

# Musical Notes



Southwell Minster's Music newsletter

Issue 2 ♦ Spring 2025



**Welcome** to *Musical Notes*, a newsletter created especially for all who love music at Southwell Minster.

In this issue we reflect on some key moments that have made the Minster's Music Foundation what it is today. We're also thrilled to announce a forthcoming BBC Radio 3 broadcast which will showcase our musicians on a national platform.

We celebrate two special milestones. 2025 marks the 20th anniversary of girl choristers at Southwell Minster. Over the past two decades, the girl choristers have become an integral part of the choir, helping to shape the choir into the dynamic and inclusive musical force it is today. We also mark the 30th anniversary of the Minster Chorale, our adult voluntary choir. Anyone who has heard this choir in action will know that they bring tremendous amounts of experience, dedication and expertise to create a sound that the Minster is truly proud of.

We hope you enjoy reading this issue. Whether you're part of the congregation, attend concerts, or follow from afar, we invite you to join us in celebrating the many ways Southwell Minster's Music Foundation continues to inspire us all.



## FUNDING NEWSFLASH

On 26th February, The Friends of Southwell Cathedral pledged £25,500 to support the Cathedral Choristers in 2025. Funding the Music Foundation is one of the Minster's greatest challenges, and we are deeply grateful for the continued support of the Friends and all those who contribute so generously.



# A season in pictures

Highlights of the last six months



An out-of-this-world installation arrived at the Minster in October. The Cathedral Choir took full advantage of the musical and spiritual opportunities presented by artist Luke Jerram's *Museum of the Moon*, singing Eucharist 'under the moon', and performing a memorable, atmospheric late-night candlelit Compline beneath the gently glowing sphere.

Many events went on during the period *The Moon* was with us, from family events to a cappella concerts. Particularly popular were the relaxing early-morning Pilates sessions – though none of our musicians were witnessed taking part in them!

We were delighted to welcome our Interim Dean, the Revd Canon Dr Neil Evans, in November. A passionate and knowledgeable advocate of cathedral music, Dean Neil is fully committed to leading the drive to secure the future of the Music Foundation. Music is integral to cathedral life, and we are thrilled to have a great ally in the Dean.

Not long after Dean Neil's installation, we welcomed two Acting Residentiary Canons, the Revd Amanda Lees and the Revd Dr Stephen Hippisley-Cox, in January. Alongside our wonderful Canon Precentor, the Revd Dr Richard Frith – who oversees services and music at the Minster – the new clergy team lead daily worship.



left to right: the Revd Canon Amanda Lees, the Rt Revd Paul Williams, Bishop of Southwell & Nottingham, the Revd Canon Dr Neil Evans, the Revd Canon Dr Stephen Hippisley-Cox



A remarkable highlight just before Christmas was a performance of Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana* at Nottingham Concert Hall. The Cathedral Choristers joined forces with the BBC Concert Orchestra and the massed choirs of Nottingham's two universities to deliver an unforgettable evening of drama. What an incredible experience for our intrepid choristers.



A highlight of the Choir's musical year is *The Magic of Christmas* – a stellar concert celebrating the lighter side of Christmas. The Choir joined forces with another professional orchestra – this time Sinfonia Viva, the Orchestra of the East Midlands. Choir and orchestra captured the spirit of the season with festive arrangements that filled the Cathedral with holiday cheer. As with so many of the Minster's musical activities, we wouldn't be able to present these large-scale concerts without the support of a trusty team of volunteers to provide refreshments. We're very grateful to the Southwell Minster Choir Association for keeping everyone fed and watered at so many of our events.



The Cathedral Choir sang an incredible 21 services in December. Alongside the daily round of services, particular highlights were the Advent Procession, two packed Carol Services, and two services on Christmas Day. Well over 5,000 people hear the Cathedral Choir and Minster Chorale sing each December, and – despite the coughs, colds and end-of-term exhaustion that is an unfortunate annual feature of the Music Foundation's Christmas-tide, the musicians of Southwell Minster did themselves proud last December.



