

## **Official Biography**



Martin Ashley was born in Rochester, Kent, where he was educated at the King's School. On leaving school he joined the BBC, working initially in news information but becoming an assistant film sound recordist after attending the TV production course at Ravensbourne College of Art and Design. Early passions for railways were laid aside during late adolescence through competing interests in music inspired by Rochester Cathedral and the existence of several ex-choristers in his peer group. After working as assistant to David Poulter and then Christopher Stokes in Chatham, he became organist of St Stephen's Church which in those days had a forty strong boys' treble line. A memorable choir tour was the catalyst for a career change, and he completed his BEd degree at Christ Church College Canterbury (now Canterbury

Christ Church University). Whilst at Canterbury he was the college organist, playing regularly in the cathedral and obtaining the Licentiate (performer) diploma of Trinity College of Music after studying organ under Allan Wicks. He founded and directed the Canterbury Renaissance Consort, which performed regular summer "cathedral weeks" around the country during the 1970s.

After a year teaching music at the Grange Grammar school in Cheshire, a partial career change took him to Lincoln Cathedral School where he was Head of Geography, retaining his interest in music teaching through running the school orchestra and choral society. He remembers the Lincoln years as idyllic in many ways but a concern with social justice and equality of opportunity drove him into the state sector where he developed his interest in boys' education or, more specifically, the failure of certain groups of boys to engage with education. The result was his first research degree, an MPhil entitled "Peer Attachments and Social Deviancy in the Primary School". Primary education, however, was not what he trained for or where his heart lay, so a move to a state middle school came next and the main subject was once again geography. Missing the academic life and his one day a week teaching fellowship at the University of the West of England, he soon embarked on a PhD which expanded into the award-winning *Sustainable Millennium Project*. Founded upon the principle that the youngest children in the school at the time would be the first cohort to become adult citizens in the new millennium, the project conservatively forecast the "climate emergency" of the year 2020 for 2030 and aimed to prepare the children of the 1990s to deal with it (as fifty somethings!)

School teaching came to a natural end in 1996 when the opportunity to complete the PhD and move full-time into university work came. The twelve years at the University of the West of England were fertile and saw him move through senior lecturer, principal lecturer to Reader in Education with leadership of the professional doctorate degree. His teaching responsibilities included being head of primary science and increasingly a return to music where he instigated the "3+1" primary training route of BA + PGCE with specialism in the creative arts (especially music!). He had maintained his interest in music since leaving the Lincoln Cathedral School through private teaching and various organist/choirmaster posts. During the Bristol years he became the co-ordinator for *Bristol Voices*, the Bristol Cathedral Chorister Outreach Programme, winning for it a substantial grant from Youth Music. He also sang for ten years in the choir of St Mary Redcliffe – most memorably in Washington State Cathedral shortly after the 9/11 attack.

It was whilst at Redcliffe that he undertook a post-doctoral ethnographic study of the boy choristers which was to become seminal for the rest of his career. Application of the PhD methodology in a different context revealed new and profound insights into children and music and a new post-doctoral programme was begun, culminating in an AHRC funded research fellowship. This was soon followed by a move to Edge Hill University where he was awarded a personal chair for his post-doctoral work on boys' vocal identity as well as an institutional chair for his role as head of research in the Faculty of Education. During this period, he founded and directed the Centre for Learner Identity Studies. A further large grant was awarded

by the AHRC for a collaborative project with the University of York and the National Youth Choirs of Great Britain, the outcome of which was the *Boys Keep Singing* project. This seeded such successful enterprises as the Cambiata North West choir run under the auspices of the Association of British Choral Directors (ABCD).

On retirement in 2013, he joined the Board of Trustees of ABCD, founding and becoming editor-in-chief of the academic journal *ABCD Choral Directions Research*. He continues to administer and update the *Boys Keep Singing* project and is always happy to respond to requests for lecturing, advice or one of his “Y8 boys singing days”. He remains research active, having collaborated with a consultant paediatric endocrinologist to develop further his work on voice change at puberty. He was invited by OUP to become series editor of the *Emerging Voices* series for changing voices. However, he has also found time (somehow) to return to his railway roots and is the education adviser for the Heritage Railway Association and sits on their Training and Development Committee. He works as a signaller on the East Lancashire Railway and is a member of the board of the South Tynedale Railway from where he administers a youth development scheme (as well as driving steam trains).