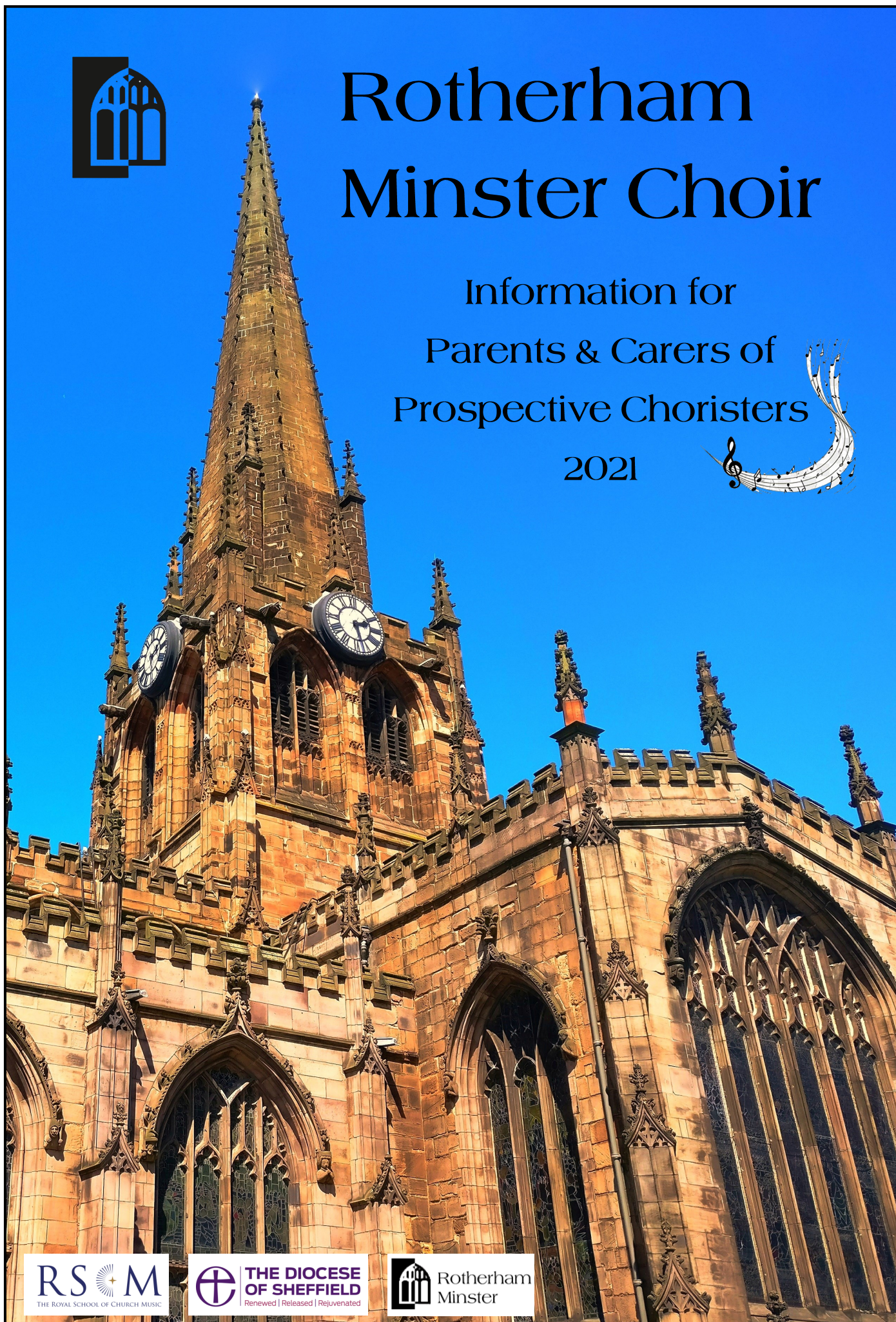




Rotherham Minster Choir

Information for
Parents & Carers of
Prospective Choristers

2021



Thank you for showing an interest in choristerships at Rotherham Minster. We aim to provide a unique and valuable experience for all children who become members of the choir, and a warm welcome to them and their families into our church community.

Choristers will benefit from an opportunity to sing regularly in what is perhaps the most historically and architecturally significant building in Rotherham, and receive free tuition in singing and music theory whilst providing a valuable service to the many people who attend our services and events throughout the year.

This brochure will give you more information about what choristers do, the benefits of being a chorister, the scheme here at the Minster and some background information about the Anglican choral tradition and the history of the choir at the Minster.

Rotherham Minster

The Minster Church of All Saints, Rotherham, stands in a prominent position in the centre of the town.

