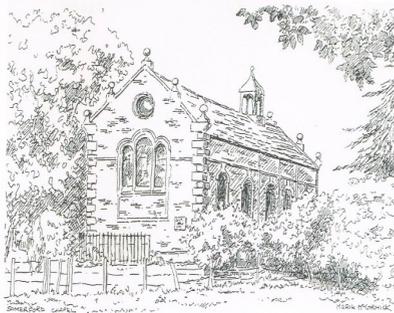


# Astbury & Smallwood Parish News

March 2026

Price £1



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Hello Everyone,

I am currently writing this letter on a cold, windy, wet February day watching the traffic going up and down Rood Hill, something that until recently I wasn't able to do. Those of you who know where I live may have noticed some big changes happening in our garden over the past three months. The large Leyland Spruce hedge that used to dominate our garden has been removed, to be replaced with a native hedge of Hazels, Dogwoods, Dog Rose, Crab Apples, Blackthorn and Field Maples; along with, we hope, some Oak and Beech grown from seed and the odd self-sown Holly.

Currently these new plants are no bigger than a pencil, with those that weren't planted in the autumn spending the winter in one of my veg beds. The hope is that the new hedge, in time, will support more native wildlife than the old hedge did and not be so detrimental to the rest of the garden. The Leyland Spruce used to suck the moisture out of my veg beds and block so much light that the trees behind it were growing at very strange angles.

Those tiny little saplings have roots that go down into the soil to draw strength from it; life-giving water and nutrients. With the correct combination of these things, which we can provide, and sunlight, which can be hit and miss, our little hedge will grow into a thing of beauty; something capable of sustaining a large variety of wildlife as well as being far more pleasing to the eyes of those passing by on the A34. As the leaves open, flowers will grace the branches, then fruits

will appear. In the autumn, the leaves of the field maple will turn the most amazing shades of red.

So why am I talking about our garden makeover in a church magazine? Partly because quite a few people have asked me about it, as it is in such a prominent position, but also because I believe our hedge replacement reflects a bit on the theme for Lent this year.

The Church of England's theme for Lent and Easter is 'Draw Near: Life-giving habits for Lent'. This year's resources have at their heart the theme of a 'rhythm of life' – habits and patterns which help us grow as disciples of Christ day by day, especially as we prepare to celebrate the great mystery of God's saving love at Easter.

There are a few words from this description that caught my eye when thinking about the theme this year. One is 'Life-Giving'; without the life-giving nutrients my little plants need, they will die, and we too need life-giving nutrients, not just food and water, but living water from God, and the Bread of Heaven.

The other is 'Help us grow'. The new hedge will need our help to grow; the area where the old hedge used to be has been prepared, with weeds removed and new soil added. The saplings are then carefully planted into this new soil and watered in.

We also need help to grow in our Christian life. Are there areas in your life which need to be 'prepared', old soil or weeds removed and new 'soil' added? We have spent a few months 'journeying' and this journeying has, I hope, given us some insights into areas of our lives that need some revitalising and with God's help we can use this opportunity to grow.

As Paul said in 1 Corinthians 3 'I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So, neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.'

During Lent as we develop our life-giving habit of faith, what seeds have you planted this year? Also, who is watering those seeds? It is good to read your Bible on your own, but it is even better when we

read together, that is when our ‘seed’ is really watered, when we hear another’s experience or interpretation of a passage. If you would be interested in joining a Bible study group, please speak to one of the Ministry Team; we would love you to get involved.

So, as I sit watching the lorries on the road, with the rain on the window, I can also see the snowdrops bobbing in the wind and the buds on some of the early spring flowers and it reminds me that even when things seem dull, grey and raining, God is always near and is calling us to Draw Near to him.

God Bless,

Steph.