The Choir's most recent adventure brought four cathedral choirs under one roof. In February we were thrilled to host a performance – again with Sinfonia Viva – of the Poulenc *Organ Concerto*, featuring our very own Rector Chori, Paul Provost, at the organ console. The massed choirs performed Duruflé's *Requiem*, topping off an incredible evening of music showcasing the abundant talent of cathedral musicians in the Midlands – Coventry, Derby, Leicester, and the home team of Southwell.



# Girl choristers thriving

Paul Provost, Rector Chori, celebrates 20 glorious years of girl choristers at Southwell Minster



Southwell Minster's very first Girls' Choir, 2005



Some of our girl choristers, 2025

*Educate a girl, empower a nation.*  
Anon.

This year, 2025, marks 20 years since girls became part of the regular musical life of Southwell Minster.

The inclusion of girls in cathedral choirs is a journey that nearly all cathedrals have made, and was of course a natural development following societal and cultural changes. Today we are very proud of our girl choristers, who are a full part of the Cathedral Choir, and have complete parity with their male counterparts.

Having looked back at documentation surrounding the formation of the 'Girls' Choir' as it was, it's clear that there was a strong will to get this right but also an anxiety around how the existing setup might be affected. Other cathedrals were consulted, to understand how different models might work and to have insight around the benefits and difficulties associated with whichever route was to be taken.

In the end a teenage choir was set up, to be directed by the Assistant Director of Music, then Simon Bell, and usually accompanied by the Organ Scholar. Subsequent Assistants and Acting Assistants made their mark, developing this into a group of musical distinction both as part of liturgy and in concert and recording work. In particular, the annual *Ceremony of Carols* performance was always a highlight of the musical calendar.

The legacy of the Girls' Choir lives on at Southwell Minster: their CD *Christus Rex* is a favourite of the Minster's events manager, and the girls' voices can often be heard soaring through the Nave at our Craft Fairs!

Since my arrival at Southwell Minster in 2017, further great strides have been taken to achieve absolute parity for girls.

There's no separation between Choristers (the boys) and a Girls' Choir: all are equally Cathedral Choristers, and the Rector Chori (Director of Music) directs all choristers. While the girls used to wear rather informal gowns, all choristers now wear cassock and surplice. Schedules for boys and girls are now equally jam-packed, and they take an equal share in all aspects of chorister life. Crucially, we have aligned the age ranges, which allows girls now to commit fully to their chorister duties rather than trying to combine these with the stresses of GCSEs.

The next step will be to develop our provision for teenage singers, which has begun in a small way by inviting school-age former choristers to sing Evensong with the Lay Clerks twice each term.

We currently have 18 girl choristers, and they are working at a very high level. Their contribution to the music here, as well as their place in the Cathedral Choir, is central. It's as if girl choristers have always been here, bringing joy and vivacity to the Music Foundation.

Over 80 girls have benefited from singing in the choir here since 2005 – their contribution to the Minster is highly valued, and we all look forward to seeing our girl choristers flourish as the years pass.

**We're looking forward to a celebratory Evensong on Saturday 15th March, just one day after the 20th anniversary of the Girls' Choir's very first service.**

