

Chorister Information

May 2025



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Why become a Chorister?

For children with a love of singing, there can be few more rewarding experiences than being a Chorister at Canterbury Cathedral.

Choristers benefit from a world-class musical education, and enjoy the opportunity to perform the greatest choral music ever composed to the highest standards alongside professional musicians in a UNESCO World Heritage Site of unparalleled majesty and beauty.

Many Choristers will participate in recordings for major record labels, will sing in services that are broadcast on national radio and television, and will sing at concerts in Canterbury and further afield at prestigious venues and high-profile festivals.

Choristers make lifelong friends with children who share their passion and enthusiasm for music. The Chorister experience teaches them the valuable skills of independence, organisation and dedication; it also boosts confidence and the capacity to work as part of a team. These are skills that will serve them in good stead, no matter what path they choose to pursue in later life. Choristers benefit from pastoral and emotional care, and support from the Cathedral's Music staff.

Many Choristers go on to hold choral and singing awards at leading universities. In recent years, destinations have included Merton College, Oxford; The Queen's College, Oxford; Clare College, Cambridge; King's College, Cambridge; St John's College, Cambridge; Trinity College, Cambridge; King's College London; Royal Holloway, University of London; Guildhall School of Music & Drama, London; Royal Academy of Music, London; Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.

Membership of the Choir is free. Additionally, Choristers receive financial support for singing lessons and Music Theory tuition.

Contact

For all enquiries about the Cathedral Choir, please contact us at music@canterbury-cathedral.org.



Who can become a Chorister?

There are two groups of Choristers: one of boys aged 7-14, and one of girls aged 12-18. These groups ordinarily perform separately, taking an equal share in the activities of the Choir and singing alongside adult professional singers, known as Lay Clerks.

Choristerships are open to children attending any school in the local area; there is no requirement to attend a particular school, or to board at the Cathedral.

Boys generally audition during the summer term whilst they are in Year 2 (aged 6-7), or Year 3 (aged 7-8), and join the Choir when they start in Year 3 (aged 7-8), or Year 4 (aged 8-9).

Girls usually audition during the summer term whilst they are in Year 7 (aged 11-12), and join the Choir when they start in Year 8 (aged 12-13).

The Director of Music, David Newsholme, is always happy to hear from prospective Chorister parents/guardians. You are warmly encouraged to contact him via music@canterbury-cathedral.org to discuss the opportunities open to your child.

The Director of Music is looking primarily for children with a love of singing, with a flair for performing, and with a good musical ear (i.e. an ability to recognise and imitate pitch and rhythm). Whilst previous experience of singing or playing a musical instrument is welcomed, it is by no means essential.

Auditions, which are informal in nature, generally last between 10 and 15 minutes. All prospective Choristers will be asked to:

- participate in a warm up;
- sing back pitches played to them on the piano;
- sing scales (no previous experience necessary);
- clap back a rhythm clapped to them;
- read out loud (not sing!) a passage from a book, which will be given to them in the audition;
- sing the first verse of the hymn O praise ye the Lord by C.H.H. Parry. Sheet music and words to help candidates prepare this hymn can be [downloaded here](#), and a recording of the hymn being sung at the Cathedral can be [viewed here](#). You can also watch our [‘How to prepare for your Chorister audition’ video](#).

A conversation between Cathedral Music staff, the prospective Chorister and their parent(s)/guardian(s) forms the final part of the process.

All auditions take place at the Cathedral. Audition dates, together with an online application form, will be available at www.canterbury-cathedral.org/music. Candidates will be informed whether or not they have been successful within a few days of the audition taking place.

Boy Choristers

Probationer Choristers

During their first academic year (and, in some cases, second) with the Choir, boys are known as Probationer Choristers (Probationers, or Probs for short). Probationers follow a reduced schedule which is designed to introduce them in a gradual and carefully-structured way to all of the routines and requirements of being a full Chorister.