The present building has stood since the 15th Century. Prior to this, two other churches occupied this spot: the previous Norman building, constructed in the 12th century, and, before this, another church building, mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086.

The current church is a Grade 1 listed building and the architecture is generally regarded as the finest example of a perpendicular style church in Yorkshire.

Previously known as the Parish Church of All Saints Rotherham, it was granted Minster status in 2004.



Rotherham Minster viewed from the West.



A Painting of the interior of the Minster in 1848, by William Cowen. The view is from the High Altar looking West towards the back of the church.



The 188 feet tall spire topped with a gilded weather-vane has overlooked the town for over 500 years.



Rotherham Minster
is in Mission Partnership with
St Paul's Church, Masbrough.

The Tradition of Choral Worship at Rotherham

The College of Jesus and the Six Choristers

The tradition of child choristers in Rotherham Minster dates back to the 15th century when Thomas Rotherham, sometime Archbishop of York, founded the College of Jesus in 1482 which provided for 'six poor boys' of the parish to be clothed, fed and educated in 'grammar, writing and song'.

These six boys were the first known choristers at what was then the Parish Church of Rotherham, now known as Rotherham Minster, and were, according to the Statutes of the College, required to 'devoutly sing on every Friday for ever'.

The college of Jesus was dissolved many years ago, but the tradition of choral worship at the Minster continues.



A window in the Jesus Chapel commemorates the founding of the College of Jesus. At the top left, three of the choristers can be seen being instructed by a Master.



Adult Minster Choir singers rehearse prior to Choral Evensong, under Coronavirus restrictions in June 2021

Rotherham Minster Choir today

Although children have sung in the Minster Choir for many years over the centuries, this tradition lapsed a few years ago and the current Rotherham Minster Choir consists of adult singers who sing at Sunday morning Eucharist services each week.

The choir also sings Choral Evensong on the first Sunday of each month, one of only a very few churches in the diocese which continue this tradition, and at special services, including Civic Services and the popular Rotherham Carols by Candlelight Service, which was attended by over 600 people at the last pre-pandemic service in December 2019.

A Tradition Revived and Renewed!

In 2021, we are reviving the tradition of child choristers singing in Rotherham Minster by launching a new treble section of the Minster Choir, and we are currently looking for children who would like to become part of this new choir, and join the long line of choristers who have sung in the church since those first six boys over five hundred years ago.

The New Rotherham Minster Treble Section

The new Rotherham Minster Choir Treble Section will consist of child choristers between the ages of 7 and 13. The choir will start training and rehearsals in September 2021. The sections below will give information about the choir and, hopefully, answer some of the questions you might ask.

What are choristers?

In the long established Anglican Choral Tradition, choristers are children who sing as part of a robed choir to lead the singing of hymns and to sing anthems and other special music during services. Although Choral Worship is less common today than in years gone by, in most British cathedrals, many minster churches, such as Rotherham Minster, and some parish churches, the tradition continues.

The practice of having children sing the top line, or treble line, in choral pieces is still common in most British cathedrals and some other, mainly larger, churches. In the past, choristers were usually boys, but during the latter part of the twentieth century, most churches and cathedrals began to include both boys and girls. Where choral services take place, it is now common to see boys and girls, sometimes singing together with adults, and sometimes singing separately, taking a key part in leading the worship.

If you have seen the famous Christmas services from King's College Cambridge, or heard them on the radio on Christmas Eve, you will know what a wonderful, inspiring and moving sound a group of well-trained and committed choristers can make.



Two Rotherham Minster Choristers preparing to meet the queen's cousin, Prince Richard, Duke of Gloucester, when he visited the church in 2011.



Rotherham Minster Choristers from the late 1940s/early 1950s meet, a government minister.



Choristers in the Chapel of King's College, Cambridge, as seen each Christmas on BBC TV.

What are the benefits of a choristership?

There are many advantages to being a chorister. Choristers receive a good grounding in music, developing their singing ability and knowledge of music theory. Being a member of the choir also builds confidence, develops team working skills and gives children an opportunity to make friends with children whom they might not otherwise meet. Also, choristers take an important part in leading services, and often benefit from the sense of purpose and responsibility which this brings, and the knowledge that what they are doing is helping others.