**Please do come if you can, and celebrate 20 years of girl choristers at Southwell Minster.**

# In the media spotlight



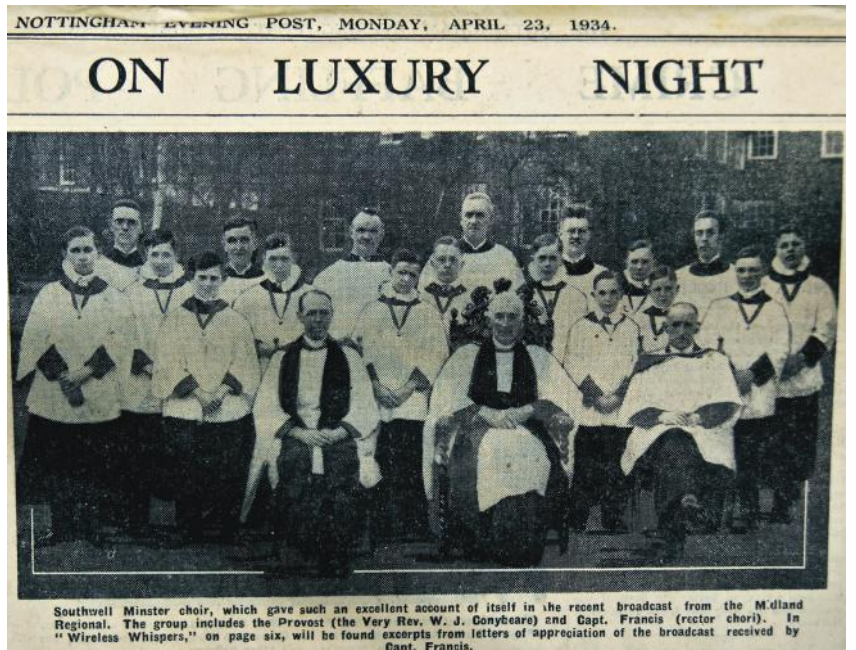
## Choral Evensong live from Southwell Minster on BBC Radio 3: Wednesday 16th April, 3pm

We're thrilled to have been chosen as the Cathedral Choir to sing Choral Evensong to the nation during Holy Week.

The Minster has a long history of appearing on radio and television broadcasts – the picture opposite was taken in 1934 following what we believe was the very first airing of the Cathedral Choir on the radio. They received a very favourable review in the *Nottingham Evening Post*.

If you'd like to hear more of the Cathedral Choir in the history of broadcasting, don't miss [this wonderful episode of \*Choirs and Places Where they Sing\*](#), recorded for the radio in 1967 and introduced by Sir John Betjeman.

Betjeman spends a full six minutes at the beginning of the programme celebrating the town and its Minster, surrounded by a "tree-embowered kingdom". He is, of course, particularly taken with the stone carvings: "Here's a place where the carvers enjoyed themselves. All along the eaves of the roof are carved heads with funny faces. Toothache, laughing, weeping, yelling ..." He could be describing our musicians at the end of a long term!



## Minster Melody Makers

Training young musicians is at the heart of the Minster's musical activities. Melody Makers is the Minster's choir for our tiniest singers. Each Saturday morning our intrepid group of 5-7-year-olds meet the wonderful Miss Osmond (one of our Lay Clerks, who also happens to be a highly skilled schoolteacher) to explore singing and the wonderful world of music.

Melody Makers will be performing their spring concert on Saturday 29th March at 10.15am in the State Chamber. We warmly invite you to join us for this special event!



[To see Melody Makers in action, click here.](#)

# Chorale 30

## Celebrating 30 years of the Minster Chorale

2025 sees the 30th birthday of an integral part of our Music Foundation, the Minster Chorale. An auditioned voluntary choir of 25 adult singers, the Chorale today fills an important role of singing for some 30 services every year, as well as concerts and trips.

The Chorale was conceived by Rector Chori Emeritus Paul Hale, who in 1994, along with the new Assistant Organist Philip Rushforth (now Director of Music at Chester Cathedral), auditioned potential singers over two evenings, and out of this a choir of twelve sopranos, four altos, four tenors and four basses was formed. Philip took on the direction of the choir, and they had their first outing on Ash Wednesday 1995. Since then, the Assistant Organist (now Assistant Director of Music) has always directed the choir, and there have been five directors since 1994: Philip Rushforth, Simon Bell, Philip White-Jones, Simon Hogan, and Jonathan Allsopp.

One of the main reasons for the Chorale's formation was singing when the Cathedral Choir was away or on holiday, and that continues to this day. The Chorale's main recurring commitments are singing a Sunday every half term, the majority of evening Sung Eucharists (Ascension, All Souls etc), and for Midnight Mass, as well as various other services, including annual services for the charity Framework. Since 2014, they have performed Handel's *Messiah* with professional soloists and baroque orchestra annually in the run-up to Christmas, and this is today a firm favourite of the Cathedral's calendar, attracting over 450 people in 2024.

