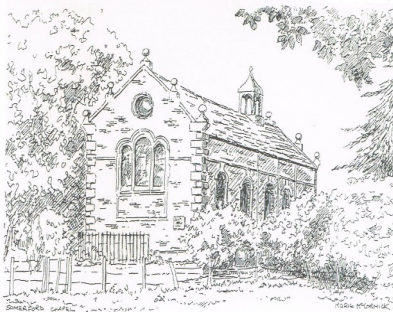
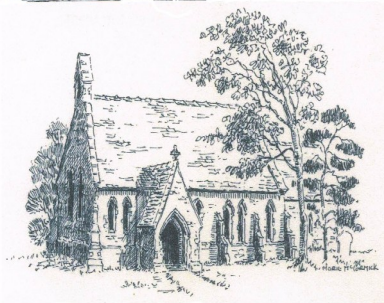


Astbury & Smallwood Parish News

January 2026

Price £1



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From the Rector

It has watched over weddings, christenings, funerals, harvest suppers, school visits and quiet moments of reflection for hundreds of years. For generations, it has been more than just a building – it's part of who we are. Sadly, like many historic buildings, time is now catching up with it. Recent surveys have shown that the church needs over £1 million worth of essential repairs to keep it safe, warm and standing for future generations. These aren't cosmetic changes – they include urgent work to the roof, stonework and internal fabric of the building.

Rising energy costs have added to the challenge. In order to make sensible savings over the winter, the church will not be holding services for three months. This difficult decision has been taken purely to reduce heating bills during the coldest period. While services pause, some internal repairs will be going ahead so the time is being put to good use. (Our Christmas Appeal primarily supported from Russell Watson's concerts and Christmas giving will be put to good use replacing lighting, the sound system and security cameras, hopefully all being fitted during this time.)

This church belongs to the whole community, whether you attend regularly, pop in occasionally, or simply enjoy seeing it there every day. We are therefore appealing to everyone in the village and beyond to help us to meet this challenge. Every donation, every

fundraiser, every shared idea makes a difference – no contribution is too small.

Over the coming months we'll be organizing events and looking for creative ways to raise funds, and we would love as many people as possible to get involved. If you have skills, ideas, or just enthusiasm, we'd be delighted to hear from you. With the community's support, we believe this much-loved landmark can continue to serve and inspire for centuries to come. Together, let's make sure our church remains standing strong at the heart of our village.

There is now a Crowd Fund page set up which went live on Christmas Eve and so far has 19 donations around £850. So it's a start.

<https://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/p/help-save-our-14th-century-community-church>

Heather

Editor – Mr W. Ball

The Old Vicarage, Reades Lane, Congleton, CW12 3LL.
Telephone 01260 279276 Mobile 07710 234943

Biddulph Old Hall Concert: We had a very successful afternoon at Biddulph Old Hall on Sunday 7th December. The Little Moreton Singers gave a superb concert and we raised £1,675 for the church. I would like to thank all the splendid helpers; Steph, Naomi, Heather Davies and Heather Carter. You were great! Huge thanks go, as always, to Brian and David who prepared so well, setting out chairs, glasses and decorating the tree. It all looked gorgeous. Brian and David continue to be so generous in 'loaning' us the Old Hall. May I wish everyone a very Happy Christmas and best wishes for 2026. Jane

Somerford Chapel: On Sunday 14th. December the Chapel held its Christmas Carol Service, superbly organized by Steph and Bev. With the lovely Christmas tree by the altar and about eighty parishioners singing ten well-known Christmas Carols it proved to be a great start to Christmas. We finished off with mulled wine and delicious mince pies! Well done to everyone who made it such a lovely Sunday afternoon

Service. This was the second year running we have had a Christmas Carol Service, since the Parish Council provided the funding for the hard plastic matting on the field car park, and we hope this is now an annual Christmas Service event. Trevor Massey

Astbury & Smallwood Parish News: The suspension of services at St. Mary's Church leaves me in something of a quandary about the future of *ASPN*. Do I carry on as usual, or do I not? I confess that at the moment (Christmas Day!) I honestly do not know!

Most people nowadays seem to obtain their church news from Facebook (or some such), but a substantial number (including me) prefer something more tangible than the glowing screen of a mobile phone. Preparing and publishing *ASPN* takes up about a full week each month. I receive the various articles from our contributors (sometimes after a gentle reminder that the 6.00 pm Friday deadline has already passed – see page 13 this month). Some arrive as emails which I can simply copy and paste; other arrive handwritten and have to be typed up for inclusion. Photographs for inclusion have to be edited and resized and maybe cropped from the 20 MB size they arrive in down to the 300 kb suitable for printing. Their insertion into the text is the next job, so as to ensure that everything fits into the number of pages available (12 to 28, but always divisible by 4!)