In particular, at Rotherham Minster, we can offer:

- a warm welcome for children and their families into our church community
- opportunity to make music in the finest perpendicular church in Yorkshire and continue the 500 year old tradition
- free tuition in music theory and vocal training and an opportunity to work towards the Royal School of Church Music (RSCM) Voice for Life awards
- staff with a wide range of experience in music and education to support the choristers and help them develop their talents
- opportunity to learn and sing a wide range of music in different styles and from different periods of time
- opportunity to sing at special services, including at Civic events, and in concerts
- social events for children and families
- a chance for children to learn more about the Christian faith
- pastoral support for children and support for families from our clergy team and others in the church community

Many well-known people were choristers in churches and cathedrals when young. These include musician and singer Ed Sheeran; TV presenter, singer and actor Alexander Armstrong; singer and TV presenter Katherine Jenkins; former England cricket captain Alastair Cook; TV and Radio presenter Aled Jones.



“I owe my entire career to my experience as a chorister,”

“It was where I learnt to perform, where I learnt to use the full range of my voice; where I learnt to listen, where I learnt to write comedy – but most importantly it was where I learnt the wonderful truth that something exceptional, something as beautiful as anything anywhere, can be created just by you and your friends.”

Alexander Armstrong (former chorister)

from a report on Classic FM Website on Alexander's appointment as Ambassador for the Cathedral Music Trust

Who can become a chorister at Rotherham Minster?

We are looking for children between the ages of 7 and 13 who:

- enjoy singing
- are interested in music and would like to learn more
- are prepared to try their best

Previous experience of singing, for example in a church or school choir, is useful, but not essential. Children do not need to have an amazing voice at the start of their chorister journey (though it's certain some will have!): we are looking for children who are enthusiastic, willing to learn and have a good ear for music. Everything else will come with training and practice. Where children are learning an instrument already, singing in a choir will support this. It is important that children are able to read fairly accurately, although singing often helps children to develop their fluency.

How can my child become a chorister?

We are always pleased to hear from parents/ carers of children who are interested in becoming choristers, and are happy to have an informal chat. We also hold 'Future Chorister' events during the year, where children have the opportunity to do some singing activities in the Minster and find out about what being a chorister involves.

When you and your child have decided that they would like to become a chorister, our Senior Musical Director, Mr Ian Wilcock, will arrange a short meeting with you both, during in which we can answer any questions you might have and check together that a choristership is right for your child.



A choir Cassock

The next step will be for your child to have an induction and become a '**probationer**'. The term probationer refers to choristers who are in the first months of being part of the choir. During this period they will attend rehearsals and start to learn the skills they will need to sing as part of a church choir. At first, the children will be invited to attend services with a parent or other adult and sit in the main body in the church as part of the congregation. This will help them get to know what happens in the church during a service and for children who aren't used to church, to become comfortable with being in the building.



A surplice is worn over the cassock during services

After a few weeks, they will be given a red **cassock** to wear and will start to sit with the choristers when they sing in a service. As they do this and continue to attend rehearsals, they will get more confident with what to do and when, and will begin to become more able to make a confident vocal contribution to the singing.

When the probationer has reached the stage where they have all the basic skills and knowledge needed by a chorister, they will be admitted as a **full chorister** and be presented with a **surplice**, which they will wear in services.

The probationary period will usually last a few months, but will be flexible to meet the needs of the individual child. So, for example, where a child enters the choir when they are in late KS2 or KS3, and/or they have previous relevant choral or musical experience, the period as a probationer may be shorter.

As the child becomes more experienced, they will progress to become **Senior Choristers**. They will then be able to lead and support younger or less experienced choristers or probationers. Some Choristers will progress to become **Head Choristers** who take on a leadership responsibility, in a similar way to the captain on a sports team, and wear an RSCM Head Chorister medal.

What do Choristers do?

Choristers take an important part in church services, and have the same duties and responsibilities as adult choir members. As part of the choir, they help give a strong lead to congregational singing. To do this, they will learn a range of hymns and songs, both traditional and contemporary. They will also learn anthems: pieces of choral music sung only by the choir, and listened to by the congregation as part of the service. Their movement forms part of the ceremony of services, as they process in and out, and they lead the congregation in standing and sitting during the service.



Choristers of the Chapel Royal in the Tudor period.

In order to fill their rôle effectively, choristers will develop a variety of skills and qualities. The children will learn a variety of musical skills. They will learn how to use their breath well and increase their vocal range over time. They will learn how to sing with clear diction, and vary the way they sing for different effects. They will learn to sing in other languages for example Latin, as used in many sacred choral pieces from the past.

Choristers will improve their musical knowledge. They will learn to sing from a musical score, and use musical notation to help them learn new music. They will learn musical terminology and develop their knowledge and understanding of different

aspects of musical theory (e.g. the names & lengths of notes, rhythm and tempo, pitch and intervals).

Being a chorister helps a child develop personal skills and qualities, many of which will be valuable in other areas of their lives. Through the responsibilities they take on, they will become increasingly confident and will develop an awareness of the importance of self discipline. Many choristers find that their self-organisational skills improve.

