

Martin Penny MA (Oxon) FRCO MCIM



I have been working full-time as a freelance organist, choir director, teacher, examiner and lecturer since April 2002. I am Organist to the University of the Arts (a 'job-share' with Chris Benham) and also to the University of Hertfordshire. Mary and I have run a flourishing music business in Letchworth since 1982, with pupils ranging in age from under 7 to over 70.

I was born in Lancashire and began playing the piano at the age of four, studying along with my sisters, Christine and Pamela. My father, Donald, worked for ICI and so we moved around the UK on a regular basis.

I took up the organ whilst singing in my local parish church choir, by then in the West Country. A move to the North East led to organ studies with Ronald Watson before spending four years with Conrad Eden at Durham Cathedral. During this period I ran the choir of a local church, played frequently at several others and sang as a deputy in the Cathedral.

I read Mathematics at Exeter College, Oxford, and was successively Choral Exhibitioner, Organist and locum Organ Scholar, being responsible for the training and direction of the choir in daily practices and four services each week. The choir included twelve boys from Christ Church Cathedral Choir School, six Choral Exhibitors and volunteers.

Whilst I was at Oxford, my family moved again, this time to Hampshire, where my mother, Barbara, was finally in one place long enough to be able to take up a career as a lecturer in Home Economics.

I spent the next twenty-seven years working for a major IT company, combining this with work as an organist and choir director. I held a number of church posts in and around London, including St Peter's, Ealing where I met and married Mary, a professional singer, pianist and teacher, in 1980. Co-incidentally she hails from a village just outside Durham and her tutor for PGCE was Michael Frith (also a pupil of Dr Eden)! I also wrote the majority of the keyboard entries for the Hamlyn Dictionary of Music, studied singing for several years with Linda Waltzer (changing from Baritone to Tenor in the process), and sang in several choirs and in opera.

Most musical activities were suspended for a period of five years due to increasing work pressure – culminating in the directorship of a major division of the UK firm, managing over 150 professional staff and a budget of circa £50million/annum in 1990.

As part of a long-planned career change back to music, I completely revised my musical skills between 1997 and 2003, studying with a number of distinguished teachers both in the UK and abroad, gaining my Fellowship of the Royal College of Organists and winning prizes for overall performance and for improvisation. In the course of my studies I furthered my passion for the music of the English Tudor period, post war developments in France and for contemporary English choral music. I feature as accompanist on a commercial CD of such music released next month.

I am looking forward to working with the choir, such a talented and skilled group of musicians, and in sustaining the excellent work of all my predecessors, but especially Chris, whose commitment to the musical life of All Saints' has been outstanding.