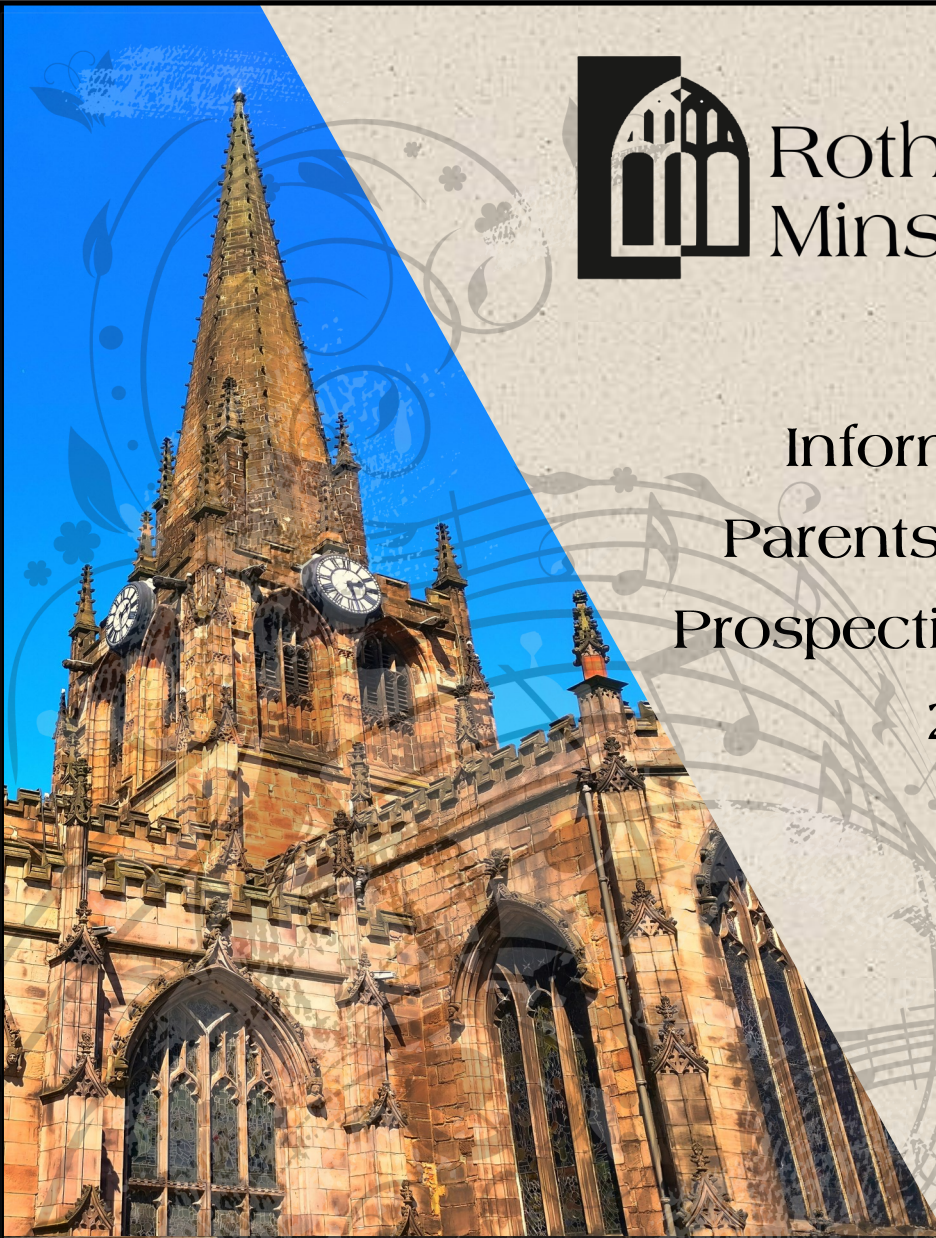




Rotherham Minster Choir

Information for Parents & Carers of Prospective Choristers 2023



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 Minster

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.

Rotherham Minster Choir today

Rotherham Minster choir today is made up of two sections: the adult choir and the choristers.

Currently, the adult choir sings each Sunday at the main 10:30 a.m. service and at Choral Evensong at 4:30 p.m. on the first Sunday of each month, one of only a very small number of churches in the diocese which continue this tradition.

