



Wells Cathedral Choir Newsletter

Michaelmas and Advent 2025



A message from Timothy Parsons

This term has been a real delight. For me, I think that is partly because I have been experiencing the annual Wells traditions for a second time: there is a reassuring familiarity, alongside the exciting challenge of how we might do things differently from, and perhaps even better than, last year.

One particularly lovely aspect has been having a full choir, both in the front and back rows. We welcomed a bumper crop of nine new probationers in September, as well as our new Tenor Vicar Choral, Raphael Geldsetzer, and Tenor Choral Scholar, Herbert Zielinski, and it has been wonderful to see all of them settle into life in Wells. It was also fantastic to see Mr Jenkins begin his new role as Singing Development Leader.

Advent Term is a particularly relentless one, with a succession of major performances to prepare for. Beginning with the Duruflé Requiem, we moved straight on to our Advent Procession and then to Christmas. As I write, we have just finished three sold-out Carols by Candlelight concerts, with the Senior Choristers and Vicars Choral on sparkling form for these magical occasions.

Since September there have also been a number of exciting extra events. Most notably, we broadcast Choral Evensong on BBC Radio 3 on 15 October, when the Senior Choristers and Vicars Choral sang music by Leighton and Sarah MacDonald, a new commission by Matthew Martin, and the famously lengthy Psalm 78. It was wonderful for the Choir to be back on the airwaves after an absence of

several years, and the service impressed and delighted many listeners. Alongside this, we undertook two trips to the Diocese: first to Stogumber Parish Church, and then to Bath Abbey to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the founding of the boys' choir there.

There is much to celebrate beyond the Cathedral Choir itself. The Chamber Choir, wonderfully led by Ms Craig, has sung for several services, including the Feasts of All Saints' and All Souls'. The Song Squad and Youth Choir have both enjoyed excellent terms under the guidance of Mr Jenkins and Miss Manning, culminating in a hugely successful Christmas Singalong. It is particularly heartening to see both groups growing in number.

As ever, there are many people to thank who keep music at Wells Cathedral thriving: Ms Craig, Mr Jenkins, and Mr Marshall for their tireless musical leadership and support of the Choristers; our wonderful team of Vicars Choral and Choral Scholars; our hugely supportive clergy, especially Canon Tim; Mrs Lawlor for her enormous hard work; and our dedicated, friendly and patient chaperones. Above all, I want to thank the Choristers themselves for a fantastic term of hard work and enjoyment, and the parents and families whose time, energy, and encouragement make all of this possible.

There is one significant farewell to mark. Mrs Henderson has been our Mistress of the Robes since 1999, and after more than a quarter of a century of devoted service she is stepping back from the role. She goes with our deepest gratitude and warmest good wishes, and we are grateful that she will continue to assist for a period while Ros Atherton takes over.

May I wish you all a very Happy Christmas and a well-deserved break.

Mr Parsons

Farewell to Jenny



On Christmas Day we will say a very fond farewell to our Mistress of the Robes, Jenny Henderson - one of the Cathedral's treasures!

Since 1999 she has meticulously organised and cared for the Choir's vestments and is the reason the musicians always look so smart. After 26 years of hard work Jenny is going to take a step back. We are enormously grateful for all that Jenny has given to the Cathedral and Choir over the last 26 years, and also to her husband, Richard, who has regularly been pulled in to help! Thank you so much, Jenny, you will be greatly missed and all of the time and effort you have given over the years has been hugely appreciated.

David Hill MBE conducts Evensong at Wells



Highly acclaimed conductor and organist, David Hill MBE, visited Wells on Thursday 11 September. After giving an organ recital as part of the Cathedral's monthly lunchtime series, which featured Liszt's iconic Fantasy and Fugue on B-A-C-H alongside works by Bach, Gardonyi, Franck, and Coleridge-Taylor, he later conducted the Girl Choristers and Vicars Choral at their rehearsal and Evensong. The Choir, accompanied by Carolyn Craig enjoyed singing Howells' *Collegium Regale* and Gibbons' *Almighty and everlasting God*.

