

Become a Cathedral Guide

Every year, Winchester Cathedral welcomes over 130,000 visitors, including 500 tour groups. Many of these take a tour with one of our expert volunteer guides. They tell us that it makes all the difference to their understanding of this magnificent medieval building.

What role do volunteers play at the Cathedral?

Without our volunteers, we simply couldn't operate the way we do.

Volunteers work in a huge range of roles here to make all who come here feel welcome, whether visiting for a service or a quiet moment, to admire this stunning building or to take part in a cultural activity.

Our 140 Cathedral guides play a special role in helping our visitors gain a deeper understanding of what they see. All receive training and work as members of a team.

What kind of people become Cathedral Guides?

Our guides come from all walks of life. Anyone aged over 18 is welcome to apply.

You won't need any specialist knowledge of history or architecture to become a guide. The main quality we look for is an ability to engage with a wide variety of visitors and capture their interest. You'll also need to be committed to the job, and completely reliable.

Many of our guides chose to join us in retirement, when they have more time available, and just over half are female.

What do Cathedral Guides do?

We offer public tours free of charge every day, at least hourly.

We guide groups of visitors who have pre-booked a tour, sometimes on a special topic or in another language, and groups of school children and students.

Walking around the cathedral answering questions and showing people where things are is as important as leading tours. Visitors tell us that chatting with a guide is often what makes a visit really memorable.

You'll need to be able to make a regular minimum commitment of two hours a week between Monday and Saturday.

What kind of training is involved?

All our guides receive six months' training, designed to equip them with everything they need to know. The course is wide ranging and stimulating, and includes written and practical tests.

Guides emerge from their training able to help visitors, wherever they come from, geographically and spiritually, to understand and value this great Cathedral's heart and heritage.

Some of our guides specialise in showing visitors the cathedral's tower. Working as a Tower Tours guide does not require the full six months' training, and most people start as an assistant to an experienced guide.

We encourage all our guides to take part in ongoing training so they continue to build their knowledge and skills.

What kind of support can I expect?

You won't be working alone. All our guides are members of at least one team, with each team taking collective responsibility for a two-hour weekday slot.

Our Cathedral Guides Committee oversees recruitment, training and information activities. It also develops new tours and organises social activities.

A volunteer lead, currently Anna Withers, provides overall coordination and a direct link to the Dean and Chapter.

Will I enjoy the work?

We hope so! Our guides tell us that the job is a great source of pleasure and satisfaction, for many reasons:

'I meet people from all over the world'

'I enjoy helping people understand the Cathedral'

'I didn't like history when I was at school – but I really do now!'

'The Cathedral is a dream working environment'

'People ask really obscure questions that I sometimes can't answer – but there's always another guide who can!'

'The training is excellent and it just goes on and on'

'There is always something new to see or understand'

'Visitors are so friendly and thankful for the help we give them'

'I have made a new set of friends in the guides'

What kind of people will I meet?

The majority of our paying visitors are tourists, visiting us from all parts of the world.

You may also meet historians, art experts, architects and theologians, many of whom have us on their trail of places to visit.

Group visitors include members of the University of the Third Age, the Women's Institute and the National Association of Fine Art Societies. We also welcome church groups, visiting as pilgrims to admire and worship.

About 25,000 young people visit us each year and some guides specialise in this work.

What kinds of things might I be showing visitors?

There are so many wonderful things to show visitors! Some highlights you might be describing include:

- Our beautifully carved 12th-century font featuring St Nicholas (Santa Claus), which has been in continuous use for baptisms for 850 years
- The Crypt, with its massive Norman pillars and vaults, and Sound II, a statue by English sculptor Antony Gormley
- The medieval wall frescos in the Holy Sepulchre Chapel – a remarkable survival
- The statue of William Walker, the deep-sea diver who worked underwater for six years to help underpin the sinking cathedral of the early 1900s – an example of the dedication and strength of ordinary people
- The 15th-century Great Screen in the presbytery at the heart of the Cathedral, with its glorious stone carving
- **The Fishermen's Chapel** – with its window commemorating Izaak Walton, 17th-century author of a much-loved work treatise on the joys of fishing, *The Compleat Angler*.

How can I find out more?

If you think you might like to join us, please get in touch! Guide training runs from the beginning of October to the end of March. We interview candidates in May and June.

You can email us and register your interest at volunteering@winchester-cathedral.org.uk. Or you can phone Anna Withers, Chairman of Winchester Cathedral Guild of Voluntary Guides, on 01962 857200.