-----  
Editor – Mr W. Ball

The Old Vicarage, Reades Lane, Congleton, CW12 3LL.  
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The Sunday services at Somerford Chapel will resume on Easter Day (5th April) with Holy Communion at 2.30 pm. They continue with Evensong on the first Sunday of each month (3rd May, 7th June, 5th July, 2nd August and 5th September). The Harvest Thanksgiving service will be on 27th September and the Christmas Carol Service on 12th December.

There will also be a concert in aid of MND research by Audley Male Voice Choir on Sunday 9th August at 3.00 pm.

Do put these dates in your diary, and we look forward to welcoming to the Chapel.

How is it possible that we need almost £12,000 a month? (Part 2): The Parish Share explained:

In recent months I have heard a lot of comment on the seeming ‘unjust’ Parish Share that we pay each year. For St Mary’s Astbury it is £60,000 for this coming year. Many people think that this is a ‘fee’ paid to the Diocese with no benefit to us whatsoever.

The Parish Share is an annual financial contribution that is paid by each parish to cover the ‘direct costs’ of their clergy and the ‘shared costs’ which covers mission and ministry across the whole diocese. It is the lifeblood that ensures the Church can flourish in every community regardless of the wealth of the local congregation and wider parish. For the Diocese of Chester in 2026 the Parish Share amounts to £11,639,000 and funds the following –

Clergy Stipends - £7,331,000

Clergy Housing - £1,818,000

Clergy Pensions - £1,250,000

Clergy removals & resettlement - £270,000

Ministry & outreach - £1,317,000

Central Support Costs - £1,822,000

National Church - £518,000

Parish Share is divided into ‘direct costs’ (two thirds of expenditure) which is the money that is given back to parishes in the form of stipends and support for clergy. This includes paying for clergy salaries, pensions, housing and property services, and training for current and future clergy and lay ministers.

- The Clergy Stipend: for St Mary’s pays for one member of clergy for 80% of a full time role, with 20% being funded by St John’s Smallwood.

- Clergy Housing – Dalebrook Road was bought for the use of that member of clergy and is maintained on a 5-year rolling programme of maintenance, with also any immediate needs met.

- Clergy Pensions are paid for Jeff Cuttell, and contributions are made for the future pensions of Jonathan and Ella, Anne-Marie and Heather

- Clergy Removals were paid for Anne-Marie to move to her present role and for Heather to move from Oxford.

- The Ministry and outreach fund has funded: Steph’s theological training and costs associated with her three years part-time training for the Priesthood. (tutors, residentials and placements . . .)

Two years’ part-time training and costs for Andrew Bailey, Bev and Denise for Lay Reader Licences.

Sophie is in process of a 3-year part time Families and Children's Worker course and David is taking a one year Occasional Worship Leaders course.

All of them need tutors, residentials and placements without adding anything extra to our Parish Share.

The remaining third covers 'shared costs' which funds mission and ministry across the diocese. The shared costs request for each parish is based on a three-year average of church attendance throughout the week and the affluence of the area. This is measured using independent data from Experian that provides an overall financial position of those living in the parish.

The Central Support costs also fund some of our Diocesan staff whose focus is to support the work of 336 churches and our church schools including:

- support with safeguarding to keep children, young people and vulnerable adults safe in our church communities;
  - support from the Mission Enabler team with growing mission, youth work, community outreach, and revitalising struggling churches;
  - support for our church schools in recruitment, buildings, governance, collective worship, RE and Christian ethos;
  - support in developing our church buildings, including applications for funding and carbon net zero initiatives;
  - support with HR queries;
- and support with communications to help parishes share their good news with a wider audience.

Our contributions to the National Church are pooled so that wealthier parishes help sustain a Christian presence in deprived or rural areas that cannot afford their own ministry costs paying for mission and ministry in some of the poorest parts of the country.

