



CANTEMUS!

Welcome to the Lent edition of **Cantemus!**; the CSA's termly magazine for our members and wider network.



With Shrove Tuesday and Ash Wednesday falling during half term for many of our schools this year, we were glad to see that some choristers still got to take part in traditional pancake races.

Boys from Pilgrims' School competed enthusiastically in the Rotary Club's pancake race in Winchester, along with the Mayor.

Photo: Joe Cooper

On Thursday 29th January, it was a great pleasure to attend a joint choral Evensong in Gloucester Cathedral sung by the Chapel Choirs of three of our members – King's Gloucester, King's Worcester and Hereford Cathedral School.



Many of those singing together were former choristers and the collective sound was tremendous – a great experience for all involved. We are always keen to hear of joint ventures which bring our members together.

While we look ahead to our conference in Oxford, we have recently had some insights into the Association's history.

We were contacted by Sally Mould, daughter of the late Alan Mould, distinguished Head of a number of CSA schools over the years and author of *The English Chorister*. This book was originally conceived as a history of the Choir Schools' Association but developed into a much broader endeavour. Sally has kindly donated her father's research notes to our small but growing archive.

Published in 2007, *The English Chorister* is a highly recommended read for anyone wanting to learn more about the history of choristers singing in monasteries, abbeys and cathedrals from Anglo-Saxon times to the present day.



It was also a pleasure to meet Wendy Jackson, the CSA's Administrator from 1996-2006 and compare notes on the Association then and now.

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My conversation with Wendy reinforced my feeling that once people have become involved in the world of choirs and schools, they never really leave it behind, so if you have friends or contacts with chorister connections, please feel free to share this newsletter with them.

Enjoy the wonderful music of this season!

Rachel Hicks, Executive Director

Connect, Support, Celebrate – with Howard Goodall CBE at the CSA Conference

We are honoured to announce that the Guest of Honour and After-Dinner Speaker at this year's Choir Schools' Association Conference will be the distinguished composer **Howard Goodall CBE**.

Few musicians embody our conference theme – Support, Connect, Celebrate – more completely than Howard. His musical journey began as a chorister at New College Oxford, aged just seven, before returning to Oxford as an undergraduate at Christ Church Oxford during the tenure of Simon Preston. The choral tradition he absorbed there profoundly shaped his compositional voice and led to a long and fruitful collaboration with Stephen Darlington over two decades.

Howard's output spans beloved television themes such as Mr Bean and The Vicar of Dibley, as well as anthems, a mass, and the much-performed Eternal Light: A Requiem, now nearing its 1,000th live performance. His millennial setting of Love Divine – written for the CSA (with lyrics by fellow Christ Church alumnus, Charles Wesley) – remains a testament to his enduring connection with our community.



In Howard's own words:

"My musical journey began, aged 7, as a chorister at New College Oxford... I am therefore delighted to be able to speak to the gathered nobility of the CSA community back at Christ Church, for which I have such fond memories."

His return to Christ Church to address the "gathered nobility" of the CSA community promises to be a highlight of our time together – an opportunity not only to celebrate extraordinary musical achievement, but to reconnect with the shared foundations of our choral tradition.

Do join us for what promises to be an inspiring and memorable conference. Come ready to support one another, connect across our network, and celebrate the vibrant future of choir schools together.

Members can book their place at the 2026 conference [HERE](#).



The Great Hall - venue for our conference dinner



The Thatched Barn at Christ Church - our main conference venue



Campaign to safeguard English Sacred Choral Music

English choral music has shaped the soundscape of our nation for centuries. From the soaring treble lines that echo through our cathedrals to the daily discipline and joy of choir school rehearsals, this tradition is not a museum piece – **it is a living, breathing practice, renewed each day by the young people and professionals who sustain it.**

That is why a campaign is underway to secure formal recognition for English choral music as “living heritage” within the UK’s Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) Inventory. Intangible Cultural Heritage status, as defined by UNESCO, is designed to safeguard traditions that are actively practised and passed from generation to generation.

