



TEWKESBURY ABBEY SCHOLA CANTORUM

OF DEAN CLOSE PREPARATORY SCHOOL

Tewkesbury Abbey Schola Cantorum of Dean Close Preparatory School

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Tewkesbury Abbey Schola Cantorum?

Tewkesbury Abbey Schola Cantorum was founded in 1973 by Miles Amherst, and in its first incarnation was known as The Choir of the Abbey School, Tewkesbury. The choir was founded to sing the weekday services of Choral Evensong at Tewkesbury Abbey. The Abbey's choir school sadly closed in 2006, and the choristers made the transition to Dean Close Preparatory School, where they have been educated ever since. It was at this point that the choir's name was changed. The choristers have continued to receive substantial chorister bursaries from the Choral Scholarship Fund, and, more recently, the Tewkesbury Abbey Foundation.

Who is in the choir ?

The choir consists of up to 18 choristers (boys and girls) and 6 lay clerks, plus a choral scholar who is appointed on an annual basis. The lay clerks are paid professional adult singers who sing the lower parts in the choir (alto, tenor and bass). They join us at the Abbey for the rehearsal and service at the end of the day.

What is a chorister?

A chorister is a young boy or girl who is a member of the choir. Choristers usually begin their journey in the choir in Year 4, but this year, we are seeking to recruit girls and boys in years 5 and 6 too. It is expected that all choristers stay in the choir until the end of year 8.

What is a probationer?

Choristers who are new to the choir are called probationers. In year 4, the probationers rehearse every morning and join the older choristers at the Abbey on Thursday evenings for Evensong. New members of the choir who join in years 5 and 6 follow a fuller timetable, and are expected to progress quicker. Initially, they may not sing every piece in every service, but through nurturing their skills in morning rehearsals and by attending services at the Abbey, they are expected to progress quicker in the choir.

Choristers who join the choir in year 4 are probationers for one year normally, and are given their surplice usually at the start of year 5, subject to satisfactory progress. Older choristers in years 5 and 6 would be expected to gain their surplice more quickly, becoming full choristers.

Why has the change to chorister arrangements been announced now?

In early 2020, both the Dean Close Foundation and Tewkesbury Abbey conducted a review of Tewkesbury Abbey Schola Cantorum, and specifically the chorister programme. Girl Choristers were a repetitive item that was mentioned throughout the discussions that took place. After careful consideration of various options open to the Abbey and the School, it has been decided to keep the provision of services sung at the Abbey the same, but to open up opportunities for girls and boys in equal measure, creating a mixed choir. Having made this decision, it was felt that as we come out of the pandemic and begin singing again in the Abbey, it is the right time to make this exciting change to set the choir up for the next phase of its journey.

Chorister Staff team

The Director of Tewkesbury Abbey Schola Cantorum is Mr Simon Bell. Simon has been in post since September 2012 and is the Director of Choral Music for the Dean Close Foundation. He previously held posts at Winchester Cathedral, Southwell Minster and Westminster Abbey.

He is supported by:

Mrs Jane Lyons	Chorister tutor and Schola Cantorum manager
Mr Ben Sawyer	Chorister singing teacher
Miss Miriam Reveley	Organ Scholar (2021-22)
Mr Archie Sladden	Choral Scholar (2021-22)

What and where is Tewkesbury Abbey?

Tewkesbury Abbey was founded in 1087 as a Benedictine monastic community. After the dissolution of the monasteries, the Abbey became the parish church for the town of Tewkesbury. Two choirs sing at the Abbey to support the worship: Schola Cantorum (who sing the weekday services of Evensong) and the Abbey Choir who sing at the weekend and at major festivals.

Where do the choristers go to school?

All of the choristers in Tewkesbury Abbey Schola Cantorum are educated at Dean Close Preparatory School, where they play a full part in the life of the school.

When can girls and boys become choristers?

From September 2021, chorister places in Tewkesbury Abbey Schola Cantorum are open to both girls and boys. We are seeking to recruit choristers in years 4, 5 and 6 for entry into the choir in September 2021.

What scholarships are available to choristers?

Choristers entering the choir as probationers in year 4 will be given a bursary worth 10% of the day fees at Dean Close Preparatory School. Choristers in years 5 to 8 will receive a 20% chorister bursary. If additional financial support is needed, means-tested bursaries are available from the Dean Close Foundation, and there are other external trusts that can be approached for additional help.

What is included in the scholarships?

In addition to the chorister bursary, all choristers receive free singing lessons with our singing teacher, Ben Sawyer. They also learn music theory as a part of their training.

What about other music opportunities at DCPS?

We encourage all of our choristers to learn a musical instrument to support their learning. The school has 8 orchestras and ensembles for pupils of all abilities to take part in and three other choirs. The choristers also sing as part of the school choir in chapel services on a regular basis.

What happens at the end of year 8?

The majority of our choristers remain at Dean Close and progress to the senior school. Many of them gain scholarships at 11+ or 13+. These are available in different areas: academic studies, music, drama, sport, art, design & technology (13+ only), and there is also an all-round award (13+ only).

What is the schedule of the choristers' day? When do they sing in the Abbey?

The day of a chorister begins at 7.50am with a rehearsal (Monday to Friday). They join the rest of the school at the start of lessons at 8.50am. On days when there are services (Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and most Fridays), the team assembles at the end of lessons (4.00pm) for choir tea, and then travels to Tewkesbury for the rehearsal and service. Evensong begins at 5.30pm and ends at 6.10pm approximately. Choristers are either picked up directly from the Abbey by parents, or they return to Cheltenham on the chorister bus, which arrives back at school at 6.40pm approximately. Parents are of course very welcome to attend Evensong.

In addition, there are very occasional weekend commitments, and these are organised well in advance and flagged on the choir calendar, known as *Schola dates*.

Can choristers play a full and active life in the school?

All of the choristers in Tewkesbury Abbey Schola Cantorum take part in any number of school activities. The choir schedule is designed to enable the choristers to play in sports fixtures against other schools and to take part in music and drama activities (including school productions and concerts).

How are the choristers supported in their busy lives?

The chorister life is a busy but highly fulfilling one. As pupils at Dean Close Preparatory School, each chorister is a member of a house, and pupils in years 4 and 5 also belong to a specific class with a dedicated form teacher within their year group. Older pupils in years 6 to 8 belong to a tutor group, under a dedicated member of staff. In addition to this, Mrs Jane Lyons is an important pastoral contact. As chorister tutor, she oversees the wellbeing of the choristers as a group, and is there to help troubleshoot any problems and worries that may crop up from time to time.

What are the chaperoning arrangements for the choristers at Tewkesbury Abbey?

Choristers in Tewkesbury Abbey Schola Cantorum are always in the care of the school. In addition to the Director, who is employed by the Dean Close Foundation, there is always a least one additional chaperone at the Abbey (chorister tutor, choral and organ scholar) ensuring that the choristers are well cared for.

How can we find out more about becoming a chorister?

You can find out more about becoming a chorister in Tewkesbury Abbey Schola Cantorum here: <https://www.deanclose.org.uk/prep-7-13/choristers/> and here:

<https://www.scholacantorum.org.uk/>

How can we find out more about joining Dean Close Preparatory School?

More information about Dean Close Preparatory School can be found here:

<https://www.deanclose.org.uk/prep-7-13/>

To contact the prep school admissions department, please email Katie Fergusson dcpsregistrar@deanclose.org.uk or phone 01242 258001

If you have any further questions about choristerships in Tewkesbury Abbey Schola Cantorum, please do be in touch with the Director of the Choir, Simon Bell. sabell@deanclose.org.uk or phone 01242 258000