Probationer Choristers' weekly schedule

Mondays	from 4.00pm	Chorister tea (Schools Department Lunch Room)
	4.30pm	Gather (Schools Department Lunch Room)
	4.45pm	Rehearsal (Cathedral Lodge)
	6.00pm	End (Collect from Schools Department Lunch Room)
Tuesdays	from 4.00pm	Chorister tea (Schools Department Lunch Room)
	4.30pm	Gather (Schools Department Lunch Room)
	4.45pm	Rehearsal (Cathedral Lodge)
	6.00pm	End (Collect from Schools Department Lunch Room)
Thursdays	from 4.00pm	Chorister tea (Schools Department Lunch Room)
	4.30pm	Gather (Schools Department Lunch Room)
	4.45pm	Rehearsal (Cathedral Lodge)
	6.00pm	End (Collect from Schools Department Lunch Room)

At this early stage, Probationer Choristers do not generally participate in additional Choir events, such as concerts, broadcasts, and recordings; they are not required to attend the Cathedral at the weekend.



Choristers

At the start of their second academic year with the Choir (usually Year 5), boys participate in the full Boy Chorister schedule, and in all additional Boy Chorister activities:

Choristers' weekly schedule

Mondays	from 4.00pm	Chorister tea (Schools Department Lunch Room)
	4.30pm	Gather (Schools Department Lunch Room)
	4.45pm	Rehearsal (Song Room)
	6.30pm	End (Collect at Dean's Steps)
Tuesdays	from 4.00pm	Chorister tea (Schools Department Lunch Room)
	4.30pm	Gather (Schools Department Lunch Room)
	4.45pm	Rehearsal (Song Room)
	5.00pm	Rehearsal with Lay Clerks (Song Room)
	5.30pm	Evensong with Lay Clerks (Quire)
	c. 6.30pm	End (Collect at Dean's Steps)
Thursdays	from 4.00pm	Chorister tea (Schools Department Lunch Room)
	4.30pm	Gather (Schools Department Lunch Room)
	4.45pm	Rehearsal (Song Room)
	6.30pm	End (Collect at Dean's Steps)
Saturdays	2.50pm	Gather (Dean's Steps): Boy Choristers who attend Music Theory
	3.00pm	Music Theory session (Archives)
	3.50pm	Gather (Dean's Steps): Boy Choristers who do not attend Music Theory
	4.00pm	Rehearsal (Song Room)
	4.45pm	Rehearsal with Lay Clerks (Song Room)
	5.30pm	Evensong with Lay Clerks (Quire)
Sundays	c. 6.30pm	End (Collect at Dean's Steps)
	9.20am	Gather (Dean's Steps)
	9.30am	Rehearsal (Song Room)
	10.15am	Rehearsal with Lay Clerks (Song Room)
	11.00am	Eucharist with Lay Clerks (Quire)
	c. 12.15pm	End (Collect at Dean's Steps)

In addition to the weekly routine listed above, Boy Choristers take part in a range of exciting activities, including special services, recordings, television and radio broadcasts, and concerts. Details about these are circulated in a termly Dates List.

Leaving the Choir

Boys generally leave the Choir when their voices change, usually between the ages of 12 and 14. At this time, the Director of Music will hear the boy sing, usually two or three times, to assess the situation. Should it prove that a boy's voice has significantly changed, the Director of Music will discuss the situation with the boy, together with his parent(s)/guardian(s), and a decision will be taken as to when the boy will leave. Please be assured that these situations are handled as sensitively and carefully as possible.

Drop off and pick up

Weekdays

Probationers and Choristers are welcome to arrive at the Schools Department Lunch Room for tea from 4.00pm on weekdays. All boys are required to be at the Lunch Room no later than 4.30pm. Parents/guardians are asked to ensure that they sign their sons in with a member of staff at this point.