All of these services and support help our parishes, church schools and chaplaincies operate and flourish in the 21st century. When parishes pay Parish Share, they aren't just funding today's church, but they are helping to invest in the future church and ensure that the light of Christ continues to shine in every corner of our diocese. Heather

Services at Smallwood: Heather is pleased to announce that there will be a service of Holy Communion using the Book of Common Prayer at 8.00 am at Smallwood on Sunday 1st March, and likewise a service of Evensong at 6.30 pm on Sunday 22nd March, in addition to the normal service at 10.00 am.

I'm sure, like me, you are sad that the church has been obliged to close for a few months. I know everyone will be keen to celebrate the re-opening at Easter time. With Heather's approval I am arranging a celebratory concert on Saturday 18th April at 7.00 pm. This would not be possible without the generous support of The Little Moreton Singers who have agreed to perform in the church. If you heard The Little Moreton Singers at Christmas in Biddulph Old Hall you will know what a beautiful sound they make.

I shall be selling tickets from my house from the end of February. I am available every Sunday morning after 10.30. My house is Foxfield House, CW12 4RQ and is fourth from the church. Please bring cash. The tickets will be priced at £15 each and will include wine, soft drinks and nibbles, served during the interval. With your help I hope to raise a goodly sum to support St. Mary's. Please tell your friends and hopefully some of you can help on the evening, selling programmes or serving refreshments. Happy New Year.

Jane Sharman

Astbury & Smallwood Parish News: Thank you to all those who, unprompted, have renewed their subscription to *ASPN* for 2026: this means that I shall carry on (DV!) until the December issue, which will complete my 40 years as printer and publisher. After that, it will be up to someone else. Who? Let me know if you think it could be you. Read last month's edition for an idea of what is involved. Please do get in touch with me if you are interested (my details are on page 20).

There will be no increase in the price of *ASPN* for 2026. An individual copy will still be £1 (please put the £1 in either of the boxes for general church funds). A normal subscription for the year remains at £10 (please collect your copy from the pile at the back of church each month) and saves you £2 over the year. If I post your copy the

cost is £20, and if you have an email copy the cost is £5, both for the year. Please pass on the money to Rachel direct, cash or cheque payable to **Astbury PCC**. Or post your cheque to me and I shall pass it on to Rachel.

If you have something which you would like to contribute, an article or photo, do please send it in (preferably by email to me at [wbbtov@gmail.com](mailto:wbbtov@gmail.com) so that I can simply copy and paste it). Articles printed represent the view of the contributors only and are unedited, apart from the correction of typos &c.

Astbury Ladies' Fellowship: As it had been decided to suspend all Astbury church services until Palm Sunday (29th March), it was decided that the February and March Fellowship meetings would be open to all church members and would start with Communion at 12.30 pm. So on 18th February Rev Heather, aided by Assistant Priest Steph and Reader Bev led a special service for Ash Wednesday in Astbury Village Hall.

Members enjoyed the service and I do hope that those who had been unable to attend are soon feeling better. Anita and her team made that ever-welcome cup of tea while everyone chatted. Pamela Price gave out some notices – (Carole had gone to the matinee performance of Shen Yun in Hanley, a Christmas present)

On Friday 6th March the World Day of Prayer Service will be held at St Mary's Roman Catholic Chapel at 10.30 am. The service is written by the Christian women of Nigeria and the theme is 'I will give you rest. Come.' The next Fellowship meeting will be on 18th March, and will again be an open meeting starting with a Communion Service at 12.30 pm. Our speaker will be Kath Reynolds – always excellent – on the subject of Sweets.

There will be a concert on Saturday 18th April to celebrate the opening of the church (and a fundraiser) at 7.00 pm in the church, when we shall be entertained by the Little Moreton Singers. If you have heard them at Biddulph Old Hall you know what a treat that will be. There will be wine, soft drinks and nibbles. Tickets are £15 each (in cash, please) and can be obtained from Jane Sharman, available

every Sunday morning after 10.30 am at Foxfield House (fourth from the church).

