

Choir News 2023

Visit to the Isle of Wight: 29 September -1 October 2023



Quarr Abbey



Choir members relaxing after singing at Sunday Mass

At the end of September, we paid our customary annual visit to the Isle of Wight for training at Quarr and St Cecilia's Abbeys. We were blessed with glorious weather, which showed up the Island in its full beauty.

As usual, we stayed in the Quarr Abbey Guesthouse, where we enjoyed the hospitality of Fr Nicholas, the Guestmaster, who is always able to regale us with interesting anecdotes as well as serious knowledge about a range of ecclesiastical topics from the perspective of a deep faith.

On the Friday afternoon and evening, we had our first training session with Abbot Xavier. It was so instructive just to hear him sing the chants so beautifully, but he is always such a wonderful teacher, encouraging but looking for high standards. As well as teaching us, he showed us a large 18th century Gradual, where we were privileged to see the very chants we were practising.

On Saturday morning, we visited St Cecilia's Abbey where we attended Mass integrated with Terce, so beautifully sung by the Sisters in perfect unison. After a break for coffee and the opportunity to browse in the bookshop, we attended the first of two training sessions led by the Choir Mistress, Sr Bernadette, where we practised singing the simple version of the Salve Regina in a more measured and careful way than how it is often popularly sung, and chants for the 30th Sunday. She encouraged us first to sing Propers in a monotone singing in a speech-like way, as this would help us to focus on the meaning of the words when singing the full version, itself an elaboration of a much simpler earlier form.

After an enjoyable break for lunch at a seafront hotel in Ryde, we returned for an afternoon session. Before it began we were delighted to have a short visit from Mother Abbess, who was so warm and encouraging. While Sr Bernadette provides helpful analysis those with a

more technical grasp of music, we were all so inspired by her beautiful singing with her crystal-clear voice and note-perfect renditions of the chant.

In the evening, on our return to Quarr Abbey, Abbot Xavier led us in rehearsing the chants for Sunday Mass with the monastic Schola. The following morning we had a further rehearsal before singing at Mass in the beautiful Abbey Church.

It was a most enjoyable as well as highly instructive weekend. Our thanks are due to Fr Peter for arranging the visit, but especially to Sue Morris for taking care of all the meticulous details.

Patrick Martin

3 October 2023