Although the presence of child choristers at the Minster goes back a long way, the choir had, for a number of years, consisted solely of adult singers. However, in the Summer of 2021, the tradition was revived when a new treble section to the choir was launched. The choristers sang in their first service in October 2021. Currently the choristers sing with the adults at the 10:30 a.m. service on the first Sunday of each month.

The choir also sings at special services, including Civic Services, such as the mayor's service in May, and the popular and very well attended Rotherham Carols by Candlelight Service. In 2023, the choir sang for the first time at the South Yorkshire Legal Service.

In addition, the choir performs at other events, such as the Taste of Christmas and the Rotherham Heritage Day.



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.



The Rotherham Minster Treble Section

The Rotherham Minster Choir Treble Section consists of child choristers between the ages of 7 and 13. The new choristers started training in September 2021 and rehearse weekly on Thursdays in term time. They currently sing on the first Sunday of the Month at the all-age service and at some other special services and events. As the choir grows and becomes more experienced, we plan to provide more opportunities for them to share their talents with others.

The sections below will give information about the choir and, hopefully, answer some of the questions you might have.

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.



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



Three Choristers from Rotherham Minster (known as Rotherham Parish Church at the time) in 1922.



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

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
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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.

“As a former chorister myself, I appreciate the benefits which singing brings to young people both physical and emotional.”

“Singing teaches you lots of skills and provides many opportunities which will help, enrich and sustain you throughout life.

“There is nothing equal to the joy of performing wonderful music with other like-minded people.”

Ed Sheeran (former chorister), *on taking up the role of Patron of the Choral Foundation for St Mary-le-Tower church in Ipswich*



“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
- are willing to make a commitment to attend rehearsals regularly and be at the services and occasional concerts in which the choristers are scheduled to sing.

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 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 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

When a chorister starts to sing with the choir in services, they will be given a red **cassock** to wear. As they attend more services and rehearsals, they will get increasingly 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 in 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.

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 fulfil 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 will, over time, increase their vocal range. 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 gives 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?

When children join the choir, many will have little or no experience of being part of a church choir, so 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 alongside the existing choristers, who will support them as they get used to things.



Rehearsals

Rehearsals take place on **Thursdays** and begin at **4:30 p.m.** The church is open from 4 p.m., and children and parents are 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, where tea and coffee are available, 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 and events

Our main Sunday morning services are currently held at 10:30 a.m. At the moment, Choristers are involved in leading the singing in our 10:30 a.m. all-age services on the first Sunday of each month.

Choristers are also involved in special services, such as the Carols by Candlelight service. In the longer term, as our chorister section become more established and the choristers become more experienced and their skills improve, it is hoped that they will become increasingly involved in a wider range of services and events, including sometimes singing at choral evensong.

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



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. 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, attend Sunday School on the Sundays when they are not singing in services. We have a faith exploration group which runs for 30 minutes after rehearsal and has specific activities focusing on the Christian faith for those choristers who want to explore it in more detail. This is not compulsory, though any child is welcome to attend.

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.

My child goes to a sports club and I have to pay for each session. How much will it cost for my child to be part of the choir.?

There is no charge to parents as the Minster covers all costs. Robes, music copies and equipment are provided for the children to use, and the Minster also provides refreshments. In essence, the children receive free tuition in singing and music theory. All we ask is that the children make a commitment to regularly attend rehearsals and the services they are due to sing at, as the choristers have an important part in helping lead the worship at the Minster.

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 have social activities aimed specifically at children 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.

The Music Team



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 Chair of the Rotherham Music Education Hub.



Rev Justine Smith
Associate Vicar — Rotherham Minster & St Paul’s Masbrough

Rev Justine joined the Rotherham Minster Team in May 2023. She grew up in South Yorkshire and studied medicine in Oxford and Manchester before settling in East Yorkshire, with, amongst other things, a period working as a GP in Hull. Rev Justine was ordained in 2012 and before coming to the Minster was priest in charge of four parishes in the North Eastern area of the Sheffield Diocese. Rev Justine has particular responsibility for Music and Worship in the Minster



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

Rev Sue joined Rotherham Minster as a 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



Associate Vicar

Rev Louise Castle



Operations Manager:

Chris Deeley



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

Website: www.rotherhamminster.co.uk

Tel: 01709 431616 (All Saints' Centre)

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Rotherham Minster Church

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

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