Then comes the printing, which is much easier than it used to be when I took over *ASPN* in 1986. In those days I typed each page onto an A5 sized sheet using an Amstrad PCW8256 (later an 8512 and then a 9512) and then produced on a separate machine a printing plate to print out by photolitho first one side and then the other of each double page. I would end up with four or more piles of paper, each with 200 sheets. I would take a sheet from each pile to make each magazine, fold the sheets and then staple. Nowadays computers have advanced so far that I can print the magazine direct from the computer, and include colour photos. There is still the folding and stapling, though, together with preparing envelopes for those who receive their copies by post, and making a pdf for inclusion on the church website and for those who receive a copy by email.

So that was then, and this is now. I am conscious that I cannot go on for ever, so is this the time to call it a day for *ASPN*? Or is there

someone out there who is prepared to take on the job – obviously with some help from me at least in the first instance? Please do get in touch with me if you are interested (my details are on page 20).

Astbury Ladies' Fellowship: It was a sunny day as members carried plates of food into the village hall for the Fellowship's Christmas luncheon. There was a flurry of activity setting tables, then everyone took a seat. The chairman welcomed members, Rector Heather, members of the ministry team, Steph and Bev, John and Rachel Hulse, and from the church community Joan and Theunis.



Heather led us in the Communion service. She prayed for the people who are ill and those who have lost a family member or friend. She told us how when she was in remote Canada, she had noticed the myriads of stars in the sky – some of them had died, but were so far away, their light was still reaching us. She told us to think of our lost loved ones like that – although they were no longer here their light was still reaching our lives. Steph did a reading, and to take Communion new stood at the front together and received the bread and wine, Bev assisting the Rector. It was a lovely service followed by a reflective silence, then the Fellowship Prayer.



Lunch followed, a delicious spread – sausage rolls, salmon baps, wedges of cheese and all manner of cakes. Thank you Pam Robinson for the flower arrangements. I have heard from Dawn Brazier, who started the Fellowship in April 1992. She has been ill with sepsis but has fought back over many months and is now walking again.

Details of the Christmas services were read out, and we look forward to meeting you in church in the run-up to Christmas, and hope people who are ill are soon feeling better.

Since writing this we have heard the news that church will need to close from 1st January until Palm Sunday due to extreme financial difficulty. This is very sad, and we hope we may all stand together to tackle this. One positive outcome of the church's being closed will be that scaffolding can be erected to do the building repairs inside the church.

I hope that everyone has a very happy Christmas.

Carole

The Ladies' Fellowship Christmas Quiz (Answers on page 17):

1. Name five fruits beginning with the letter 'P'.
2. What gas makes up the largest proportion of the earth's atmosphere?
3. In which European city is the Brandenburg Gate?
4. What singing group has four males and a
5. What is the capital of Switzerland?
- 6 I am one of these: rearrange the letters to find my name – RAZBHATLA.
7. This could be a bird or a country.
8. How many shillings are there in a £?
9. Which English tree lives the longest?
10. Which is the world's largest land-locked country?
11. Fill in the blanks: As warm as – . As cold as – .
12. Who ran away with the spoon?
13. What hymn would you sing first thing on Christmas morning?
14. There were five - - - in the pear tree with the partridge. What?
15. How old is King Charles III?

16. In golf, what is an eagle?
 17. Who founded the Samaritans?
 18. Who pardons the American turkey?
-

Astbury Women's Institute: Our newly selected President Kate Naylor took the reins and held her first meeting for December at Astbury Village Hall.

35 members including 3 new members joined in the fun and festivities. There was a definite buzz with the run up to festive season – Kate opened the meeting and welcomed all members new and old, *Jerusalem* was sung and Birthday Buttonholes were handed out. The Book swap table and Artisan table was run by Linda Brayford assisted by Margaret Steele, Homemade Jams and Chutneys filled the table along with Christmas Crafts which were selling quickly.

Our Competition table was managed by Jenny Fagan and a few entries were submitted which was 'An 85 Year Old Anniversary Card' – homemade – which Margaret Pearson won.

Our speaker for the evening was Caroline Spiers on a talk 'My Mother flew Spitfires', which was about her mother Rita Baines and the story of how she became a Spitfire Pilot.