Astbury members continue at present to join the 10.00 am service at St John's Smallwood, where a warm welcome awaits. Their Blessing of the Plough service will take place a 10.30 am in Smallwood Village Hall: we shall look forward to seeing you there. Astbury May Day will be on Saturday 16th May this year. The Fellowship is running the plant stall again, so I hope members will be taking cuttings in preparation. A busy year ahead with plenty going on. I look forward to seeing you, and I hope we are all keeping well.

PS – The Chinese dancers were amazing, mime-dancing stories from Ancient China. Do go and see them if you have the chance.

Carole

Astbury Women's Institute: No report owing to Kate's being ill. Get well soon!

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Sartor's Quiz (Answers on page 17)

1. Which Roman made the ancient city of Tarsus in Asia Minor the capital of the Roman province of Cilicia? a. Pompey; b. Augustus; c. Julius Caesar; d. Mark Antony.
2. It was also the birthplace of which famous convert to Christianity? a. St Mark; b. St Luke; c. St John; d. St Paul.
3. Where was he going when he was converted? a. Jerusalem; b. Jericho; c. Damascus; d. Rome.
4. Who tried to seduce Joseph? a. Potiphar's wife; b. Lot's wife; c. Jezebel; d. Bathsheba.
5. In which land did Moses die, and was buried? a. Israel; b. Judah; c. Edom; d. Moab.
6. Who travelled with Paul on one of his missionary journeys? a. Barnabas; b. Dorcas; c. Peter; d. Andrew.

7. When Paul wrote a letter to Titus, where was Titus supervising the churches? a. Athens; b. Corinth; c. Crete; d. Thessalonica.
8. More than how many different kinds of cheese are made in France? a. 100; b. 200; c. 300; d. 400.
9. Roquefort cheese is made from the milk of which animal? a. Cow; b. Goat; c. Yak; d. Sheep.
10. Which famous footballer was chosen by the Football Writers' Association as their player of the year in 1948 and again in 1963? a. George Best; b. Bobby Charlton; c. Tom Finney; d. Stanley Matthews.

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WORDS OF WIT & WISDOM

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Psalm 111, 10

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. Psalm 119, 105

For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you.

Jeremiah 29, 11 & 12

Ladies with typewriters in church magazines:

At the evening service tonight, the sermon topic will be 'What is Hell?' Come early and listen to our choir practise.

Eight new choir robes are currently needed due to the addition of several new members and to the deterioration of some older ones.

The church will host an evening of fine dining, super entertainment and gracious hospitality.

Potluck supper at 5.00 pm – prayer and medication to follow.

Supplied by our Canadian friend, Susan Bayley of Montreal.

Through many dangers, toils and snares  
I have already come,  
'Tis grace brought me safe thus far,  
And grace will lead me home.

John Newton (1725-1807), *Amazing Grace*

Mrs Malaprop rides again:

Old Lady: Our Cecilia wants to go on the stage, or into politics, and, so that she can talk proper, and create a big impression in interviews, she's having electrocution lessons.

Canon Chasuble: Don't you mean elocution lessons?

Old Lady: No, definitely not. It has always been her ambition to start with a bang and to end up in the bright lights.

Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer

Romans, 12, 12

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Romans 12. 2

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## FASCINATING FACTS

### Hedley Verity

Although, as a schoolboy, I played cricket in Lancashire, my hero among bowlers has always been a wonderful Yorkshireman.

Following in a great Yorkshire tradition, Hedley Verity was one of the most skilful left-arm spin bowlers in history, and his easy, springing run-up to the wicket and his sheer accuracy of length and viciousness of spin reduced the best of batsmen to uncertainty and impotence. He was a great student of the game and varied his length, pace and toss according to the state of the wicket. With Bill Bowes, he

was the pivot of Yorkshire's attack in the great Championship-winning years of the 1930s. From 1935 to 1937 he exceeded 200 wickets each season. Twice he took all the wickets in an innings, against Warwickshire at Headingley for 36 runs in 1937 and against Nottinghamshire on the same ground for 10 runs in 1932 – a world record.