Being in the choir also give children access to a continuing tradition of Christian liturgy, music and architecture. They will get to know the liturgy well, and become familiar not just with a wealth of music, but also the texts which are set. For those choristers who choose to find out more about the Christian faith as they move through their early years into adulthood, this accumulated knowledge will become an important resource on which they can draw throughout their adult lives.

Last, but by no means least, being part of the choir community allows children to build friendships and develop social skills. They will meet children from other schools and different backgrounds and will feel a sense of purpose and achievement in working together towards a common purpose.

VOICE
for **LIFE**

Rotherham Minster is affiliated to the **Royal School of Church Music** (RSCM), and in order to develop their knowledge and skills, choristers will

have the opportunity to follow the Voice for Life choral training programme. As they learn more, they will have chance to gain medals which they can wear with their choir robes.



What is the schedule for rehearsals and services?

As our treble section will be a newly formed choir, and most of the new choristers will have little or no experience of being part of a church choir, the emphasis in the first term will be welcoming them and their families into the church and choir family, introducing them to what they will be doing as choristers, and training and rehearsing, but there will also be opportunity for them to sing during some of our services.



Rehearsals

Rehearsals will take place on **Thursdays** and begin at **4:30 p.m.** The first rehearsal of the Autumn Term 2021 will be on **Thursday 9th September 2021**. From then on, Rehearsal will be at the same time each Thursday, with the exception of the Thursday of half term week, 28/10/21. The church will be open from 4 p.m., and children and parents will be able to enter through the South Transept door. There will be an area to wait and socialise before rehearsal starts.

At 4:30, choristers will be taken to the rehearsal area and will rehearse for an hour. Parents are welcome to wait in the South Transept area, or can leave and come back later to collect their child. At the end of the rehearsal, choristers will be taken to their parents. We will only release children to their own parents/ carers, unless prior arrangements have been made and Music Team staff informed by the parent/carer.

There will generally be no rehearsals during half term holidays, the week following Christmas and Easter and during the month of August.

Services in Autumn 2022

Our main Sunday morning services are currently held at 10:30 a.m. In the Autumn Term 2021, Choristers will be invited to become involved with our 10:30 a.m. all-age services on the first Sunday of each month. These all-age services will be at 10:30 a.m. on

Sunday 3rd October

Sunday 7th November

Sunday 5th December

Normally, where choristers sing at a service, there will be a short rehearsal before the service.

Although the choristers will not sing as a group at the other services, they and their families are invited to attend as members of the congregation. This will allow the children to become familiar with what happens in services and families to get to know others in our church family.

As we move into December and the Christmas period, there may be other opportunities for choristers, who are ready to do so, to participate in other seasonal singing activities.

Spring and Summer 2022

Rehearsals will continue during the Spring and Summer of 2022, and choristers will begin to sing more frequently in services. As they rehearse, their skills will improve and they will become familiar with a range of music and will progress to more difficult pieces.

Longer Term Plans

In the longer term, as our choristers become more experienced and their skills improve, it is hoped that the treble section will become increasingly involved in a range of services, including sometimes singing at choral evensong and at special services, such as Rotherham's Civic Services.

I am bringing my child up in the Christian faith. How will being a chorister support this?

As part of their church music education and training, choristers will learn about the Christian faith and the role of music in worship. The RSCM Voice for Life Scheme supports learning on this. During services, choristers will sing and say words which carry the Christian message, and will become increasingly familiar with liturgy, prayers and stories from scripture. Many former choristers who are Christians find that the texts they sing when young, for example biblical verses set to music and sung as anthems, stay with them into adult life and continue to help them on their journey of faith for the rest of their lives.

As part of our approach, Christian values, such as kindness to and consideration for others, will be promoted.

In addition, we will offer other opportunities for choristers who wish to look at the Christian faith more closely. They can participate in our existing Messy Church sessions, and we also we plan to have specific activities focusing on the Christian faith for those choristers who want to explore the faith in more detail.

We're not a religious family, can my child still join the choir?

Yes. A church or cathedral choir is somewhat different from a secular choir, in that most of the music will be sacred music and be sung as part of acts of Christian worship, so anyone singing in a church choir will need to be prepared to sing and say texts which express the Christian faith, and to show respect for those who follow the faith. However, our faith teaches us to welcome everyone, so people of any faith or none are welcome into our church, and this is the case with our choir.

How will the children be supported?

