

Halifax Minster

Director of Choral Music Pack

Halifax

Halifax is in West Yorkshire, nestled in the foothills of the Pennines and almost equal distance between Leeds and Manchester, with good road and rail infrastructure. The town was built out of the textile industry but in the twentieth century relied heavily on Financial Services. Following the economic crash in 2008 it has diversified the economy and whilst there is still some local manufacturing and Financial Services, there is now a flourishing creative industry including heritage and tourism, film and television. Calderdale celebrates 50 years as a local authority with a Cultural Festival from April 2024 - April 2025.

The Minster

Halifax Minster was built some 900 years ago by Benedictine monks from Cluny. It was one of the largest parishes in the north of England covering around 124 square miles. In 1376, the monastic land held in both Sussex and West Yorkshire was given to the Crown which retains the Rights of Patronage. The Minster is a large medieval building with chantry chapels. It is the spiritual home of the Duke of Wellington Regiment, and the place where Anne Lister of Shibden Hall was baptised, worshipped, and is buried.

The Minster is open to the public most days of the year, and there are usually three public services Monday - Friday and two services on a Sunday. The Minster is a busy centre for culture and the arts, lifelong learning, and heritage. Following the reopening of The Piece Hall, the Minster has seen a significant increase in visitor numbers. As well as serving as the Mother Church of Calderdale, it remains a Major Church in the Anglican Diocese of Leeds, with an International Ministry to Halifax's twin town of Aachen in Germany, and its mission partner at The Cathedral Church of St Peter, in Kowak, Tanzania.

The Music Department

The Minster has two choirs: the Minster Choir of boys and girls with adults; and the Minster Chamber Choir. The Minster is actively looking to relaunch a new Junior (feeder) choir aimed at Key Stage 1, which will be run independently on a Tuesday before the main choir practice.

The Minster Choir sings a cathedral-style repertoire for 36 weeks of the year. The choir regularly sings with a group from Hammonds Band and The Yorkshire String Quartet to supplement special occasions. Concerts are performed alongside the Halifax Choral Society and Skipton Camerata. Tours each year take the choir across the UK and abroad. Recent tours at home have included Ely, Norwich, Coventry, Derby and Newcastle Cathedrals and Hexham Abbey. Tours abroad include two trips to Aachen in Germany, and this August to Normandy, France.

The Minster Chamber Choir is for adults who love to sing, sight-read well and are unable to make the commitment of the Minster Choir. They sing one Evensong a month during term time, on Good Friday and join with the Minster Choir on Festival occasions. They are conducted by Sean Montgomery, one of our organists.

The first Organist was Sir William Herschel, who went on to become the King's Astronomer and founded the planet Uranus, and is buried in Westminster Abbey's Science corner. Herschel played the first Snetzler chamber organ which was relocated and subsequently rebuilt in 1929 by Harrison and Harrison. Whilst a major rebuild now awaits, regular tuning and maintenance ensures that the 'Halifax Sound' is preserved and much loved. There is also a small two manual Snetzler chamber organ located in the Holdsworth Chapel. Professor Ian Tracey is Patron of the Minster Organs. We have an annual organ recital series called Thursday@One. There is a Yamaha baby grand which is used to accompany worship and for concerts.

The Post of Director of Choral Music for the Minster Choir

The Minster's Strategic Plan highlights music as one of the unique selling points of the life of the Minster. The Minster Council and the Vicar have expectations of achieving a high standard of music to support the Liturgy, that being the core business of the Minster's existence alongside all the many other aspects. The Minster currently has a small group of talented organists who play each month and a dedicated team of volunteers who have been assisting the Vicar in running the choir. We are now ready to employ a musician who not only loves music, but cherishes the opportunity of motivating others to sing, and to sing their best to the glory of God. The choir sings a traditional style of Anglican choral music.

The Minster regularly hosts numerous large and high-profile occasions in which music is hugely important, such as Ordinations and other diocesan services, civic occasions for the Local Authority and the West Yorkshire Lieutenancy and military services for the Dukes' Regimental Association and the Yorkshire Regiment. In recent years, the Minster has hosted BBC One for a live service for Pentecost Sunday and BBC Radio 4 for Sunday Worship.

Tuesday is a key day for the Music Department with the Minster Choir and Junior Choir rehearsing after school into the evening, and also the day on which the monthly staff meeting takes place, which the Director of Choral Music would attend. Time on Tuesdays will be needed for administration, timetabling, working with the Vicar on the Music List, and for recruitment in schools. Sunday services in term time are the 10.30am Sung Eucharist – the principal service of the day, followed by Choral Evensong at 4pm, with short rehearsal before each.

Ability to play the organ is desirable but not essential. We would hope for some element of keyboard skills to adequately lead rehearsals, which usually take place in the Song School. You would be working alongside various organists and the team of volunteers who help to run and support the Minster Choir as well as the clergy, Operations Manager and Office Assistant outside the Music Department. The role requires flexibility and organisational skills to collaborate effectively with full-time and part-time staff and volunteers.

The Minster Development Board is currently in discussion about the potential of relocating the Song School. The postholder will be expected to be involved in the team taking this forward.

Responsibilities

- direct the Minster Choir
- plan and take Tuesday night rehearsals
- be available and assist with arrangements for festival services, concerts, 'come and sing' events and one-off services (e.g. Ash Wednesday, Ascension Day, Christmas Day, plus some concerts on Saturdays)
- attend the Minster monthly Staff meeting
- organise and carry out a recruitment programme, including some work in schools
- ensure that a high standard of music is achieved
- work with the Vicar on choosing and introducing appropriate music for each term
- help with the planning and lead the annual tour (at home or abroad)
- identify and complete applications for additional funding to support the work of the Music Department as it evolves
- Any other reasonable duties associated with the role and as directed by the Vicar

Person Specification

Essential

- Degree in Music – performance/academic
- Experience in leading church choirs and motivating children and adults to sing
- Experience in liaising with a range of musical organisations to coordinate events and build relationships
- Well-organised with IT skills
- Good communication – written, verbal and artistic
- Understanding of the importance of safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults – it will be a requirement of this post to obtain an enhanced DBS upon appointment

Desirable

- Basic keyboard skills – enough to lead a rehearsal
- Experience in recruiting children and adults to choirs

People you will be working with

- The Minster Music Department team
- Other employees and volunteers at the Minster
- The Clergy of the Minster – the Vicar will be your Line Manager
- The Minster Safeguarding Implementation and Monitoring Group
- Halifax Choral Society
- Calderdale Music
- Local schools across Calderdale
- Both professional and amateur music groups who engage with the Minster

Contract terms

- Annual Salary of £12,000 (0.4)
- From September 2024
- Approx. 16 hours a week to include Tuesday afternoons and evenings and Sundays (term time), plus additional festival services and concerts involving the Minster Choir
- You will be required to sign the Minster's Policies concerning safeguarding, health and safety, harassment and bullying, etc
- Statutory Pension arrangements will be provided.
- Holiday entitlement: not during term time unless in exceptional circumstances and by agreement.
- Also attached music list for Sept 23 - August 24 and the Minster Strategic Plan.

Interviews

- By Zoom Wednesday 3rd July
- In Person Tuesday 9th July afternoon/evening

Application

Alongside the standard application form please include a letter of application setting out why you wish to apply and giving the names of two referees.