Inspiring young singers at *Be a Chorister for a Day*



The Cathedral's annual *Be a Chorister for a Day* event took place on Saturday 20 September.

Thirty-four children aged between six and ten from schools across Somerset and beyond enjoyed meeting the Cathedral Choristers, engaging in a fun singing workshop, and rehearsing for and singing Choral Evensong in the Quire of the Cathedral with the Choristers of the world-renowned Choir. The children performed the anthem *The Lord is my Shepherd* by Howard Goodall, helped the Choristers lead the two hymns in the service, and learned how to process.

Timothy Parsons, Director of Music, said: "It was an absolute delight to welcome so many children, along with their families, to Wells Cathedral on Saturday. The children enjoyed an action-packed

afternoon culminating in a service of Choral Evensong, where they performed beautifully alongside the Choristers of the Cathedral Choir. Our hope is that every one of them had a wonderful, fun, and informative day learning about our special musical tradition at Wells, and that they will have come away from the Cathedral enthused about the idea, perhaps, of becoming Choristers themselves.”

If you are interested in the 2026 *Be a Chorister for a Day* event, please contact the Cathedral via musicoffice@wellscathedral.org.uk.



VC tunes at the Cider and Cheese Festival



What a day to remember! The Cathedral's first ever Cider and Cheese Festival took place on Saturday 27 September. Over 1,500 people attended and enjoyed trying over 100 different ciders, stocking up on cheese, and tucking into amazing street food. Throughout the event, visitors enjoyed music from a number of acts and choirs, including from some members of the Vicars Choral (pictured below). Next year's event will be taking place on Saturday 26 September 2026 – get in in your diary now!



Schola Cantorum – the return!

The Cathedral's Schola Cantorum choir has reformed! The group is made up of a bank of professional adult sopranos who are booked on a service-by-service basis to sing services in the Cathedral alongside the Vicars Choral when the Choristers are off. There are currently 11 ladies in the group, with four normally singing for each service - only rehearsing directly before services. So far since September, Schola Cantorum have sung for four Evensong and two Eucharist services, and they will also sing alongside the Vicars Choral for the Eucharist of Christmas Night. Look out for them singing at the Festal Eucharist for Epiphany on Tuesday 6 January, and at the Eucharist and Evensong on Sunday 25 January.

Chorister Camp-Out

On the evening of Friday 3 October, the Choristers gathered for their Chorister Camp-out in the Cathedral.

Tents were pitched across the Cathedral transepts, and the Choristers enjoyed singing and board games, and pizza, and then changed into their pyjamas to watch the film *The Wild Robot* – stopping half-way through for hot chocolate!

After a restful night(!), everyone de-camped then headed to The Bishop's Palace for breakfast.

Huge thanks must go to Mr Jenkins for arranging the Camp-Out, as well as Mr Parsons, Miss Craig, Mr Marshall, and Mrs Murdoch.

Diocesan Evensong in Stogumber

By Celine

The Girl Choristers and Decani Vicars Choral enjoyed a trip to St Mary's Parish Church, Stogumber on Sunday 5 October as part of the Cathedral Diocesan Outreach work. It was absolutely amazing. Everyone at Stogumber was so lovely and welcoming, and had really good tea too! We sang Ēriks Ēšenvalds' *Merton College Service*, and Eleanor Daley's *Upon Your Heart*. My friends did lovely solos in both pieces. We also sang the Gabriel Jackson *Preces and Responses* which I find very exciting and fun.

Stogumber is a jaw-dropping church, with the prettiest and cutest interior I have ever seen! I really enjoyed going to Stogumber, and I'm sure I speak for the entire Choir when I say that! Having sung Evensong, the Girls enjoyed tea & cake with the community in Stogumber, before heading back to Wells to get ready for another busy week.