The Chorale also makes regular trips to sing away from home, and in recent years have been on tour to the Channel Islands, sang for a week of services at Hereford Cathedral, and sang at the Mass for New Catholics at Westminster Cathedral. This year includes a weekend of services at Durham Cathedral, and a return trip to sing at the Saturday evening Vigil Mass at Westminster Cathedral.



Above: Chorale in the Quire. Right: the splendid cake celebrating Chorale's 30th anniversary, expertly created by Emma Frith. Below: Minster Chorale and Lincoln Cathedral Consort at the Anniversary Evensong held in February.





# The new Lay Clerk in town

Meet the new Bass of the Cathedral Choir



Ever fond of new scenery, I'm very excited to explore more of Southwell and the Midlands. When I'm not singing, raising money, or contemplating mortality, I enjoy rambling in the countryside, often with my camera, where I can be found practising – with various degrees of success – my landscape photography. Otherwise, as fan of good wine and beer, you'll probably find me with the other Lay Clerks in one of Southwell's many fine establishments.

I'm hugely grateful for the warm welcome I've received over the past seven months in Southwell. The kindness and generosity of everyone has been striking, the standard of music-making unrivalled, and the beauty of the Minster breathtaking. I'm looking forward to many more evensongs to come, and to meeting more of the Minster community in due course.

Hi all, my name is Matt McCullough and I'm delighted to have joined Southwell Minster as a Bass Lay Clerk in September 2024. Originally from Ireland, I began my cathedral-hopping at St Peter's Cathedral, Belfast, before moving across the pond to sing in Winchester, Portsmouth, Durham, and most recently Newcastle. Before migrating to the Midlands, I completed a PhD at Durham University on British Music and the First World War, more broadly integrating the concepts of loss, mourning, and memory.

Alongside the wealth of singing and music-making at the Minster, my daily work has two focuses. Primarily, I work as a fundraising consultant, working with charities and arts organisations to help them attract the money they need to carry out their work. So far this year, I've raised money to build a sensory room for children with additional needs in Wolverhampton, to run a professional orchestra in Wales, to create a social welfare centre in Manchester, and to renovate a church roof in York. It's a fabulously varied job, and it's wonderful to see that your work – and the money you raise – actively makes a difference to people's lives.

In addition, I will be carrying on with my research. I'm currently writing a book chapter on Gerald Finzi and a chapter on Charles Villiers Stanford's choral works for the new *Cambridge Companion to Stanford*. I'll also be lecturing on British music and death at Newcastle University in May and I have a forthcoming volume on *Music, Mortality, and Memory* with Professor Douglas Davies to be released this year. It's a wonderful mix to be able to write about so much of the music that we sing and hear in the Minster, and I can promise that all of the death talk isn't half as gloomy as it seems!



*Matt and his Music Foundation colleagues on Christmas Morning. While our congregation may be blissfully unaware, thanks to the robes worn during services, there's a long-standing tradition among the Lay Clerks and Organists to don their finest formal attire on Christmas Day. Very smart!*

# Completion of the Quire organ project

Jonathan Allsopp, the Minster's Assistant Direct of Music, reports that the scaffolding has finally come down following a £250,000 project to restore the organ

A quiet weekday Evensong during Advent might not seem like the most suitable moment for our Nicholson Quire Organ to have been heard for the first time in public in over six months, but in fact it made complete sense.

The Quire Organ has been in near-daily use since 1996. Alongside the daily round of services, it's used regularly for recitals, demonstrations, and special services including weddings and funerals. The Quire Organ is central to the rhythm of the Cathedral, accompanying Evensong with comforting regularity and its distinctive tone.

As with anything mechanical, the organ requires regular maintenance, including tuning visits and routine upkeep. However, there comes a time when it's necessary to strip the whole thing down to its bare bones and give it a full service. Imagine not taking your car for a service in 30 years; inconceivable!

In May 2024, Nicholson & Co, the organ's original builders, took out almost all of the pipework, the action and the console, and set about cleaning everything, fixing some significant glitches, and generally making everything more reliable. We also upgraded the organ's memory system, giving our Organists much greater flexibility when programming settings.

