

The Michael Swindlehurst Organ Scholarship

Information for applicants

This organ scholarship was established in memory of the Reverend Canon Michael Swindlehurst. Michael was a loyal and committed supporter of the music at St Mary's and it is hoped that the scheme will honour his memory and provide an opportunity for the comprehensive, holistic and professional training of a young church musician. Funding is drawn from a number of different sources: St Mary's Music Association, Saffron Walden, St Mary's Church PCC, Saffron Walden, St Mary's Church PCC, Wendens Ambo and community funding in Michael's memory. The scholarship will be held for one year in the first instance, though on occasion the scheme can be extended into a second year by mutual consent of all concerned. Students entering their upper sixth year will need to carefully consider their time commitments, though there may be room for a limited degree of flexibility on this.

Background Information, St Mary's Saffron Walden:

St Mary's, Saffron Walden is home to a vibrant Christian community in the historic market town of Saffron Walden. Belonging to the Church of England, we are people of all ages and outlooks whose mission is sharing God's love. Services range from cathedral to café style and our strong musical tradition includes an excellent robed choir. The church is open daily for worship and to welcome visitors to a place where the Christian faith has been celebrated for over 800 years.

THE CHOIRS

The main function of the junior and senior choirs (both are mixed) is to lead the worship at St Mary's Church. However, in addition, occasional concerts are given, either in aid of a charity or music funds. There is currently a strong junior choir, while the senior choir can number up to 50, of which, 16 places are for our choral scholars. A Choral Scholarship scheme was established in March 2011 for teenage members wishing to develop and improve their musicianship. The Junior Choir (up to 20 8-14 year olds) meets on Fridays 6-8pm. The choir is affiliated to the Royal School of Church Music, and all junior choir members have the opportunity to receive musical training following the RSCM ribbon awards scheme.

Joyful Noise, is a singing group for children in school years 1-3, which meets in the Parish Rooms after school on Fridays.

BRASS GROUP

Oliver King, Director of Music (DoM), directs the brass group which plays at occasional services and events over the year.

ST MARY'S MUSIC ASSOCIATION

The St Mary's Music Association provides practical, administrative and financial support to the DoM in order to maintain a wide variety of musical events in the parish. Membership is open to all.

CHURCH INSTRUMENTS

The organ is an impressive 4-manual instrument by Hill, Norman and Beard, with various alterations and additions over the years, most recently in 1997 by David Wells of Liverpool. A separate booklet giving details and the full specification is available on request. We are fortunate to have in the church a recently restored Blüthner grand piano.

The total scholarship would be worth £1242 in total, of which £752 will be payable directly to the scholar in three termly instalments. The remainder will be retained as a tuition allowance. The

teacher will be the Director of Music and Organist at St Mary's Saffron Walden. There will be the equivalent of 14 hours of formal instrumental teaching over the year, the exact composition of which will be mutually agreed. The DoM will also be the scholar's mentor: on certain occasions this will be delegated to the Assistant Organist who in practice is in the organ loft for most choral services.

Appointment process:

Oliver King is happy to meet prospective candidates and their parents informally to talk through the scheme - It should be noted though that this is in no way an audition.

Applicants should complete the form below and include a letter stating why they wish to apply. Please include names of two referees, one of whom will be your instrumental teacher and the other could be your head of music/head of year at school. Applications will close on Friday 20th June 2025, with auditions and interviews taking place on Sunday 6th July.

The formal process will consist of the following:

Audition with the DoM, and an independent music advisor (if applicable) and Jeremy Allen (Assistant Organist) (approx. 20 mins):

Two contrasting pieces (organ and/or piano)

Sight Reading - (approx. grade 6 ABRSM standard)

Interview (approximately 25 minutes) usually with the Rector, DoM, music advisor (if applicable), SMMA chair or representative, and a representative from St Mary's, Wendens Ambo.

Personal Expectations and initial skills required:

Would ideally suit sixth form age though exceptionally the actual minimum age could be 14 years old. The maximum age is 21 or the termination of full time studies, whichever is the sooner.

The minimum expected standard of keyboard proficiency is a high merit at grade VI ABRSM or equivalent. Previous experience of playing the organ is desirable though not essential.

It is expected that the scholar will actively strive to improve their organ playing and accompaniment skills - the latter may likely also involve accompanying on the piano where appropriate.

The scholar will also demonstrate an enthusiasm and willingness to further their skills within the field of choral music which could include working with singers and instrumentalists/conducting/organising vocal ensembles/ junior choir ribbon training etc. The precise nature of this will develop according to the scholar's strengths and interests. Full support and advice will always be given as needed.

The scholar will be expected to attend and actively contribute towards the music for one Sunday per month at St Mary's Church, Wendens Ambo. All other Sunday morning services will be spent at St Mary's Saffron Walden.

The scholar will be expected to attend and contribute up to 2 evening services per month - Saffron Walden.

The Scholar will be expected at a minimum to attend all Friday choir practices, from 19.30 to 21.00

7 weeks leave per annum to be agreed with the DOM and the Rector in advance, plus August (total 11 weeks).

The scholarship will run 1st September to 31st July (except in exceptional circumstances).

The scholar's progress will be reviewed at least termly with regular constructive informal verbal feedback given on a weekly basis. If the scholar is under the age of 18 then feedback will additionally be given to parents.

It is expected that the scholar attend and thoroughly prepare for organs lessons. These will be provided by the DoM in the first instance or as delegated by him. Both Oliver King and Jeremy Allen are Fellows of The Royal College of Organists and are experienced professional musicians and teachers.

OQK APRIL 2025