Against Essex at Leyton in 1933 he took 17 wickets for 91 runs, and in his last match of all he took 7 for 9 against Sussex at Hove on 1st September 1939. He was a regular for England for 7 years, at home and abroad, and on a wet wicket at Lord's against Australia in 1934 he took 14 wickets in one day for 80 runs (15 for 104 in the match).

A kindly, thoughtful man, Captain Verity of the Green Howards died as a POW in Italy in 1943, having been wounded in an 8th Army attack in Sicily. His last reported words to his Company, 'Keep going', were characteristic of him.

Detailed information from Christopher Martin-Jenkins, *World Cricketers*, pp389/90 & E. W. Swanton, *Cricketers of My Time*, pp64-6

F. F. Bruce, former Rylands Professor of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis at the University of Manchester, at the end of his Introduction to his book, *Hard Sayings of Jesus*, quotes on page 18 the late Professor T. W. Manson, *The Sayings of Jesus*:

'The teaching of Jesus is difficult and unacceptable because it runs counter to those elements in human nature which the twentieth century has in common with the first – such things as laziness, greed, the love of pleasure, the instinct to hit back and the like. The teaching as a whole shows that Jesus was well aware of this and recognised that here and nowhere else lay the obstacle that had to be surmounted.'

We are reminded that Mark Twain spoke for many when he said that the things in the Bible that bothered him were not those that he did not understand but those that he did understand.

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## ***Astbury & Smallwood Parish News***

### **Publication & Copy Dates 2026**

Publication is on the last Sunday of the preceding month –

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

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# **EGERTON ARMS HOTEL**

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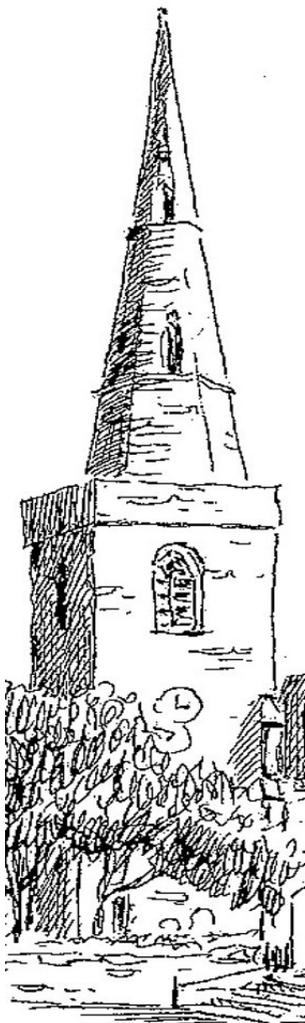
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**Registered Charity No. 1178664**

RECTOR		Rev Heather Carter		01260 702512
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
<b>SERVICES</b>	8.00 am	1st & 3rd Sundays	Holy Communion	BCP
<b>Currently</b>	8.00 am	2nd, 4th & 5th Sundays	Morning Prayer	BCP
<b>suspended –</b>	11.00 am	1st & 3rd Sundays	Morning Praise	CW
<b>see pp 19-20</b>	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

Hon. Vice Chairman	Mr A. Bevington	07957 961140
Hon. Secretary	Mrs M. Chapman	
Hon. Asst. Secretary	Mr A. Bailey	01260 640616
Hon. Treasurer		
DEANERY SYNOD	Mrs C. Goodwin, Mr A. Bailey, Mr A. Bevington	
ELECTED PCC MEMBERS	Mrs M. Armstrong, Mrs D. Barnett, Mr T. Buischool, Mrs M. Chapman, Mrs B. Cook, Mrs L. Gleaves, Mrs J. Goodier, Mr J. Hulse, Mr Trevor Massey, Dr J. Moore, Prof Denise Morrey-Carter	
CO-OPTED PCC MEMBERS	Miss P. Blythe	
SIDSEPEOPLE	see ASTBURY ROTAS	
BELL RINGERS TOWER CAPTAIN		
CHILDREN'S SOCIETY	Mrs B. Cook	
CHURCH RECORDS	Mr W. Ball	01260 279276
ELECTORAL ROLL OFFICER	Mr J. Hulse	
FLOWERS	Mrs B. Cook.	
JUNIOR CHURCH	Mrs L. Shipton, Dr J. Moore	
PARISH NEWS EDITOR	Mr W. Ball	01260 279276
ORGANIST	Dr S. Drage	01260 270217
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](http://www.astburychurch.org.uk)