We understand that every child is an individual. Some may be very confident, others less so. Some may enjoy singing on their own, others may be more reluctant to do this. Some make friends easily; others are quite shy. These differences are all normal, and we will do our best to nurture your child by taking account of their personalities and needs. We want to do the best we can to help your child grow musically, develop self-confidence and independence and develop spiritually. If at any point, you have concerns or your child is worried about anything, you will be able to contact whichever member of our staff team you feel most comfortable talking to or who you feel might be able to help you the best.

What is the church's approach to safeguarding?

Rotherham Minster is committed to effective safeguarding procedures. All members of staff and volunteers who will be supervising and working with choristers will have had an enhanced DBS check and will have undergone safeguarding training.

Our parish safeguarding officer is **Mrs Jayne Rogan**. She can be contacted via the Minster Office at the All Saints' Centre on **01709 431616** or **information@rotherhamminster.co.uk**

A link to our Safeguarding Information can be found on the Home Page of our website, **www.rotherhamminster.co.uk** .

What other things does the church offer?

When choristers join the choir, they and their families will become part of our choir family, which is part of our church family. Like families at home, we hope to develop an atmosphere of mutual support. Families will, of course, be most welcome to take part in all of our church community activities if they wish. We have a social committee which is involved in organizing activities including such events as family fun days, harvest suppers and family quizzes. In addition, we plan to have social activities aimed specifically at choristers and their families. We hope that by being part of the choir, children will make and develop friendships which will continue as they grow up.

Our Music Team

In addition to their knowledge and skills in the field of church music, the members of our music team also have many years of experience of working with children in educational settings.



Ian Wilcock BA (Hons), PGCE.

**Senior Musical Director of the Mission Partnership
Organist of Rotherham Minster & Director of the Minster Choir**

Ian has been leading the music at Rotherham Minster since 2011. He plans the music, plays the organ for services and directs the Minster Choir. He was a chorister from the age of seven and started to learn the organ in his early teens, taking on his first organist post at 16. He sang as a choral scholar in Bangor Cathedral Choir whilst studying Linguistics at Bangor University, where he continued his organ studies under the university organ tutor. Ian gained a Post Graduate Certificate in Education in Liverpool and took up a teaching career. Ian worked in primary education for almost thirty years, seventeen of these as a deputy head teacher. He is currently Acting Chair of the Rotherham Music Education Hub



Elliott Walker BA (Hons), MA

**Centenary Project Worker
Director of Music and Organist at St Paul's Masbrough**

A native of Rotherham, Elliott studied piano from the age of 10 and began to play the organ at 16. In addition to his work at Rotherham Minster, he plays the organ and directs the choir at St Paul's, the other church in our Mission Partnership. Elliott studied English Literature at York St John University, and went on to gain an MA in The History of English Church Music from York University. Elliott was appointed Centenary Project Worker for the Mission Partnership in Autumn 2019, in which role he is tasked to work with children and families, with a particular emphasis on music. He combines these roles with private music tuition and is also joint Musical Director of the Masbrough Community Choir.



Rev Rachel Young Mus.B (Hons), PGCE, MA
Associate Vicar of Rotherham; Choir Chaplain

Rev Rachel took up the post of Associate Vicar at Rotherham Minster early in 2020. Amongst her duties, she oversees worship, including liturgy and music, at Rotherham Minster and St Paul's, Masbrough, working closely with the Directors of Music at both churches and acting as choir chaplain. Prior to this she was Succentor at Southwark Cathedral in London, involved in organising the Music and Worship. Rev Rachel was previously a member of the clergy team at Beverley Minster, and also a rector of a number of parishes in East Yorkshire. Rachel studied music at university and, before ordination as a priest, she was a peripatetic teacher of woodwind in East Yorkshire, and was heavily involved in church music, including church music groups and choirs. Rachel is also currently RSCM Diocesan Representative for Sheffield



Rev Sue Armstrong B.Mus (Hons), PGCE, GDipTMM
Curate— Rotherham Minster & St Paul's Masbrough

Rev Sue joined Rotherham Minster as a newly ordained curate in June 2021. She is a former secondary school music teacher and Church of England Reader. She sang as a chorister as a child and has been involved in church music of different kinds over many years. Sue is also a pianist and oboist performing musical styles from Classical to Jazz and has a real love of directing Musical Theatre productions.

Some other people on the Minster Team you might meet:

Vicar

Rev Canon Phil Batchford



Associate Vicar:

Rev Ali Middleton



Operations Manager:

Stephanie Osman



You can see the rest of the members of our staff team and other people involved with the Rotherham Minster and St Paul's Masbrough Worshipping Community on our website.

Find us and Contact Us

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Tel: 01709 431 616

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Rotherham Minster Church

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60 1PD



Our offices are in the All Saints' Centre, which is close to the South East corner of the church

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