The next Diocesan Evensong service will be at St Bartholomew's Church, Cranmore, on Sunday 8 March 2026, sung by the Boy Choristers and Cantoris Vicars Choral.

WCCT Filming and Evensong

The Wells Cathedral Chorister Trust enjoyed a particularly busy week in October. They welcomed the team from 50 Degrees Media, who spent two days filming the Choristers and interviewing supporters of the Trust. Their work will culminate in a short promotional video that captures the spirit and mission of WCCT.



The Annual Evensong celebrating the work of Wells Cathedral Chorister Trust took place on Saturday 11 October, and this year also celebrated the completion of the £500,000 Coronation Fund, a separate fund specifically for those Choristers needing 95% or more bursary support. Those present remembered the generous donor Pamela Pye, and all other donors no longer with us.

Arnold Wills, Chair of Trustees, said “The service featured our magnificent Cathedral Choir, directed by Timothy Parsons, Director of Music, with organ accompaniment by Carolyn Craig, Assistant Director of Music and Edward Marshall, Organ Scholar. The Choristers as always were exceptional”.

Music was by Bairstow, Parry, Dyson, and Millington, and the blessing at the end was given by The Rt. Revd Michael Beasley, Bishop of Bath & Wells. Also taking part were timpanists and brass players from Wells Cathedral School who, as always, added so much to the service.

We were delighted that in attendance were Janet Montgomery, High Sheriff of Somerset; Mohammed Saddiq DL, HM Lord-Lieutenant of Somerset; and Tessa Munt, Member of Parliament for Wells and Mendip Hills. Their presence, along with that of the Trust’s generous supporters, made the evening truly memorable.



Choirs join forces at Bath Abbey

By Ryan, Head Boy Chorister



On Sunday 12 October, the Boy Choristers and Vicars Choral went to sing a special Evensong at Bath Abbey which celebrated 150 years of their Boy Choristers and Lay Clerks - and it was spectacular. We sang a world premiere - Annabel Rooney's arrangement of Psalm 98 and Psalm 67 by Francis Grier, and alongside the Bath Abbey Choir, the sound was incredible. Choristers from Bath Abbey sang solos in the Grier and in Stanford's Te Deum, both of which were inspiring. Dyson's Magnificat in D was a real beast of a piece blasting out chords in contrast to his Nunc Dimittis, Psalm 144, and Rose's Preces & Responses which have a softer feel. Following Evensong, which included an address from the Bishop of Bath and Wells and the rededication of the Bath Abbey Boys Choir, all of the boys enjoyed squash and cake together in the Bath Abbey Song School. All the boys loved it, and we hope to do something like this again soon.

Wells returns to Radio 3!



For the first time in seven years, on Wednesday 15 October Choral Evensong was broadcast live from Wells Cathedral on BBC Radio 3! The Senior Choristers and Vicars Choral sang magnificently,

making Wells proud. Marking the Dedication of the Cathedral, this special service featured music by Bruckner and Leighton, a full recitation of Psalm 78, and a fantastic new work, *Sing We Merrily* by Matthew Martin, which was funded by Wells' own *Cathedral Commissions* scheme and received its premiere at Evensong on Monday 29 September 2025.

To further mark the Cathedral's Dedication Festival, a Festal Eucharist followed in the Nave at 6.00pm led by Wells Cathedral Chamber Choir and with a sermon given by The Reverend Professor David Fergusson OBE.



Duruflé Requiem for Remembrance Sunday



During a special devotional service on Remembrance Sunday, 9 November, the Cathedral Choir, joined by the Wells Cathedral School Chamber Choir, sang Duruflé's Requiem. The movements were interspersed with poignant readings, and at the end of the service there was the familiar "poppy drop", when red poppy petals cascaded slowly down into the Nave. A retiring collection was taken in aid of the British Legion's Poppy Appeal and Wells Cathedral Music.