For choir schools, cathedral and churches, this recognition would be both symbolic and practical.

- Symbolically, it affirms the national significance of the daily round of services, rehearsals, and music-making that define our lives.
- Practically, inclusion in the UK’s ICH Inventory strengthens advocacy efforts, raises public awareness, and provides a framework for long-term safeguarding. At a time when arts funding and access to music education face continuing pressures, this matters profoundly.

The campaign, led by the Cathedral Music Trust, has already made encouraging progress and an ‘expression of interest’ has been lodged in advance of the formal submission which is due by Friday 27th March 2026. An Open Letter has also been sent to the Secretary of State, calling for government recognition of the cultural and educational value of the English choral tradition and its inclusion in the Inventory.”

Conversations with sector partners, in which the Choir Schools’ Association is very much involved, have demonstrated strong cross-community support, and the case being built highlights not only cathedral foundations but also independent schools, parish churches, and community choirs. **This is a shared inheritance.**

Now the campaign needs visible backing from those who know its value best. By signing the petition, you add your voice to a national call to recognise and protect the English choral tradition for future generations.

We would ask all CSA members, and friends who have not done so already, to please take a moment to click on the link below and show your support for the campaign. Together, we can help ensure that this living heritage continues to flourish.

[**Add your name to the campaign here**](#)

2025/26 CSA Grant Awards

In 2025/26 the CSA were delighted to be able to award grants totalling over £18,000 to support 10 members with their music related projects. The grants have been spent on a wide range of projects including singing workshops and partnerships with local schools; concerts; new hymn books, choir folders and musical instruments.

If members have a similar project and would welcome some extra funding to make it feasible, and reduce the burden on their own stretched finances, then please complete the short form below. We just need a very brief overview of the project and amount required (the maximum award is £2,500). The deadline for applications to Wednesday 22nd April You can apply [HERE](#).

Below you can read a summary of some of the projects supported by the CSA this year..

The **King's School, Gloucester** currently teaches and performs music on two different sites (in the school music department and at the Cathedral) and has to move equipment between the two, which is not ideal in terms of efficiency or resources. They received a CSA grant to purchase new music stands with a trolley, so that they can be stored in the Cathedral for events; and also for a video camera, sound equipment to record and share events and allow recording and promotion of school / cathedral partnership work in the years ahead.



Wells Cathedral School received a CSA grant to help them protect and reorganise the music in their Cathedral Choir library. The project included the boxing and covering of music that is currently uncategorised, greatly benefiting the smooth running of their day-to-day activities, enabling them to reintegrate displaced music, and ensuring their valuable music is preserved for many generations of Choristers to come. With the grant, Wells also renewed their Evening Psalters which are used each day at Evensong, along with a further set containing the morning psalmody.

St John's College, Cardiff used their CSA grant to purchase recording equipment which will allow them to stream their choir and musical performances.



A spectacular concert was performed in Norwich's Roman Catholic Cathedral on 4th March 2026 given by long-standing CSA member school, **Norwich School**, and supported by a CSA grant. Their adult Choral Society joined forces with a huge, combined school choir to perform with professional musicians "Norwich Baroque" and pupil music scholars- a combined group of some 150 performers on stage. It was a joy for the ears and a spectacle for the eyes!



The programme began with two 20th century choral works: Daley's *Upon Your Heart* (1999) and Bainton's *And I Saw a New Heaven* (1928), followed by a virtuoso performance of Mozart's much-loved horn *Concerto No 3*. After the interval, a large audience was treated to another modern work, Goodall's moving *Eternal Light: A Requiem* (2008). The seven talented soloists for the evening were all pupils from the school, many having been Choristers at Norwich's other Cathedral.