CHURCH KEYS ARE AVAILABLE FROM THE CHURCHWARDENS

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*

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ASTBURY ROTAS

8.00 am

11.00 am

6.30 pm

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Answers to Sartor's Quiz this month (page 8)

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

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FROM THE REGISTERS

*Holy Matrimony*

*Burial of the Dead*

Feb	12th	Ina Lomas	96
Feb	13th	Russell Aubrey Gibson	90

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## JOINT PARISHES CALENDAR FOR THE COMING WEEKS

### MARCH

<b>Sun</b>	<b>1st</b>	<b>LENT II</b>		
		10.00 am	Smallwood	March <i>Parish News</i> published
Wed	4th	7.30 pm	Astbury	Holy Communion (CW)
Sat	7th	2.30 pm	Smallwood	Women's Institute
				Troublesome Reeds Concert

<b>Sun</b>	<b>8th</b>	<b>LENT III</b>		
		8.00 am	Smallwood	Holy Communion (BCP)
		<b>10.30 am</b>	<b>Smallwood VH</b>	<b>Plough Service</b>

<b>Sun</b>	<b>15th</b>	<b>LENT IV – Mothering Sunday</b>		
		10.00 am	Smallwood	Holy Communion (CW)
Wed	18th	1.30 pm	Astbury VH	Ladies' Fellowship
Fri	20th	6.00 pm		Copy date for <i>Parish News</i>

<b>Sun</b>	<b>22nd</b>	<b>LENT V</b>		
		10.00 am	Smallwood	Morning Praise
		6.30 pm	Smallwood	Evensong (BCP)

<b>Sun</b>	<b>29th</b>	<b>PALM SUNDAY</b>		
		11.00 am	TBA	April <i>Parish News</i> published
				Benefice Service

### APRIL

<b>Sun</b>	<b>5th</b>	<b>EASTER DAY</b>		
		8.00 am	Astbury	Holy Communion (BCP)
		9.30 am	Smallwood	Holy Communion (CW)
		11.00 am	Astbury	Holy Communion (CW)
		2.30 pm	Somerford	Holy Communion (BCP)
		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](mailto:wbbtov@gmail.com)

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

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## CONCERT IN AID OF ASTBURY CHURCH

Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> March 2.30pm

# 'TROUBLESOME REEDS'

Charmian Baskeyfield (oboe)

Rachel Durber (oboe)

Elizabeth Cuttell (cor Anglais)

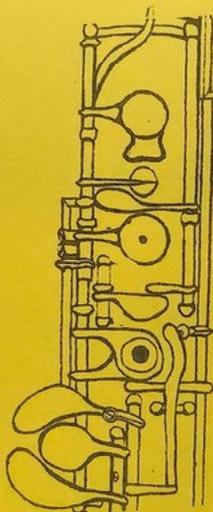
'A Musical Miscellany from across the Centuries'

Dance of the  
Sugar Plum Fairy  
Tchaikovsky

Colonel Bogey  
K. J Alford

Trio in F  
Pössinger

Mini - Suite  
Allan Stephenson



Cradle Song  
J.S Bach

Flower Duet  
Delibes

Scherzo  
Schubert



St. John the Baptist Church,  
Church Lane,  
Smallwood. CW11 2YH

Free admission : Donations in support of  
St. Mary's Church, Astbury appreciated

Please join us for tea/coffee and cakes after the concert