebration of the Tridentine rite, capturing the atmosphere of the traditional Mass in ritual sounds.

The Ceremony of the Shepherds and Midnight Mass, Herald HAVPCD 180. Schola Gregoriana of Cambridge and Choristers of King's College Cambridge directed by Mary Berry. Recorded at Fitzalan Chapel, Arundel Castle in January 1995.

The recording preserves a celebration of the thirteenth-century ritual of midnight Mass at Rouen cathedral, preceded by a ceremony of the shepherds. The Ordinary is troped and the choristers sing the ceremony and the Sanctus.

The Martyrdom of Saint Thomas Becket, Herald HAVPCD 192. Schola Gregoriana of Cambridge directed by Mary Berry. Recorded in Canterbury Cathedral in January 1996. Notes by Mary Berry and Dr Michael Straiton.

The Office of Vespers that was interrupted by the martyrdom of St Thomas Becket is recreated here. Review: *Gramophone*, July 1997.

'Not Angels, but Angels', Herald HAVPCD 200. Schola Gregoriana of Cambridge directed by Mary Berry. Recorded in San Gregorio al Celio in April 1997. Notes by Mary Berry and Dr Michael Straiton.

The title of the disc, which marks the anniversary of St Augustine of Canterbury's mission to Britain, is a citation from Bede's Life of Pope Gregory. The chants are mostly taken from two Offices of St Augustine, one from England, the other by Pope Leo IX. The antiphon *Deprecamur te*, famously associated with Augustine's landing in Britain, and the sequences *Christo regi laudes* and *Aule rutila* are included.

Angels from the Vatican, Herald HAVPCD 220. Schola Gregoriana of Cambridge directed by Mary Berry. Recorded in Charterhouse Chapel in April 1998. Notes by Mary Berry.

The recording gathers Scriptural references to angels from chant and polyphony. The latter includes works of Victoria, Marenzio (in Italian) and Palestrina. The former includes Mass VIII, the Easter *Exsultet* and the *Te Deum*. The offertory *Stetit Angelus* with its verse *In conspectu Angelorum* was unfortunately omitted from this author's discography in *The Offertory and its Verses: Research, Past, Present and Future* (ed. Roman Hankeln).

Tu es Petrus, Herald HAVPCD 245. Schola Gregoriana of Cambridge directed by Mary Berry. Recorded in the Vatican in June 1999. Notes by Mary Berry.

The recording traces the life of St Peter the Apostle in chant and polyphonic works. The latter include *O Roma nobilis*, two medieval motets, and works of Dufay, Festa, Carpentras and Palestrina.

The Coming of Christ, Gloriam Dei GDCD 033; The Beloved Son, Gloriam Dei GDCD 032; I Am With You, Gloriam Dei GDCD 034. Gloriam Dei Cantores directed by Mary Berry. Recorded in the Church of the Transfiguration, Orleans, MA, in September 2001. Notes by Mary Berry.

The life of Christ is told in antiphons and other chants that use gospel texts. Review: *Fanfare*, 27:5 (May–June 2004).

Shining Like the Sun, Glorïae Dei GDCD 035. Glorïae Dei Cantores directed by Mary Berry. Recorded in the Church of the Transfiguration, Orleans, MA, in November 2003. Notes by Mary Berry.

The Mass and Office of the Transfiguration and other chants related to the mystery. Review: *Fanfare*, 29:2 (November–December 2005).

Guillaume de Machaut, Herald HAVPCD 312. Schola Gregoriana of Cambridge directed by Mary Berry. Recorded in Reims Cathedral in April 2004. Notes by Mary Berry.

The *Messe de Nostre Dame* and motet *Felix Virgo/Inviolata* with Proper chants for the feast of the Assumption drawn from Reims, Bibl. Mun. 217, 224, 264 and 285, sung during a Mass. Review: *Fanfare*, 32:2 (November–December 2008).