Advent Carol Service

The Surpliced Choristers and Vicars Choral sang beautifully at the Advent Carol Service on Advent Sunday, 30 November. The service, which begins the season of waiting and preparation for the birth of Jesus Christ, opens in darkness before the Advent Procession moves through the Cathedral. It included readings, traditional congregational Advent carols, and music by Palestrina, Ledger, Wood, Manz, Judith Weir, Arvo Pärt, and Kerensa Briggs. Congratulations to Kukhanya (pictured below) for singing a beautiful solo from the Singing Gallery.



Carols for WCCT in Bishop's Palace Chapel



It was a real pleasure for the surpliced Choristers to sing in a venue they have not sung in for quite some time: the very beautiful chapel in the Bishop's Palace. We teamed up again with King's Harpist, Mared Pugh-Evans, who we have now performed with three times, to sing several items from one of the Choristers' favourite pieces, Britten's *A Ceremony of Carols*. This was a special event to thank supporters of the Wells Cathedral Chorister Trust, and it was wonderful to have an opportunity to sing to them and tell them a little about what the Choristers do.

Primary Outreach

Our Junior Choristers joined forces with over 120 local school children for the Cathedral's termly Primary Music Outreach Concert on Friday 5 December.



Arranged and conducted by Alex Jenkins, Singing Development Leader, the programme, entitled *A Christmas Celebration*, ushered in the festive season with carols old and new, and was thoroughly enjoyed by parents and visitors to the Cathedral. The Junior Choristers sang Michael Head's *The Little Road to Bethlehem* on their own, before joining with the visiting children for Audrey Snyder's arrangement of *In the Bleak Midwinter*, and the whole Nave singing *Away in the Manger* to round the concert off.

Chorister Christmas Treat and Christmas Dinner

After the end of the School term on Friday 12 December, the Choristers had their annual Christmas treat: this year, a fun swimming session in the WCS school pool, followed by benchball with Mr Jenkins. Despite a couple of Choristers going in the water fully clothed as they hadn't got their swimming costumes, a good time was had by all!! The following week, on Saturday 20 December, we enjoyed a fabulous Christmas dinner cooked by the brilliant team in the WCS kitchen. Lots of crackers were pulled, turkey eaten, and we all had a very festive time!

Candlelight Concerts

The annual, very popular, sold-out Candlelight Concerts took place on Friday 19, Saturday 20, and Sunday 21 December. These must surely be the most spectacular event of the year! The Cathedral's team of Virgers spends many hours in November setting out thousands of special slow-burning candles atop the pillars and higher levels of the Cathedral, to be lit especially for these concerts. No electronic light is used— the only light is from the 3,500 candles lit each evening.

The Senior Choristers and Vicars Choral performed beautiful festive pieces including Peter J. Wilhousky's arrangement of *Carol of the Bells*, *Lo, he slumbers* by Cecilia McDowall, *Alleluia! A new work is come on hand* by former Organ Scholar Ghislaine Reece-Trapp, *Sans Day Carol* by John Rutter, *The Three Kings* by Jonathan Dove, *Hymn worship we now born so fre* by former Choral Scholar Piers Conor Kennedy (commissioned for the 2024 Carol Services by Cathedral Commissions), and *The Lamb* by John Tavener. The concerts were then beautifully finished with an encore of Peter Gritton's arrangement of *Have yourself a merry little Christmas!*



Christmas at Wells

The annual Wells Cathedral Carol Services will take place on Tuesday 23 and Wednesday 24 December. There will be plenty of congregational carols, as well as beautiful singing from the Cathedral's Great Choir, and festive readings. The music will include the premiere of a new work funded by the Cathedral's own *Cathedral Commissions* scheme – *Alleluia! Immortal babe* by Tamsin Jones, who will be at the Tuesday service to hear its first performance.

