



# UNESCO final submission

This is the final draft of text submitted to the UK's Living Heritage Inventory for English Sacred Choral Music.

The question text is from the submission form.

The **bold** box text underneath is the submission text.

The 2026 submission process ended on Friday 27 March.

We expect that the inventories will be published in late 2026

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## Title

Please provide a short title for your element. This will be the title we use on the inventory page and will need to be distinct from other elements. We will be in touch to help if we think it is too similar to another element. [text - maximum 15 words]

## **English Sacred Choral Music**

## Short Description

- Please describe your element as if a friend / family member with no prior knowledge of the element asked you to tell them about it.

[text - minimum 25 words / maximum 50 words]

**English Sacred Choral Music is a living practice of collective music-making characterised by a distinctive choral sound and a rich body of repertoire. Originating in English cathedral and collegiate foundations, it has become a defining element of cultural life in the UK, expressed through cross-denominational liturgical services and secular performances.**

## Description

Please tell us more information about your element.

[long text box - minimum 100 words / maximum 200 words]

Please include details about:

- Who the community of practice is (including active participants and knowledge bearers [pop up to define], and/or your audience, if relevant);
- Where it takes place (including any connections to other parts of the UK or internationally);
- How often your element is practised;
- Any associated objects such as the tools, instruments, costumes, materials or products; and
- If there are any commercial activities relating to your element - how do they benefit the community.
- Please note, brand names or trademarks should not be included unless they are part of the title of the living heritage.

**English Sacred Choral Music is sustained by an intergenerational community of practice that includes cathedral, collegiate and parish church choirs, community and school choirs, organists, composers, and clergy. Professional and voluntary musicians act as key knowledge bearers, transmitting the cultural practice via formal and informal training, particularly through chorister programmes that combine musical education with mentorship and peer learning. The tradition is expressed across all parts of the UK in cross-denominational liturgical and community settings, forming a distinctive part of national cultural life and contributing significantly to the education of children and young people. It also boasts a widespread international articulation and influence.**

**The element is performed daily, sustaining a tradition that has continued for well over 500 years and ensuring continuity of repertoire and performance practice. New compositions sit alongside historic works, demonstrating a living and evolving artform.**

**Associated objects include organs, sheet music, vestments and liturgical books, set within institutions that span sacred and secular architectural spaces, helping to shape its distinctive sound.**

**Commercial activity includes concerts, recordings, touring, publishing, educational programmes, and usage in film and advertising – indicative of recognition in contemporary society. Income generated supports scholarships, training, outreach work and commissions, ensuring accessibility of the tradition.**

## Safeguarding (including history)

Please outline information relating to your element's safeguarding.

[long text box - minimum 100 words / maximum 200 words]

• Please include details about:

- The history of how long it has been practised and how it has been passed on to now.
- How it is currently passed on and if there are any risks to it.

**English Sacred Choral Music has been practised for over 500 years, across the UK and internationally. Its transmission has historically relied on a model of choristers and musicians learning through daily rehearsal, liturgical participation, and immersion in repertoire. This tradition has ensured that skills, knowledge, and musical understanding are transmitted from experienced practitioners to new generations.**

**Today, the practice continues to be passed on through daily services, choir schools, parish and cathedral choirs, educational programmes, concert performances and festivals, all of which maintain the high standards and characteristic sound of the tradition. Its continuity is reinforced by ongoing composition, performance, and public engagement, ensuring that the tradition remains dynamic rather than static. UK trained practitioners continue to be exported around the world, whilst international exponents seek opportunities to practice and learn across institutions in the UK.**

**However, there are recognised risks. Many institutions face financial pressures that threaten the sustainability of choirs and music departments. The sector also identifies challenges in maintaining equitable access to training and in safeguarding the pipeline of choristers and skilled practitioners. Living Heritage recognition is seen as a vital means of strengthening awareness and ensuring the long-term viability of this culturally significant practice.**

Please outline how you have gathered free, prior and informed consent from the community in more detail (200 words):

**To ensure free, prior and informed consent, we have engaged extensively with the practising community throughout the development of this submission. Cathedral Music Trust has undertaken significant consultation with organisations and individuals across the choral and cathedral music sector, resulting in a collectively agreed title and description for English Sacred Choral Music. These discussions involved the most influential bodies within the tradition - including the Royal College of Organists, Cathedral Organists Association, Conference of Catholic Directors of Music, Church Commissioners, Royal School of Church Music, Choir Schools Association, Association of English Cathedrals, Rodolfus Foundation, the Three Choirs Festival - ensuring that the submission reflects sector-wide understanding, priorities and expectations.**

**As part of this consent-gathering process, we have also invited practitioners, supporters, and institutions to add their name to a public letter of support. The letter, endorsed by 1,846 individuals and organisations, reinforces that the submission is made on behalf of, and with the explicit backing of the community of practice.**

**Across all engagement activity, no significant objections have been raised. On the contrary, sector responses reflect a shared recognition of the importance of safeguarding this centuries old tradition and a willingness to contribute to its future protection.**