

ONCE A CHORISTER ANNUAL FESTIVAL, 2023

An invitation from Oliver Hancock,

Director of Music, The Collegiate Church of St Mary, Warwick



It is my very great pleasure, on behalf of the Guild of Ex-Choristers of St Mary's, to invite you join us at The Collegiate Church of St Mary, Warwick for the Once a Chorister Annual Festival, 2023 taking place from 15th to 17th September.

The Festival takes place at a momentous time in our history as we celebrate the 900th anniversary of the founding of the Choir at St Mary's. Whilst we cannot boast that a choir existed during the whole 900 years, we can be proud of our musical tradition during much of that time and, especially, over the last 150 years.

The ancient county town of Warwick sits on a low rocky hill overlooking the river Avon. All approach roads into Warwick afford magnificent views of the tower of St Mary's. Daniel Defoe wrote in 1724 that "*few towns in England present so fine an appearance and the Collegiate Church presides magnificently over this picture*". Unfortunately, our current appearance is less than perfect: our iconic landmark is currently shrouded in scaffolding as urgent repairs to the tower proceed for the next 12 months.

We do not know when this ancient church was founded and began its ministry but it is likely that there was a church on this site before the Conquest. The Domesday Book (1068) records the church as possessing 120 acres of land which were given to the church by Turchill, a wealthy Saxon nobleman; of the pre-Norman building, however, no archaeological remains have been found.

The earliest church in Warwick seems to have been All Saints', which lay within the precincts of the castle and – like Saint Mary's – was served by secular (i.e. non-monastic) canons. In order to resolve disputes over various claims and rights of the two churches, Henry de Newburgh – the first Norman Earl of Warwick – supported St Mary's and proposed one Collegiate foundation be formed. However, it was Henry's son Roger de Newburgh who effected the legal transfer. We know that the date was 1123 as the charter is still extant:

"I, Roger, Consul of Warwick, by the Grace of God, St Mary and All Saints, for the soul's health of my father and my ancestors, firmly and steadfastly grant to my canons of Warwick to have a Dean and Chapter and brotherly meeting, and will, and on God's behalf grant, that they may serve God in the Church of St. Mary after the manner of canons, and may hold all their possessions as freely and quietly as the canons of London and Lincoln and Salisbury and York are said to hold their possessions in ecclesiastical fashion."

In addition to modelling the new Collegiate foundation on those four cathedrals, there was to be a choir of six 'Quaeresters' and six-to-eight 'Vicars-Choral'. There was also a song school and grammar school and Roger endowed it with eight churches, sixty houses and land in the neighbourhood of Warwick and beyond.

All that remains of the Newburgh's Norman church today is the impressive crypt which, despite its short steep staircase access, is well worth a visit. A crypt of this size is a rarity

indeed and those short, thick, soft sandstone pillars have held up the great weight of the church above for nine centuries.

The earldom passed to the de Beauchamps (now pronounced 'Beecham') in 1268 and this extremely wealthy family added considerably to the endowments of St. Mary's. Thomas de Beauchamp, who fought in all the great battles during the reign of Edward III and was guardian of the Black Prince, vowed to replace the twelfth-century church with a much larger building but only oversaw the extension of the crypt before dying of the plague in 1369. His will left instructions to "*new build the quire of the Collegiate Church of Warwick where I order my body to be buried*". His son, another Thomas, completed the work in about 1392, the result of which is the magnificent Perpendicular Gothic-style chancel, vestries and chapter house we still see today.

Richard de Beauchamp, 13th and richest Earl of Warwick, built the feature for which St. Mary's is perhaps most famous. The Chapel of Our Lady, commonly known as the Beauchamp Chapel, is considered to be one of the great masterpieces of medieval art. In addition to Richard's own tomb, it contains the effigial monument of Robert Dudley, 1st Earl of Leicester and favourite of Queen Elizabeth I.



The church, along with much of the town, was devastated by the Great Fire of Warwick in 1694. The nave and tower of the building were completely destroyed. In 1704, the rebuilt church was completed in a Gothic design by William Wilson (appointed by the Crown Commissioners). A reordering of the nave in the late nineteenth century involved the removal of the Wilson's galleries and box pews.



