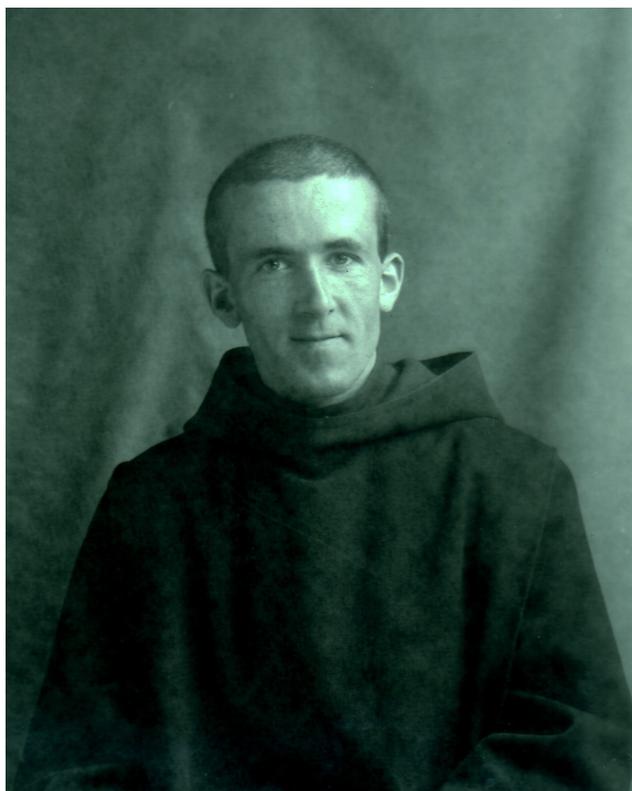


Fr Gregory recalls one of his confrères in this memoir of Dom Jean Desrocquettes.

When I arrived at Quarr in September 1964 Dom Jean had just been made Subprior. He was highly amused by this as he said later, perhaps in an unguarded moment, to Fr Robert Gough: 'When I was young I was a devil'. He had then been in the monastery for 55 years. He amused me by claiming that his Latin wasn't much good. Though he had been given extra lessons, he said that 'it has been getting worse ever since.'

Dom Jean had left Quarr with the Solesmes community, but returned after a short time to be choir master. Dom Pedro said that the choir came to life like a great organ under the hand of a master. When the foundation was made at Santiago de Chile he and Dom Pedro were the only monks of Quarr who were sent out but, in 1948, Dom Jean returned to Europe via Brazil, a providential disposition since it was there that he met Dom Paul Gordan of Beuron, who was able to take word to Germany of the need for support for the Chilean monastery.

After a short time teaching in Rome Dom Jean returned to Quarr and resumed the office of choir master. He had a great gift of encouragement and used to repeat to me what Dom Delatte had been in the habit of saying to novices, "si le petit cochon ne vous mange pas" [If the little pig doesn't eat you]". Obviously, since I was a novice and he a jubilarian I did not know him well, but Abbot Aelred wrote in his obit: 'For him the chant was the heart of the life of prayer-it would be a thing of beauty in the measure in which it expressed and nourished prayer. It would express and nourish prayer in proportion to the loving care given to its execution. The same deep spirituality was both expressed and concealed by his utter simplicity, and it was expressed especially in his love of the brethren.' Dom Jean certainly communicated his love of the chant in his weekly choir practices and in his chant classes for the novitiate. I remember my very first class with him, when I was required to read some verses of Psalm 118 to him. He always insisted on perfection of diction as the foundation of good chant.



Dom Jean Desrocquettes

In January 1965 Dom Jean left for what was to be his last month in the USA giving courses to the Cistercian monks and nuns. About six months after his return, to the great sorrow of the community, he suffered a severe stroke. The community assembled in the corridor outside his cell for the administration of Extreme Unction, and very slowly he made a partial recovery so that he was able to walk even into the wood unaided. Although his speech was affected he was able to communicate. He kept his sense of humour and his ability to mimic, which had always been a source of mirth at recreation. When I was taking him his supper I asked him if he wanted cocoa. He echoed my words with a pronounced English accent: 'Est ce que vous voulez du cocoa, mon père?' Another of my tasks was to go to his cell and wake him up for Sunday Mass, as he often fell asleep and the bells didn't wake him.

For seven years Dom Jean accepted his severe disabilities with unfailing cheerfulness and fortitude, but in February 1973 his condition deteriorated rapidly, and he died in St Mary's Hospital at the age of 83. He is buried in our cemetery at Quarr.