

# BECOMING A CHORISTER AT BUCKFAST ABBEY

Music at  
Buckfast Abbey



Buckfast Abbey

In 2018 Buckfast Abbey celebrated 1000 years since its foundation. As a lasting legacy, the Abbey now offers the opportunity for boys and girls aged between 7 and 14 to be part of our Choral Foundation in partnership with St Mary's Catholic Primary School.

## WHAT IS A CHORISTER?

- A **chorister** is a young singer attached to a choral foundation (often a Cathedral, College or Monastery) who participates in the sung services of the church
- The choristers are joined by adult professional singers, known as **lay clerks** who form the lower voices of the choir

A chorister's education offers children the unique privilege of participating in a professional choir. The skills learned as a chorister brings benefits and skills that will last a lifetime. Performing to such a high standard, choristers gain a natural self-confidence, as well as the appreciation of good time-keeping and the rewards that result from hard work.

Each chorister is a highly valued member of a team and, as such, choristers develop great self-respect and motivation. Being a chorister is one of few experiences where children perform alongside professional adults, and are treated on equal terms. The skills are transferrable to all aspects of a chorister's life. Choristers often develop a high level of concentration, and research has proven that musical activity in early development has a positive benefit on improved IQ, spatial-temporal awareness and language development. Generally choristers are academic 'over-achievers'.





## TIMETABLE

In order to train children to sing at a high standard, a large amount of rehearsal time is necessary. A detailed schedule of all times/dates of rehearsals and services is issued to parents in advance of the forthcoming term, but a typical week during term-time looks like this:

<b>Wednesday</b>	08:00–08:50 Rehearsal (School) 15:30–17:30 Rehearsal/Mass (Abbey)
<b>Thursday</b>	08:00–08:50 Rehearsal (School) 15:30–17:30 Rehearsal/Mass (Abbey)
<b>Friday</b>	08:00–08:50 Rehearsal (School)

The choristers also join the Abbey Choir (a professional, adult, ensemble) from time-to-time to sing for Sunday Solemn Mass/Vespers, and for other liturgies and concerts during the year. As the choir develops further, there may be opportunities to sing live radio and TV broadcasts, make CD recordings and go on tours.

## THE LIFE OF A CHORISTER

It's not all work! In reward for their commitment, our choristers have plenty of opportunity to have fun and enjoy themselves. We organise varied activities, including visits to other cathedrals and abbeys, trips to the theatre, bowling, and an annual climb to the top of the Abbey tower. In the free time between rehearsals and services, choristers have the opportunity to play and relax, with refreshments provided.



## BENEFITS OF BEING A CHORISTER

Each chorister receives a scholarship from the Abbey for individual vocal and piano tuition. Each chorister also works towards exams in singing and piano for the Associated Board of the Royal School of Music. Examination expenses are paid as part of the scholarship. In the last session, the choristers achieved a 100% success rate in the exams, and several were awarded a distinction.

The award of a choristership does require significant commitment from all parties concerned: the chorister and his or her family, the Abbey and the School. It is important that their family is thoroughly supportive as this is very much a commitment that you take on together.

## WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

If you feel that it might be something that you and your child(ren) are interested in taking further, you are encouraged to sign up for an audition on the **30th June** or the **2nd July**. These take place after school (15:30–17:00) at the Abbey, for around 15 minutes. Please sign up for a slot by emailing Matthew Searles (Assistant Master of the Music) [msearles@buckfast.org.uk](mailto:msearles@buckfast.org.uk).

## WHAT HAPPENS AT THE AUDITION?

The Abbey Music Department looks for children with a natural sense of musicianship and an interest in singing; although some preparation can prove helpful, formal voice training is definitely not a pre-requisite. Children will be asked to sing a song of their choice (this could be something as simple as ‘Happy Birthday’), complete some short aural tests (such as singing back some notes played on the piano and repeating a clapped rhythm). They will be asked to read a short piece of text and describe why they want to be a chorister.