At the end of rehearsals, during the week, Probationers should be collected by parents from the Schools Department Lunch Room, while Choristers depart via the Dean's Steps.

Weekends

On Saturdays, Boy Choristers are required to be at the foot of the Dean's Steps no later than 2.50pm for those who attend the Music Theory session, and 3.50pm for those who do not attend (for more information, see 'Music Theory sessions' on page 8).

On Sundays, all Boy Choristers must be at the foot of the Dean's Steps by 9.20am. Again, parents/guardians are asked to ensure that they sign their son(s) in with a member of staff at this point.

At the end of the session, Boy Choristers should be collected from at the foot of the Dean's Steps. Parents/guardians are asked to arrive promptly, and to ensure that they sign their sons out from a member of staff.

Parents/guardians are welcome to wait in the Cathedral Precincts for their children. The Lodge has a bar which is open every day of the week, at which Chorister parents/guardians are eligible for a 10% discount. For more information, please visit www.canterburycathedralodge.org.

Parents/guardians are welcome to park in the Cathedral Precincts when their son is on duty with the Choir. Please note that, to ensure the safety of pedestrians in particular, the speed limit in the Precincts is 5mph. Should parents/guardians wish to drive into the Precincts, they will be asked for details of their vehicles before their son joins the Choir.

Access to the Precincts before 7.00pm is via the Burgate entrance; after 7.00pm, cars can enter via Christ Church gate in the Buttermarket. This area is accessed via the pedestrianised section of Burgate, which is blocked by automated bollards. Parents/guardians can request entrance by pressing the button and talking on the intercom to a member of staff at the Council; on the way out, they should be careful to wait for the green light to show. Please note that the Cathedral is in no way responsible for the operation of these bollards.





Attendance and absence

Boy Choristers are expected to attend all Choir commitments. However, we understand that this is not always possible, especially in the case of illness. Where there is such unavoidable absence, please contact both the Director of Music, David Newsholme, and the Music Administrator, Jo Pearsall, at music@canterbury-cathedral.org, giving as much notice as possible.

Chorister tea

Chorister tea is provided at the Cathedral Schools Department Lunch Room. This usually consists of sandwiches and cake. Parents/guardians will be invited to provide details of dietary requirements for their sons before they join the Choir. While tea is available from 4.00pm for those who want it, please note that attendance is not required until 4.30pm.

Music Theory sessions

Boy Choristers are offered group Music Theory sessions on Saturdays at 3.00pm during termtime in the Cathedral Archives. These sessions, which are led by the Director of Music and Assistant Director of Music, take the form of supervised work time, during which boys progress through the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music Theory course, using books provided by the Cathedral. More information about this course can be found here: <https://www.abrsm.org/en-gb/music-theory>

The expectation is that all Choristers attend these sessions until they reach Grade 5 standard. These sessions are intended to expand the boys' understanding of, and confidence in, the theory of music; the sessions are essential in underpinning the boys' work in the Choir.

Probationers receive musicianship training as part of their group sessions on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Singing lessons

Probationer Choristers receive singing tuition as part of their group sessions on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays in the Schools Department Lunch Room.

Choristers are invited to claim up to £300 per term towards singing lessons with a teacher of their choice. A form is available on request from the Music Administrator.

Solos

Some of the music which the Choir sings contains passages to be sung by soloists, or groups of soloists. The Director of Music is responsible for ensuring that these solos are distributed appropriately, and that the level of challenge is suitable for the boys who sing them. He makes every effort to ensure that all boys are given adequate opportunity to develop their solo voice during their time in the Choir. Please note that the final decision for allocation of solos always rests with the Director of Music.

Clothes and robes

Boy Choristers are generally free to dress as they please when attending the Cathedral. However, please note that dark tights/socks and black shoes must be worn during services, and long hair should be tied back.

When performing with the Choir at Cathedral services, all singers wear purple robes, called cassocks, and white robes, called surplices. These are provided and maintained by the Cathedral; they are kept in a vestry at the Cathedral.