Caroline gave a brief history of the formation of the Air Transport Auxiliary and the vital part they played during the second World War. Rita, her mother, was one of 168 female pilots – the only one from North Staffordshire. Caroline brought along photos and Artefacts that had been found in her mother's loft which were interesting. The story about how her mother became a pilot is fascinating – she initially checked the aircraft and loved it but she was eager for the air. Though she had no flying experience she eventually managed to get started on the training and flew Tiger Moths as well as other aircraft and started to build flying hours up. On 1st October 1944 she became a fully fledged pilot and was also paid the same as men which was an astounding achievement in its day and in 1944 flew her first Spitfire.

It was an incredible story and everyone thought it very interesting and asked questions afterwards and we then watched a short film about her life which brought it to life with the sound of Spitfires filling the room.

Following the talk we all had Tea and Christmas Cake, Mince Pies and home made shortbread by Carol Steer, which was superb. We sang Christmas Carols accompanied by Lisa Cartilage on the Piano and then we held our Raffle. After that we sang the National Anthem and the meeting was closed.

Our Christmas Party was held at The Plough on 9th December joined by The Mad Hatters: we all enjoyed a Turkey Christmas dinner and sang along.

Our next meeting is to be held on the **afternoon** of Wednesday 7th January between 2.00 and 4.00 pm. This is a special archive meeting and WI artefacts and items will be on display to view.

Should you wish to find out any more information on Astbury WI please contact Kate Naylor 07875691170 – all are welcome and we look forward to seeing you soon.

Kate Naylor

Sartor's Quiz (Answers on page 17)

1. Who wrote the hymn *Eternal Father, strong to save*? a. Reginald Heber; b. Augustus Toplady; c. Nahum Tate; d. William Whiting.
2. Since which century has the epithet *reverend* ('worthy of high respect') been applied to the clergy? a. 14th; b. 15th; c. 16th; d. 17th.
3. Since which century has it been used as a title prefixed to their names in correspondence? a. 15th; b. 16th; c. 17th; d. 18th.
4. Who said, 'Am I my brother's keeper'? a. Jacob; b. Esau; c. Cain; d. Abel.

5. Who was Abraham's eldest son? a. Isaac; b. Jacob; c. Cain; d. Ishmael.
6. Where was the Mount of Olives located? a. Galilee; b. Judea; c. Samaria.
7. According to Roman Catholic tradition, who was the first Pope? a. Jesus; b. Peter; c. John; d. Athanasius.
8. Which of these literary giants wrote under a pseudonym? a. Cervantes; b. Dante; c. Goethe; d. Molière.
9. Which of these towns or cities is known as the 'ville de Molière'? a. Pézenes; b. Paris; c. Marseille; d. Rouen.
10. What was the name given by Capt. W. E. Johns to the air ace hero in his popular adventure stories? a. Noddy; b. Biggles; c. Tiddles; d. Raffles.

WORDS OF WIT & WISDOM

Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world. James 1, 27

Speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ. Ephesians 4, 15

Listen to advice and accept discipline, and at the end you will be counted among the wise. Proverbs 19, 20

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8, 38-39

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the

peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Philippians 4, 6-7

Notice what ‘the peace of God’ does for you. It will ‘guard’ your mind. From what? Asking impulsively, acting selfishly, or acting maliciously. Acting in any way that will result in loss rather than gain – and regret rather than joy.

UCB Word for Today, Tuesday 31st January 2023

FASCINATING FACTS

Confessions of a Book Reviewer

In a cold but stuffy bed-sitting room littered with cigarette ends and half-empty cups of tea, a man in a moth-eaten dressing-gown sits at a rickety table, trying to find room for his typewriter among the piles of dusty papers that surround it. He cannot throw the papers away because the wastepaper basket is already overflowing, and besides, somewhere among the unanswered letters and unpaid bills it is possible that there is a cheque for two guineas which he is nearly certain he forgot to pay into the bank. There are also letters with addresses which ought to be entered in his address book. He has lost his address book, and the thought of looking for it, or indeed of looking for anything, afflicts him with acute suicidal impulses. He is a man of thirty-five, but looks fifty. He is bald, has varicose veins and wears spectacles, or would wear them if his only pair were not chronically lost. If things are normal with him he will be suffering from malnutrition, but if he has recently had a lucky streak he will be suffering from a hangover. At present it is half past eleven in the morning, according to his schedule he should have started work two hours ago; but even if he had made any serious effort to start he would have been frustrated by the almost continuous ringing of the telephone bell, the yells of the baby, the rattle of an electric drill out in the street, and the heavy boots of his creditors clumping up and down the stairs. The most recent interruption was the

arrival of the second post, which brought him two circulars and an income-tax demand printed in red.

The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell,
Vol 4, p215

Leeds Castle, Kent

The first sight of Leeds Castle on a hot summer afternoon takes one's breath away. Set in the middle of its tranquil lake, surrounded by rolling parkland of the lushest green, it strikes one as being almost too beautiful, a medieval castle straight out of a fairytale – and every bit as unreal.

