

# The Choir



**The choir stalls (seats) can be seen in the chancel area of the church.**

**In the later Middle Ages choral singing in parish churches became increasingly important, especially in wealthy churches that were able to buy an organ and could support a choir of men and boys. Another factor was the presence of chantry priests or parish clerks who could offer schooling, including musical instruction such as teaching 'pricksong'.**



**Singing was a central part of worship in the early Christian Church. The early form was 'Georgian Chant', meaning all sang the same tune in unison.**



**However, during the Middle Ages singing became more complex aided by changes like the presence of boy choristers. This meant variation in the form of different pitches and tunes was introduced, firstly in cathedrals and monastic churches, then parish churches. Such music is known as polyphony.**

The St Dunstan's inventory of church goods, dated 1500, lists "whyte vestments for chyl dren", which indicates white choir robes for boys. As well as the choir robes, the inventory lists several sets of vestments for the parish priest. Such clothing was an outward sign of the difference between the priest and church choir, and the parishioners. The inventory also lists several liturgical (church service) books containing musical notation, such as 'a prymier notyd' and 'a sequens boke notyd'.

Such books were often donated by parishioners or members of the parish clergy. They might include new or special services. William Sprott (in 1496) asked to have sung at his funeral a dirige by note and 15 masses of which four were to be the Trinity, the Holy Ghost, Our Lady, and the Requiem.



Our thanks to Canterbury Historical and Archaeological Society (CHAS) for their generous sponsorship of this postgraduate student project. Credits: Research and text by Beth Woljung. Photograph of Gregorian Chant in a fifteenth-century liturgical book from Avila Cathedral; Choir stall in St Dunstan's Church chancel; Example of a late medieval polyphonic choir book, Four-part mass | © BSB/ Mus. ms. F, fol. 86v/87r; British Museum, late medieval print of choirboys in Corpus Christi procession, ref:1972,U.677, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.