Girl Choristers

Weekly schedule

Mondays	4.45pm	Rehearsal (Quire)
	5.00pm	Rehearsal with Lay Clerks (Quire)
	5.30pm	Evensong (Quire)
	6.15pm	Dinner (venue confirmed on a termly basis)
	7.00pm	Rehearsal (Song Room)
	8.30pm	End (Depart via Dean's Steps)
Wednesdays	4.45pm	Rehearsal (Song Room)
	5.30pm	Evensong (Quire)
	6.15pm	Dinner (venue confirmed on a termly basis)
	7.00pm	Rehearsal (Song Room)
	8.30pm	End (Depart via Dean's Steps)
Sundays	3.00pm	Music Theory session (Archives)
	4.00pm	Rehearsal (Song Room)
	4.45pm	Rehearsal with Lay Clerks (Song Room)
	5.30pm	Evensong (Quire)
	c. 6.30pm	End

In addition to the weekly routine listed above, Girl Choristers take part in a range of exciting activities, including special services, recordings, television and radio broadcasts, and concerts. Details about these are circulated in a termly Dates List.

Leaving the Choir

Girls generally leave the Choir at the end of Year 13, when they are aged 18.

Drop off and pick up

Parents/guardians are welcome to park in the Cathedral Precincts when their child is on duty with the Choir. Please note that, to ensure the safety of pedestrians in particular, the speed limit in the Precincts is 5mph. Should parent(s)/guardian(s) wish to drive into the Precincts, they will be asked for details of their vehicles before their daughter joins the Choir.



Access to the Precincts before 7.00pm is via the Burgate entrance; after 7.00pm, cars can enter via Christ Church gate in the Buttermarket. This area is accessed via the pedestrianised section of Burgate, which is blocked by automated bollards. Parents/guardians can request entrance by pressing the button and talking on the intercom to a member of staff at the Council; on the way out, they should be careful to wait for the green light to show. Please note that the Cathedral is in no way responsible for the operation of these bollards.

Parents/guardians are welcome to wait in the Cathedral Precincts for their children. The Cathedral Lodge has a bar which is open every day of the week, at which Chorister parents/guardians are eligible for a 10% discount. For more information, please visit www.canterburycathedrallodge.org

Attendance and absence

Girl Choristers are expected to attend all Choir commitments. However, we understand that this is not always possible, especially in the case of illness. Where there is such unavoidable absence, please contact both the Director of Music, David Newsholme, and the Music Administrator, Jo Pearsall, at music@canterbury-cathedral.org, giving as much notice as possible.

Chorister dinner

Chorister dinner is provided between Evensong and the evening rehearsal on Mondays and Wednesdays. Venues for these dinners are confirmed on a termly basis.

Music Theory sessions

Girl Choristers are offered group Music Theory sessions every Sunday at 3.00pm during termtime in the Cathedral Archives. These sessions, which are led by the Director of Music and Assistant Director of Music, take the form of supervised work time, during which girls progress through the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music Theory course, using books provided by the Cathedral. More information about this course can be found here: <https://www.abrsm.org/en-gb/music-theory>.

The expectation is that all Choristers attend these sessions until they reach Grade 5 standard. These sessions are intended to expand the girls' understanding of, and confidence in, the theory of music; the sessions are essential in underpinning the girls' work in the choir.

Singing lessons

At present, girls are invited to claim up to £300 per term towards singing lessons with a teacher of their choice. A form is available on request from the Music Administrator.

Solos

Some of the music which the Choir sings contains passages to be sung by soloists, or groups of soloists. The Director of Music is responsible for ensuring that these solos are distributed appropriately, and that the level of challenge is suitable for the girls who sing them. He makes every effort to ensure that all girls are given adequate opportunity to develop their solo voice during their time in the Choir. Please note that the final decision for allocation of solos always rests with the Director of Music.

