

Staff Profile

Christopher Muhley Parish Organist and Director of the Parish Singers



My role as Parish Organist and Director of the Parish Singers began formally in September last year, although I have been playing here fairly regularly over the past ten years. As a native of St Albans and alumnus of St Albans School my association with the Abbey has been much longer.

Earlier in my career I was involved with other churches in the city and the area, including St Saviour's, where my father was a lay reader and I became assistant organist; as Organist and Choirmaster of All Saints' Leavesden; and then at St Peter's, St Albans, where I was appointed Director of Music, aged 20, and remained for 24 years. My 'day job', though, for 37 years, was teaching, and I retired from Haberdashers' Aske's Boys' School in 2016 after 19 years as Director of Music.

As a schoolboy, I remember watching and hearing Simon Lindley (then Assistant Master of the Music) creating colour and vitality on the cathedral organ, and this was what inspired me to take up the instrument. So, you could say that St Albans cathedral's organ changed the course of my life, leading to study at the Royal College of Music alongside my younger colleague, Andrew Lucas! It has thus been a special pleasure to see both of my daughters become Head Chorister of the Abbey Girls' Choir, the elder in the early days under Andrew Parnell and the younger during the Simon Johnson era.

For the past ten years or so I have been playing the organ occasionally for weddings and funerals and at a fair number of 9.30am services. I have also had the pleasure of accompanying the boy or girl choristers at evensong if the cathedral organists have been unavailable – something which has been easier since I 'retired'.

This brings me to the main focus of my job, which is to provide high-quality, uplifting music at the 9.30 Parish Eucharist and to energise and challenge the Parish Singers with different musical styles and a broad variety of genres; also encouraging them to take up occasional opportunities to sing at other services such as evensong and compline. I share the playing of the 9.30 with the Organ Scholar, though this can involve a certain amount of (hopefully discreet) running up and down the organ loft stairs! Whatever the musical style, whether it be a renaissance motet or a modern worship song, we aim at excellence in performance.

As a side note, I'll briefly mention another role that I have in the cathedral community, which is Chairman of the St Albans Cathedral Music Trust. Since its foundation over 20 years ago, the Music Trust continues to raise funds to support liturgical music-making in the cathedral. It has paid for the organ restoration, new cathedral pianos and choir outreach events, and supports the cathedral choirs for recordings and tours. A wonderful, never-ending project. But what glorious, inspirational singing is to be heard resonating, day-by-day, through our cathedral's ancient stonework!

As well as the music-making itself, I feel that I am part of the pastoral fabric of the Abbey and I try to offer encouragement and support. As a teacher and musician, over the years I've been used to dealing with all sorts of groups of people, so that helps. It's a privilege to be in a role where I can enjoy working with people to get the best out of them and produce music to the glory of God.