Steffan Griffiths, Head of Norwich School, expressed his heartfelt thanks to the CSA for their extremely generous lead sponsorship of this annual choral concert for the third year in succession, enabling the school to put on such a memorable event.



SPOTLIGHT INTERVIEW

Tom Dowdy, former York Minster chorister, paramedic and Atlantic rower



This time last year former York Minster chorister Tom Dowdy was recovering from the once-in-a-lifetime experience of rowing the Atlantic with two of his paramedic colleagues as part of The World's Toughest Row.

The 'ParOARmedics' completed the 3,000 mile journey in 48 days, four hours and 17 minutes.

We caught up with Tom to find out more about the challenge, his career as a paramedic and some of the ways in which being a chorister has influenced it all.

Tom's playlist...



What was the motivation for taking part in the row?

It was definitely the sense of adventure and a feeling of, why not? There was a cool statistic that more people had climbed Everest that year than have *ever* rowed an ocean.

There was also the happy by-product of raising a significant amount of money for some really important causes: Macmillan, The Stroke Association and The Ambulance Staff Charity.

Tell us a bit more about the experience...

It was incredible. From being caught up in a cyclone, experiencing 40 foot waves at 3am, rowing alongside dolphins and whales, to being in complete wilderness for weeks on end, it was a huge mental challenge and team effort.

People often say that choristers become excellent team players... did your chorister training come to mind while you were rowing?

More than you might think... for one thing, we had a very eclectic playlist to listen to during the long hours at sea, and it included a lot more organ and choral music than my team mates were bargaining on... I particularly enjoyed teaching them the actions we learned as choristers to Stainer's 'I saw the Lord!'

More seriously though, being a chorister builds self-discipline and resilience from a young age. You can't coast. Preparing for the row was like being a chorister in that training and practising to a very high level ultimately enables you to do something extraordinary, and have fun at the same time.

What about in your work as a paramedic?

When you're working with an advanced life support team, it's a bit like being part of a musical ensemble where everyone has their individual part and it has to be perfectly co-ordinated. It's people working together to a very high standard and thriving under pressure – you learn to enjoy it.

What's the next adventure you're planning?

I'm taking the opportunity to use my professional skills as a paramedic in expedition and wilderness medicine, supporting others who are undertaking major challenges and adventures. I've worked on an ultra-marathon in Morocco and a cycle-kayak-run triathlon event in Nicaragua.

I've recently been accepted as a Reservist in 335 Medical Evacuation regiment so there's plenty on the horizon!

New Members

In January we welcomed two new Associate Members to the CSA: **New Hall School** and **Ripon Cathedral**.

New Hall School in Chelmsford features a renowned, historic Tudor Chapel that serves as the centre for its active choral and liturgical music tradition.

The Chapel Choir is a mixed voice choir of approximately 50 singers ranging from Year 3 (aged 7) to Year 13 (aged 18) supplemented by some adult singers. The Choir consists of 18 boys and 32 girls, and they sing at Mass each Sunday during term time.



Members of the choir also sing for public worship at Brentwood and Chelmsford Cathedrals, usually once a term.



Ripon Cathedral has an unbroken history reaching back to the 7th century serving the small city of Ripon and the vast rural county of North Yorkshire.

The Cathedral Choir sings six services per week during term-time. There are two separate treble lines, recruited from local schools, a teenage choral scholar scheme and six Lay Clerks.

Do You Hear the People Sing? St John's College, Cardiff's powerful *Les Misérables*

Over 80 pupils were involved in the St John's College, Cardiff production of *Les Misérables* which was watched by 1,000 people over the four sell out nights.

The production was nothing short of extraordinary; a triumph of dedication, resilience, and breath-taking young talent. From the opening notes to the final, rapturous applause, the school community witnessed a production that will long be remembered as a defining moment in their performing arts history.



Established in 1918, the Choir Schools' Association exists to promote and support the education and wellbeing of choristers – the young people at the heart of the UK's world-class choral tradition.



Choir Schools'
Association

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