Clothes and robes

Girl Choristers are generally free to dress as they please when attending the Cathedral. However, please note that dark tights/socks and black shoes must be worn during services, and long hair should be tied back.

When performing with the Choir at Cathedral Services, all singers wear purple robes, called cassocks, and white robes, called surplices. These are provided and maintained by the Cathedral; they are kept in a vestry at the Cathedral.



Getting to Canterbury Cathedral

For more information about getting to the Cathedral, please [click here](#).

Locations

Brief information about the key locations for members of the Choir is given below.

1. Archives

The Archives & Library holds an impressive collection of manuscripts, historic records, photographs, maps and printed books dating back to the late 8th century. It is also where Choristers attend weekly Music Theory sessions.

2. Cathedral House

This is the building in which the majority of Cathedral offices are situated. Cathedral House is situated in the Precincts on the south side of the Cathedral.

3. Cathedral Lodge

This is a hotel and conference centre, situated in the Precincts on the south side of the Cathedral. There is a bar and lounge area which parents/guardians are welcome to make use of. The Boy Probationers' rehearsals take place in a room at the Lodge.

4. Choir Vestry

This is the room in which all Choir robes are stored, accessed via a flight of stairs leading up from the Song Room.

5. Community Studio

This is a modern and well-equipped room situated next to the Cathedral Shop, just inside the Precincts, near to the Christ Church gate.

6. Crypt

This is the part of the Cathedral which is (semi-) underground. Small-scale services sometimes take place down here, as well as concerts and other events.

7. Dean's Steps

These are the steps up to the Cathedral on the north side of the building. Please note there is also lift access at this point.

8. Nave

This is the main part of the Cathedral where occasional and large-scale services take place, where the chairs generally face forwards.

9. Quire

This is the part of the Cathedral in which the majority of services take place, where the wooden stalls (rows of seats) face inwards towards each other.

10. Schools Department Lunch Room

This is a room within the Cathedral Lodge building, accessed on the left as you go towards the entrance to the Lodge. This room is used by the Schools Department for school visits; it is also where auditions usually take place, and where Boy Choristers and Probationers meet for tea.

11. Song Room

The Choir rehearsal room is accessed via a flight of stairs leading up from St Andrew's Chapel in the north-east corner of the Cathedral. This is where the majority of Chorister rehearsals take place. It is also where the Choir library is stored.

12. St Andrew's Chapel

The Chapel at the foot of the Song Room stairs, where the Choir generally lines up before and after services.

13. Water Tower corridor

The area at the top of the Dean's Steps on the north side of the building, where the staff toilets used by the Choristers are located. This is also where Choristers leave their robes on a regular basis to be mended, changed and cleaned.

Cathedral Map





Cathedral staff

The following list shows Cathedral staff who work with the Choristers, together with a brief overview of their role in relation to the Choir.

Canon Precentor

The member of the Cathedral's Chapter (governing body) responsible for Liturgy and Music.

Director of Music

The Director of Music is Dr David Newsholme. He is responsible for all musical aspects of the Cathedral's work, and leads the Choir in the majority of rehearsals and performances.

Assistant Director of Music

The Assistant Director of Music is Mr Jamie Rogers. He assists the Director of Music in running all musical aspects of the Cathedral's work, including rehearsing and conducting the Choir on occasion. He is the principal accompanist to the Choir.

Singing Partnerships Lead

The Singing Partnerships Lead is Mrs Helen Brookes. She is responsible for connecting with partner institutions, including schools, both locally and nationally, and for teaching the Boy Probationers.

Robes Administrators

The Choir's robes are looked after and kept in good order by Mrs Sally Such (boys and Lay Clerks) and Mrs Claire Harland (girls).

Lay Clerks

The Lay Clerks are professional adult singers who sing alongside the Choristers.