After several months' work, costing just shy of £250,000, the organ was reinstalled in the autumn, and it came back into use on Thursday 5 December at Evensong.

So why a run-of-the-mill weekday Evensong? Why not wait for a grand Sunday service? Well, we did have a special Sunday re-dedication, with the Dean re-dedicating the organ with a liberal sprinkling of holy water. But the decision to introduce the organ on a plain Thursday Evensong reflects its true purpose: to accompany the daily sung office in the Quire.

The Quire Organ isn't reserved solely for the big occasions; it's played at every sung service in that space. And its role may not always be in the foreground. At the Sunday re-dedication, it accompanied the choir singing William Walton's vibrant *Chichester Service*, showcasing the full dynamic spectrum of the instrument. But at its more introverted return on the preceding Thursday, it accompanied a Tudor anthem on a single stop, provided a post-service voluntary and, crucially, accompanied both the Office Hymn and the Psalms for the day – a role it fulfils at every Evensong. Simple, yet perfect.

If you have yet to hear the Quire Organ since its overhaul, I warmly encourage you to come and observe its role in the daily worship. Come to a Sunday Evensong, and you will hear it in a powerful and festal mode. But if you really want to hear it do what it does best – and indeed what it exists for – come to a rainy midweek Evensong and you will hear it in its most important role, as part of the Cathedral's beating heart.



# The chorister journey

Shining a light on the wonderful world of our young musicians

**A chorister's journey in the Cathedral Choir is one of dedication, growth and transformation, both as a musician and as an individual. Along the way, they develop essential life skills such as self-organisation, focus and teamwork. Learning to lead is another important part of choristership. This brief article walks the uninitiated through the developing roles – and wardrobes! – of Southwell Minster's Choristers.**

The typical chorister journey lasts seven years, from their early days learning the ropes, right up to potentially taking on the role of Head Chorister and leading the charge. While occasionally choristers are recruited in later years, and indeed can end early for a variety of reasons, this description of a chorister's journey will assume they start in Year 3 (aged 7), and conclude at the end of year 9 (aged 14).

## An exciting new adventure

A new recruit begins their journey as a **junior chorister**, with a commitment that is lighter than that of the full choristers. This gradual introduction to chorister life allows them to develop a wide range of new skills and knowledge. Typically, junior choristers attend four early-morning rehearsals each week, where they work closely with the Organ Scholar. During these sessions, they learn everything from reading and following music to understanding the structure of the Eucharist and Evensong. We don't expect new choristers to come to us with prior knowledge; all we ask for is enthusiasm, a willingness to learn, and a good musical ear. As they progress through their first year, junior choristers begin to participate in more weekday services. They also start music theory classes after school and take part in Sunday services, sharing music until Christmas, after which they are given their own copies of music.

## The cassock

In their second year, junior choristers reach a significant milestone. They receive their own cassock to wear during services and are officially added to the choir roll book, a tradition that every chorister, lay clerk and organist observes at the start of their tenure. At this stage, they are known as **probationers** and begin following the full chorister schedule, participating in all services and concerts. Their confidence grows, and they start to take on smaller solo opportunities, particularly during the weekday office hymns on Mondays and Tuesdays.

## The surplice

At the start of their third year, our probationer choristers finally reach the exciting point of becoming fully-fledged **full choristers**, and they are 'surpliced' (given a surplice) at a celebratory Evensong by their Head Chorister. It is always a delight to see them enjoy the flapping capabilities of their new surplices!





## Passing the 'medal test'

Before long, full choristers become eligible to take the infamous 'medal test'. This written test asks choristers a range of questions about choristership, with everything from specific questions about orders of service to musical questions. All being well, a successful chorister will receive their own **medal**, a mark of achievement and further seniority in the chorister ranks.

## The tippet (the cape)

As a chorister reaches the latter years of their time in choir, as well as making the exciting transition to Senior School, they become eligible to become a **Tippet Chorister**. A tippet is a shawl-like garment worn over the shoulders, and signifies seniority in the choir.