The extraordinary thing is that much of it is absolutely genuine. It has been added to, of course, and restored – radically, in both the nineteenth and twentieth century, and at enormous cost; but it remains at heart the same castle that Edward I made over to his Queen, Eleanor of Castile, 700 years ago and which he and she cherished above all others.

John Julius Norwich, *The Architecture of Southern England*, p326

Acceptance

Come then what may
In me work your will.
To struggling soul, say:
Rest, be still.
Your peace flood in
When furious efforts cease.
Only in your will
Lies my peace.

From *How Can I See*, a fundraising book sold in aid of St Mary's
Church, Bowdon, in 1986

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Astbury & Smallwood Parish News

Publication & Copy Dates 2026/27

Publication is on the last Sunday of the preceding month –

The February issue will be published on 25th January

Last Date for material 16th January

The March issue will be published on 1st March

Last Date for material 20th February

The April issue will be published on 29th March

Last Date for material 20th March

The May issue will be published on 26th April

Last Date for material 17th April

The June issue will be published on 31st May

Last Date for material 22nd May

The July issue will be published on 28th June

Last Date for material 19th June

The August issue will be published on 26th July

Last Date for material 17th July

The September issue will be published on 30th August

Last Date for material 21st August

The October issue will be published on 27th September

Last Date for material 18th September

The November issue will be published on 25th October

Last Date for material 16th October

The December issue will be published on 29th November

Last Date for material 20th November

The January 2027 issue will be published on 3rd January, 2027

Last Date for material 25th December

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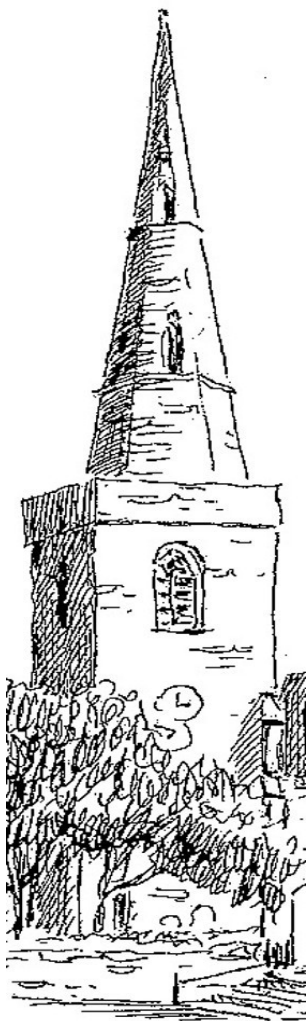
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ASSISTANT PRIEST	Rev Steph Morris	07703 587003
READERS	Andrew Bevington	07957 961140
	Andrew Bailey	01260 640616
	Prof Denise Morrey-Carter	01260 702512
CHURCHWARDEN	Dr Sally Drage	01260 270217

SERVICES	8.00 am	1st & 3rd Sundays	Holy Communion	BCP
Currently	8.00 am	2nd, 4th & 5th Sundays	Morning Prayer	BCP
suspended –	11.00 am	1st & 3rd Sundays	Morning Praise	CW
see pp 18-19	11.00 am	2nd & 4th Sundays	Holy Communion	CW
	11.00 am	5th Sunday	Benefice Service	
	6.30 pm	1st & 3rd Sundays	Compline	
	6.30 pm	2nd & 4th Sundays	Evensong	BCP
Wednesday	11.30 am	every Wednesday	Holy Communion	CW
	2.45 pm	every Wednesday	Community Worship	

Funerals and Services of Holy Baptism & Holy Matrimony by arrangement with the Wardens

PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL

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Hon. Secretary	Mrs M. Chapman	
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SIDSEPEOPLE	see ASTBURY ROTAS	
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PARISH NEWS EDITOR	Mr W. Ball	01260 279276
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SAFEGUARDING CO-ORDINATOR	Mrs J. Renshaw-Priest	07825 549788
VILLAGE HALL BOOKING	Mrs S. Brightwell	07857 234686

ASTBURY ST MARY'S CHURCH OF ENGLAND PRIMARY SCHOOL, School Lane, CW12 4RG.

Head Teacher	Miss P. Blythe	01260 272528
Chairman of Governors	Mrs K. Moore	01260 290135

WEBSITES www.astburychurch.org.uk

CHURCH KEYS ARE AVAILABLE FROM THE CHURCHWARDENS

Astbury & Smallwood Parish News – January 2026

Astbury Church choir meets to practise every Friday evening
between 7.00 and 8.00 pm.