Organ and Choral Scholars

The Organ and Choral Scholars are early-career musicians who spend a year working in the Cathedral's Music Department, playing and singing with the Choir. They may assist with the training of the Choristers on occasion, helping out at musicianship sessions, for example.

Music Administrator

Ms Jo Pearsall is the Cathedral's Music Administrator. She plays a vital role in ensuring the smooth running of our busy Department, assisting the Director of Music in particular by offering administrative support.

Safeguarding and Welfare

Ensuring the safeguarding and welfare of choristers is of paramount importance at Canterbury Cathedral.

Key people

The Cathedral's Safeguarding Lead is Revd Dr Emma Pennington, Canon Missioner; the Deputy Safeguarding Lead is Kathryn Beldon, our Receiver General. These are the two people within the Cathedral to whom safeguarding concerns are to be reported in the first instance. They are supported by the Cathedral's Safeguarding Advisers, Mrs Fiona Coombs and Mr Paul Brightwell.

Contact details

Revd Dr Emma Pennington, Canon Missioner and Safeguarding Lead.

Email: emma.pennington@canterbury-cathedral.org

Mrs Fiona Coombs, Cathedral Safeguarding Adviser.

Email: fcoombs@diocant.org; Tel: 07548 232395

Mr Paul Brightwell, Cathedral Safeguarding Adviser

Email: pbrightwell@diocant.org; Tel: 07398 009951

Concerns or queries regarding safeguarding should be directed to safeguarding@canterbury-cathedral.org

Chaperones

When on duty with the Choir, choristers are accompanied by chaperones. These are specially-selected adults, many of whom have been trained and registered as Chaperones with Kent County Council to ensure the children's wellbeing during rehearsals, services, and at all other times here. Chaperones provide written reports of each session attended by choristers which are sent to the Precentor, the Cathedral's Deputy Safeguarding Lead. These reports are reviewed regularly by the Cathedral's Safeguarding Lead and by its Advisers.

Cathedral Constables

To report an emergency safeguarding concern, please call our Cathedral Constables on 01227 866237, or go to the Constables' office located just inside The Precincts by Christ Church Gate.

Cathedral policies

The Cathedral's policies relating to Safeguarding can be found at www.canterbury-cathedral.org/safeguarding





Code of Conduct

In the Cathedral's *Strategic Plan 2025-2035*, the values of Compassion, Collaboration, Commitment, and Curiosity are highlighted. Choristers are expected to uphold these values by adhering to the Code of Conduct below.

Behaviour Expectations

- All Choristers should be respectful, well-mannered, and courteous always to adults and to one another;
- All Choristers must listen carefully to instructions;
- It is expected that older children and those children who are longer serving in the Choir act as good role models for younger children.

Within the Cathedral

- Be respectful of the sanctity of the Cathedral and its quiet spaces;
- Be respectful of all visitors to the Cathedral. Remember that they are visiting the Cathedral with an expectation that it will be a quiet place of worship;
- Walk sensibly and in pairs when in formation;
- Listen to instruction from the adults supervising.

Rehearsals

- Stand in your allocated space;
- Listen to all directions and instructions;
- Try your best to sing well and to improve by following instructions and watching the conductor;
- Do not distract your colleagues at any time;
- Be respectful of other choristers and their property.

Services and service preparation

- Put your robes on quickly and sensibly – it should not take long;
- Be helpful and pick up any surplices, hangers and name labels you see on the floor and hang them back on rails/hooks;
- Remember that as a Cathedral Chorister you are on show during services, whether you are singing, sitting, or kneeling. The congregation have high expectations of Chorister behaviour in services;
- Always stand up straight and still and try not to fidget;
- When you are not singing, for example in readings and prayers, you must sit or kneel silently and still.

Signing Out

The member of staff in charge of signing out after services will not release you until he/she can see your parent/guardian. Ensure that you do not leave before you have been allowed to do so.

Canterbury
Cathedral