On Christmas Eve, two Crib Services will take place, at 1.15-1.50pm and 2.30-3.05pm, led by Song Squad and Youth Choir. These are short, fun, thirty five-minute services for children, who are invited to attend dressed as a character from the Nativity. The Cathedral holds two of these services as they are so popular! Later, the Eucharist of Christmas Night at 11.00pm will be sung by Schola Cantorum and the Vicars Choral. This allows for some different music, but also a much-needed night-off for the Choristers!

There will be just one sung service on Christmas Day – a 10.30am Eucharist with the Great Choir – after which the Chapter invites the congregation to join them for a glass of fizz in the North Transept!

Tour fundraising underway!

The Choristers taking part in the Choir tour to Tuscany in April have each been challenged to raise funds for the tour by turning £20 into £200.

Grace B has already raised a fabulous amount by doing a mammoth sponsored walk, and Clemmie brightened up a few Sundays for the congregation by making and selling some rather scrummy cakes after the morning Eucharist.

Molly, Francesca, Jemima, Gabi, and Arya made some amazing things which they sold at the Prep School Christmas Fayre (photo below). Francesca and Jemima sold macrame pot hangers and Christmas decorations that they had made over the summer, Arya and Gabi made and sold Christmas and Chorister themed badges, and Molly sold hand-crafted paracord keyrings.



And plans are underway for a fund-raising concert on Saturday 28 February, with the Choristers and Vicars Choral singing. Further information will follow in the New Year!

From Choristers to Organ Scholars

Former Choristers Michael and Zino have recently taken up organ scholarships at St John the Baptist Church, Glastonbury, where they will be mentored by Matthew Redman, St John's Organist and Director of Music.

The boys were installed and received a warm welcome at St John's on Sunday 7 September - please see attached photo. They follow in the footsteps of former Wells Chorister Sophie Harbridge, who was Organ Scholar at St John's from 2021-2024.

Michael and Zino continue to study the organ with Carolyn Craig, the Cathedral's own brilliant Assistant Director of Music.



Primary Outreach

This term's Primary Outreach Concert ushered in the festive season, with over 120 children from local primary schools joining forces with the Junior Choristers on Friday 5 December to sing a variety of Christmas tunes to assembled parents, teachers, and guardians, as well as visitors to the Cathedral. This culminated in a performance of Andrea Snyder's arrangement of *In the Bleak Midwinter*, with all of the performers singing together.

Song Squad

Song Squad have had a great start to the academic year, with a large number of new joiners since September. We welcomed the High Sheriff of Somerset, Janet Montgomery, to our rehearsal on Tuesday 14 October, to share what we get up to. The Seniors (Year 3-6) gave their first performance of the term with an Evensong on Thursday 16 October alongside the Junior Choristers of the Cathedral Choir, which concluded with a lovely rendition of Tallis' Canon, with congregation participation in the canon too.

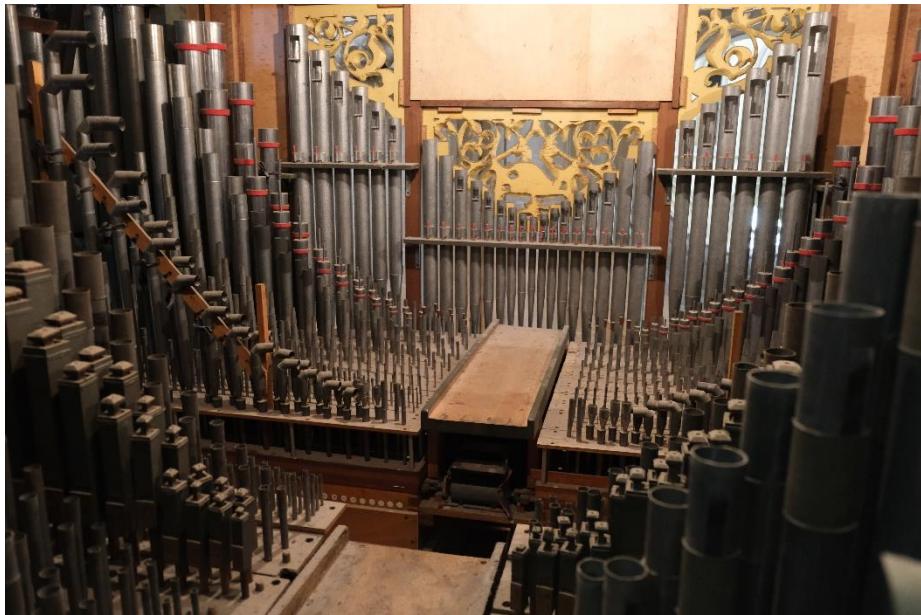
The whole choir (Reception to Year 6) joined forces with the Cathedral Youth Choir to lead a full Nave for this year's Christmas Sing-Along on Saturday 20 December, and will be doing so again for the Cathedral's two Crib Services on Christmas Eve.