Astbury Church bellringers meet to practise every Wednesday evening
between 7.30 and 9.30 pm.

ASTBURY ROTAS for CLEANING & BRASS – *currently suspended*

ASTBURY ROTAS

8.00 am 11.00 am 6.30 pm

December 28th Jean Nadin TBA -----

Answers to the Ladies' Fellowship Christmas Quiz (page 7)

1. – peach, pear, plum, pineapple, pomegranate; 2. – Nitrogen; 3. – Berlin;
4. – Manfred Mann; 5. – Berne; 6. – Balthazar; 7. – Turkey; 8. – 20;
9. – Yew; 10. – Kazakhstan; 11. – Toast, Ice; 12. – The dish;
13. – Christians awake!; 14. – Gold rings; 15. – 77;
16 – A hole played two strokes under par; 17 – Chad Varah;
18 – The American President

Answers to Sartor's Quiz this month (page 9)

1 – d; 2 – b; 3 – c; 4 – c; 5 – d; 6 – b; 7 – b; 8 – d; 9 – a; 10 – b.

FROM THE REGISTERS

Burial of the Dead

December 22nd	Reginald Harry Percy Shaw	88
December 23rd	Betty Davenport	91 ashes

JOINT PARISHES CALENDAR FOR THE COMING WEEKS

DECEMBER

Sun 28th THE SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS DAY

8.00 am	Astbury	January <i>Parish News</i> published
11.00 am	TBA	Morning Prayer (BCP)
		Benefice Service

JANUARY 2026

Sun 4th EPIPHANY

10.00 am	Smallwood	Holy Communion (CW)
7th 2.00 pm	Astbury	Women's Institute

Sun 11th EPIPHANY I

10.00 am	Smallwood	Morning Praise
Fri 16th 6.00 pm		Copy date for <i>Parish News</i>

Sun 18th EPIPHANY III

10.00 am	Smallwood	Holy Communion (CW)
Wed 21st 1.30 pm	Astbury VH	Ladies' Fellowship

Sun 25th EPIPHANY III

10.00 am	Smallwood	February <i>Parish News</i> published
		Morning Praise

FEBRUARY

Sun 1st SEPTUAGESIMA

10.00 am	Smallwood	Holy Communion (CW)
Wed 4th 7.30 pm	Astbury	Women's Institute

Sun 8th SEXAGESIMA

10.00 am	Smallwood	Morning Praise
----------	-----------	----------------

Sun 15th QUINQUAGESIMA

10.00 am	Smallwood	Holy Communion (CW)
----------	-----------	---------------------

Wed 18th ASH WEDNESDAY

1.30 pm	Astbury VH	Ladies' Fellowship
Fri 20th 6.00 pm		Copy date for <i>Parish News</i>

Sun 22nd LENT I

9.00 am	Smallwood	Morning Praise
---------	-----------	----------------

MARCH

Sun 1st LENT II

10.00 am	Smallwood	March <i>Parish News</i> published
Wed 4th 7.30 pm	Astbury	Holy Communion (CW)
		Women's Institute

Sun 8th LENT III

10.00 am	Smallwood	Morning Praise
----------	-----------	----------------

Sun 15th LENT IV – Mothering Sunday

10.00 am	Smallwood	Holy Communion (CW)
Wed 18th 1.30 pm	Astbury VH	Ladies' Fellowship

Joint Parishes Calendar, continued

MARCH

Fri	20th	6.00 pm		Copy date for <i>Parish News</i>
Sun	22nd	LENT V		
		10.00 am	Smallwood	Morning Praise
Sun	29th	PALM SUNDAY		
		8.00 am	Astbury	April <i>Parish News</i> published
		10.00 am	TBA	Morning Prayer (BCP)
				Benefice Service

APRIL

Sun	5th	EASTER DAY		
		8.00 am	Astbury	Holy Communion (BCP)
		9.30 am	Smallwood	Holy Communion (CW)
		11.00 am	Astbury	Holy Communion (CW)
		6.30 pm	Astbury	Compline
Wed	8th	7.30 pm	Astbury	Women's Institute

ASTBURY & SMALLWOOD PARISH NEWS

is also available in large-print format.

Please let Mr Ball know if you require such a copy.

Editor – Mr W. Ball

Telephone 01260 279276 email wbbtov@gmail.com

Cover Drawings of St Mary's Church, Astbury,
St John's Church, Smallwood and All Saints' Chapel of Ease,
Somerford by Marie McCormick

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Brother MFC-J5330DW (A4) & MFC-J5910DW (A3)

P – 5330 – 251226

***We wish all our
readers
a Happy New Year***