## Head Chorister and Deputy Head Chorister

Finally comes the prospect of being elected as **Head Chorister** or **Deputy Head Chorister**, roles which come with certain expectations and responsibilities. Our Head Choristers' tippets are specially embroidered with distinctive insignia. All choristers vote at the end of an academic year for the following year's Head, Deputy Head and Tippet Choristers, which is taken into consideration alongside the music staff's deliberations. These roles reflect a huge amount of dedication and commitment to the choir.



A chorister's time must eventually come to a close, and this occurs at the end of school year 9 (Third Year in old money!). The final Evensong of the academic year is our traditional 'valediction' service, where we say farewell and thank you to our departing choristers, and they receive the gift of a hymn-book, signed by the Dean and Rector Chori. The annual choir barbecue after this service is a lovely way for the whole choir to let off some steam, and more personal farewells to be said.

It's always remarkable how quickly seven years can pass, not just for the chorister, but also for the Organists, for whom it is the greatest privilege to see a fresh, inexperienced 7-year-old evolve into a fine young musician, capable of leading their peers in a hugely varied diet of music day after day.

*With thanks to Richard Bullock, who inspired us to write this article*



## Sponsor a chorister's robes

As our chorister team continues to grow, we need to invest in five new cassocks and surplices this year. Many of our current robes are too long for our smallest choristers, and while the Minster's Needlework Guild works tirelessly to adjust hems, we must purchase new robes in 2025 to ensure a proper fit.

**[If you would like to sponsor a set of robes for £150, please consider donating to the Milo Chorister Fund by clicking here. Your support is greatly appreciated!](#)**

# Can you help the Cathedral Choir?

The Cathedral Choir plays a vital role in leading and inspiring worship at Southwell Minster, reaching a global audience through live-streaming and national media partnerships. Its concerts bring exceptional music to the people of Nottinghamshire, while its presence marks key moments in our community's life – from baptisms and weddings to funerals.

However, the future of our Choir is not guaranteed. Maintaining a professional choir is costly, with nearly a quarter of the Minster's annual budget allocated to music (£250,000).

We receive no financial support from the Church of England or government bodies to preserve, promote and develop music at Southwell Minster. The Cathedral's reserves for music are severely depleted, and we rely on the generosity of individuals and trusts to sustain this vital part of our life. Your support now is more important than ever.

Please consider making a donation to Southwell Minster's Music Foundation in 2025 by contributing to the Milo Chorister Fund. Every gift truly makes a difference, helping us continue the cherished Choral Tradition at our beloved Minster.

## How your donation will support us

- £25 pays for a chorister's music lessons for a week
- £50 fully supports a chorister for a week
- £150 pays for a set of new chorister robes (cassock, surplice & neck tie)
- £200 supports all the choristers for a day
- £1,000 covers two years of a chorister's music tuition
- £1,500 creates a MILO CHORISTER FUND BURSARY. This fully supports a chorister for an entire year.

[CLICK HERE TO DONATE](#)

*A huge thank you to a wonderful Chorister Parent who secured £1,000 for the Milo Chorister Fund in January through a corporate philanthropy scheme.*

Many large companies offer funding opportunities for charities – if you, or anyone you know, is connected to a company with a charitable giving scheme, we would be grateful if you would consider nominating us. Please [contact Ruth Massey, Head of Fundraising](#).



## The Milo Chorister Fund

This fund was set up in 2023 specifically to support the Cathedral Choristers.

Named after Milo Hogeson, the very first chorister ever to appear in the Minster's annals (in 1469), the fund aims to protect the future of the Minster's choristers for generations to come.



Our 2023–4 Milo Bursary Choristers



Our 2025 Milo Bursary Choristers... Every £1,500 raised through the Milo Chorister Fund will create a new Milo Chorister. Please support us today.



Southwell  
Minster

Cathedral ♦ Gardens ♦ Palace

We hope you have enjoyed reading *Musical Notes*. If you have any comments, suggestions, or would like to adjust your communication preferences – whether to stop receiving updates or to hear more from us – please contact Ruth Massey at [ruth.massey@southwellminster.org.uk](mailto:ruth.massey@southwellminster.org.uk)

[www.southwellminster.org](http://www.southwellminster.org)