Dr Anthony Crossland



On Saturday 14 March 2026, the Cathedral will be holding a special Evensong in thanksgiving for the life of Dr Anthony Crossland (1931-2025), who was Assistant Organist at Wells between 1961 and 1971 and then Organist and Master of the Choristers from 1971 until his retirement in 1996. The service will be held in the Nave at 5.15 p.m. and sung by the Cathedral Great Choir. All are welcome to celebrate Anthony's life and his immense contribution to the music and ministry of Wells Cathedral over so many years.

Work to save Grand Organ to begin in January



Wells Cathedral has announced that a major refurbishment of its historic Grand Organ is to begin in January. The Cathedral took the decision to start work in the New Year following a growing number of mechanical faults which risk imminent catastrophic failure of the organ.

All 5,000 of the organ's pipes are to be removed for repair, cleaning, or replacement as part of the project, alongside an overhaul of its console, pedals, and stops. Improvements will also be made to enhance the organ's performance across a wider range of uses, such as civic services, carol services, celebrations, and Evensong.

The decision to begin the project in January came as a relief to organists at the Cathedral, who have been forced to use their skills to creatively cover up the instrument's shortcomings when performing during services and recitals!

Commenting on the news, Timothy Parsons, Director of Music, said:

"I am thrilled that Wells Cathedral will be working with Harrison & Harrison on this major project. The renewed organ will be transformative to the life of the Cathedral and its music. We are greatly looking forward to working with the team from Harrison's as the project comes to life."

The project is being supported by an initial donation of nearly £2 million from the Friends of Wells Cathedral's Grand Organ Appeal.

However, with total costs for completion of the two-year project expected to reach £3 million, fundraisers are keen to emphasise that there is still some way to go to ensure its future. As The Very Reverend Toby Wright, Dean of Wells, said:

"Through the mists of time, music has carried both the beauty of holiness and the joy of human hearts within these walls. The Grand Organ is not merely an instrument, but the living breath of Wells, binding past, present, and future together in song. So of course, we are excited and relieved to begin this critical project, and we are hugely grateful for the generosity of everyone who has made this start possible. However, our work is not finished. We still need to raise a further £1m if we are to complete the refurbishment and save something that is absolutely central to this place and to our community."

To find out more and donate to the Wells Cathedral Grand Organ Appeal, visit the Friends of Wells Cathedral website at www.wellsfriends.org/grand-organ-appeal

Farewell to the Organ with Festive Messiaen

On Thursday 11 December, Timothy Parsons gave the outgoing Cathedral Organ one last concert opportunity before its major refurbishment project begins in January 2026.

The Cathedral's own Director of Music gave an impassioned performance Olivier Messiaen's *La Nativité du Seigneur*, an epic cycle which celebrates aspects of the Christmas story, in aid of the Grand Organ Appeal. The recital was well attended and very much enjoyed, with the retiring collection raising £210.50 for the Grand Organ Appeal. All being well, the newly renovated Organ will be in use for Christmas 2027, with Timothy planning to perform the same piece again then to welcome in the new Organ.