The tower rises 174 feet to the pinnacles and, following significant deterioration, is currently subject to substantial and costly repairs. The intention is to carry out works to preserve and make safe as much of the original stonework as possible.

In recent years, St Mary's has been the launch-pad for many illustrious careers in choral music. Past Directors of Music and Assistants have gone on to appointments at Ely, Birmingham, Sheffield, Salisbury, St Edmundsbury, Truro, and Guildford Cathedrals, New College, Oxford and St George's Chapel, Windsor (to name but a few) and many choristers have gone on to professional musical careers.

In addition to St Mary's, the town of Warwick is steeped in history and heritage, and offers visitors many wonderful things to see and do. It boasts one of the finest and largest medieval castles in the United Kingdom and the outstanding Lord Leycester Hospital, repurposed by Robert Dudley to house former military men deserving of support.



More information about Warwick can be found here: <https://www.visitwarwick.co.uk/>

The Guild of Ex-Choristers has planned a full programme for the three days of the Festival:

FRIDAY 15th SEPTEMBER

From 2.00pm	Welcome and Registration	St Mary's Church, North aisle
From 4.00pm	Tea	St Mary's Church, North aisle
5.30pm	Choral Evensong	St Mary's Church, Chancel
6.15pm	Civic Reception	St Mary's Church, Nave
7.00pm	Friday Fish & Chip Supper	The Chip Shed, Swan Street
8.30pm	Choral Compline	St Mary's Church, Beauchamp Chapel

SATURDAY 16th SEPTEMBER

10.30am	Guided tour of St Mary's Church and talk on its history	St Mary's Church
	Morning otherwise at leisure to visit other Warwick sights of interest	
12.00pm	Federation AGM	St Mary's Church, Regimental Chapel
2.45pm	Organ Recital: Luke Bond <i>Assistant Organist, St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle</i> <i>Former Assistant Director of Music, St Mary's</i>	St Mary's Church, Nave
3.30pm	Tea	St Mary's Church, North aisle
4.00pm	Rehearsal for Evensong	St Mary's Church, Nave
5.30pm	Choral Evensong	St Mary's Church, Nave
7.00pm	Drinks reception	Court House
7.45pm	Festival Banquet Guest Speaker: Paul Trepte <i>Former Director of Music, Ely Cathedral & St Edmundsbury Cathedral</i> <i>Former Director of Music, St Mary's, Warwick</i>	Court House

SUNDAY 17th SEPTEMBER

9.45am	Rehearsal for Eucharist <i>Delegates are welcome to attend to observe</i>	St Mary's Church, Nave
10.30am	Choral Eucharist	St Mary's Church, Nave
c.11.45am	Drinks reception and farewell	St Mary's Church, Nave

Booking for the Festival is now open and may be done either [on-line](#) or by post. Booking will close on 15th August, 2023. Further details are available via the Federation newsletters and on the [Federation](#) and [St Mary's](#) websites and Facebook pages.

Suggestions for accommodation can be found on the next page.

Accommodation:

Warwick Arms Hotel - <http://www.warwickarmshotel.com/>

Delta Hotels by Marriot - <http://www.m40j15warwickhotel.co.uk/>

Holiday Inn Express - <http://www.expresswarwick.co.uk/>

Globe Hotel - <https://www.theglobewarwick.co.uk/rooms>

Castle Limes Hotel - <https://www.castlelimeshotel.co.uk/>

Old Coffee Tavern - <http://www.theoldcoffeetavern.co.uk/>

The Old Fourpenny Shop - <http://www.4pennyhotel.co.uk/>

Pillows & Porcelain - <http://www.pillowsandporcelain.com/pillows-bb.html>

Premier Inn - www.premierinn.com

Rose & Crown - <https://www.roseandcrownwarwick.co.uk/>

Tilted Wig - <https://www.tiltedwigwarwick.co.uk/>

Other accommodation is available in the area including Airbnb and hotels within easy driving distance.

Free car parking is available within a short walking distance from St Mary's, details of which will be provided on booking.