



Music and Choirs

Salisbury Cathedral is the Mother Church of the 456 parishes in Wiltshire and Dorset, and a centre of musical and liturgical expertise. The music tradition at Salisbury Cathedral extends back over 1,000 years, both in our current Gothic cathedral (consecrated in 1258) and the preceding Norman cathedral. Music is now and always has been a fundamental part of our daily life: the tradition of sung services and concerts draws in both national and international visitors, eager to hear our renowned choirs and organists.

Donations from our congregation, visitors and local supporters ensure that our ministerial responsibilities and some of the repair works to the fabric of the cathedral are funded, but we need increasing support for our choirs. We maintain our musical standards through careful selection of choristers and musical staff, but we do need to offer bursaries to the children and part-time salaries to the adults in the choir if we are to attract the very best talent. We therefore need to raise approximately £313,000 each year to support our work, and are always very grateful for donations for our music.

Introduction

The mainstay of our music tradition is our choirs. The boys' choir has been present at Salisbury Cathedral for nearly 1,000 years, and includes 16 full choristers and four probationers. We run a girls' choir side by side; we were the first cathedral to launch a girls' choir in 1991. In addition, we have six adult men in our choral repertoire, known as the lay vicars. Running two choirs requires extra resources and a lot of extra organisation, so in addition to our Director of Music and Assistant Director of Music, we recruit an organ scholar every year to assist us. Organ scholars are always graduates or post graduates, and their time with us provides them with experience in all the aspects of running the musical department, including playing the organ for services, conducting the choirs and planning the music schedule. We provide each scholar with an honorarium and accommodation, recognising that suitable scholars will probably not be local.

The choristers all attend the Cathedral School, founded as the Choir School in 1091 by Bishop Osmond to provide an education for future life, in addition to musical and liturgical training. The school was exclusively dedicated to the education of choristers until 1946, when changes in society and education meant the school widened its education topics and welcomed students who were not choristers. The school is now a highly rated preparatory school, educating children from the ages of five until 13.

One of the major choir costs is chorister bursaries. We recognise that not all families can afford private education and we do not want financial circumstances to stop musical children from joining our choirs. We therefore offer bursaries of 40% to all boarding choristers and 20% for day children (regardless of whether they are boys or

girls); a substantial number receive further bursaries or grants from the school and external funders to help with the remaining costs. Our aspiration is that no student should be barred from joining the choir due to cost, and we would dearly like to be in the position in the future to offer 100% bursaries to the children who require them.

Choristers receive a rich and rewarding education at the School and Cathedral, but it is hard work and requires complete dedication from both the children and their families. We recruit choristers through voice trails in January, and selected children join the school and choir as probationers in September. We run “Be a Chorister for the Day” events each year, when children can come and experience a day in the life of a chorister. Training to be a chorister is challenging and the children are expected to perform at a professional level. The choirs sing nine services each week, in addition to any concerts and tours which are undertaken. They rehearse for one hour every weekday morning, one and a quarter hours every Saturday morning and for an hour every weekday before evensong, in addition to attending school and completing homework. With two choirs we are able to rotate their duties so the children do not have to sing services every day, but it is still a vast undertaking for the choristers who also sing services during times of holiday for most children, such as Christmas and Easter. The lay vicar commitment is also huge. They all have jobs so cannot attend morning practice, but they attend rehearsals every evening before evensong, with additional practice sessions on Saturday and Sunday. We are fortunate that our lay vicars choose to stay with us for several years, and we provide a small part-time salary with accommodation where necessary in recognition of their great dedication and effort.

The choirs underpin the entire music tradition at Salisbury Cathedral, and are a central part of our lives. The choral experience provides children with a very high standard of musical education, as well as helping them to develop confidence, a strong work ethic and a sense of community. It is inconceivable to think of the Cathedral without music due to lack of funding, and so we must fundraise to keep the music alive.

Finances

There are four main sources of funding for the Choirs; the Choral Endowment Fund (established in the 13th century for the boys), the Girl Choristers’ Trust (Chaired by the Countess of Chichester) and the Choral Foundation (which uses its funds to generate investment returns for both girls and boys), with the Cathedral meeting any shortfall. The Cathedral finances are currently stretched, running at a deficit due to increased requests for support from chorister families, and expenditure on repairs to the fabric of the building. We therefore seek external support and I hope you will be able to help us.

Our most urgent and priority requirement is to meet the shortfall on the choir bursaries, with support for the lay vicars’ costs a second and still very important need. Even with the active work of supporters like the Countess of Chichester we are predicting a deficit of £60,000 for bursaries in the current financial year; lay vicars’ costs will be £58,911. We must offer the bursaries, otherwise we are in danger of creating a two-tier system where talented children are excluded due to their financial circumstances.

Please help us by making a donation. You can make donations by credit card, CAF Account, cheque and cash, and we are very happy to discuss other forms of gift such as shares or legacies. You can call us to make a donation on 01722 555107, or contact us at j.wright@salcath.co.uk; Development Office, The Chapter Office, 6 The Close, Salisbury, SP1 2EF

However you decide to help us – thank you.

Salisbury Cathedral

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