High Sheriff Award for WCCT Chair



December began on a celebratory note for the Wells Cathedral Chorister Trust (WCCT) when Janet Montgomery, High Sheriff of Somerset, presented a prestigious High Sheriff Award to Arnold Wills, Chair of WCCT.

The award recognises individuals who make an exceptional contribution to their communities. Janet praised Arnold's leadership of and commitment to WCCT, noting that under his chairmanship since 2019, WCCT has raised £500,000 for the Coronation Fund. This fund will provide bursaries covering up to 100% of costs, ensuring that talented children from all backgrounds can become Choristers at Wells Cathedral and benefit from an outstanding education at Wells Cathedral School.

Janet highlighted how WCCT reflects her focus on supporting projects that help children reach their potential, while nurturing the next generation of choral talent.

Arnold expressed his gratitude:

"I am deeply honoured to receive this award. With the successful culmination of the Coronation Fund, it provides a double cause to celebrate and concludes a momentous year for the Trust."

For more information about WCCT, its events, and how to get involved, please visit wcct.co.uk.

Save the Date! Sound of Wells Festival 2026

From Wednesday 6 – Sunday 10 May 2026, discover a world-class festival of classical music in the heart of England's smallest city, featuring all the best of Wells Cathedral's music - from choral concerts to recitals and a live, improvised film soundtrack!

At the heart of the *Sound of Wells* festival is the Cathedral's daily rhythm of worship, featuring services of Choral Evensong and the Eucharist, sung by our Choristers, Vicars Choral, Song Squad, Cathedral Youth Choir, and Cathedral Chamber Choir.

Further details, including the full programme and ticket information, will be available closer to the time. Please check the Cathedral website in early 2026 for up-dates!

Plus Point prizes

A big “well done” to the Advent Plus Point winners.

Senior Girl: Clemmie
Junior Girl: Emmeline
Senior Boy: George, Henry, and Walter!
Junior Boy: Cyrus

Exam news

Congratulations to the following Choristers on their exam success!

Grace B	Grade 6 Singing with Distinction
Henry	Grade 5 Music Theory
Imogen	Grade 2 Violin with Merit and Grade 2 Music Theory with Distinction
Molly	Grade 5 Music Theory
Ryan	Grade 5 Singing with Distinction
Theo	Grade 5 Music Theory with Merit

Dates for your diary

Looking ahead to the Epiphany and Lent terms, here are some dates for your diary:

Tuesday 6 January	Epiphany Term begins
Friday 9 January	Epiphany drinks reception
Sunday 11 January	Evensong commemorating Bishop Bekynton
Sunday 1 February	Epiphany Procession
Monday 2 February	Festal Eucharist for Candlemas
Saturday 7 February	Choristers sing Britten's <i>A Ceremony of Carols</i> in concert, in aid of WCCT
Sunday 8 February	Evensong with the Installation of the Bishop of Taunton
Wednesday 25 February	Evensong at St George's Chapel, Windsor
Saturday 28 February	Tour fund-raising concert
Sunday 1 March	Joint Evensong with the Choir of Bath Abbey
Sunday 8 March	Diocesan Evensong at St Bartholomew's Church, Cranmore
Saturday 14 March	Evensong celebrating the life of Anthony Crossland
Friday 20 March	Primary Outreach Concert with the Junior Choristers
Sunday 22 March	Legal Service

Tuesday 24 March	Joint Evensong: Song Squad and Youth Choir
Sunday 29 March	Palm Sunday
Thursday 2 April	Eucharist of the Last Supper
Friday 3 April	Three-Hour Devotional Service (Cathedral Choir to sing for final hour)
Saturday 4 April	Easter Vigil
Sunday 5 April	Easter Day
Tuesday 7 April	Choir tour to Tuscany departs

