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# St Helen's Church

Ashby-de-la-Zouch

Loving God, Loving Others, Loving the World



# Parish Magazine

July 2024

# WELCOME FROM THE EDITOR



Hello and welcome to July's parish magazine.

There is plenty to read about this month—please do make a note of all the opportunities we have to come and join us over the summer as there is a lot on over the coming weeks. Most notably, perhaps, we will be hosting a confirmation service on Sunday 14th July—please do pray for all the candidates as they prepare for this and as they continue to grow in their faith after the event.



Donations can be left in the boxes at the back of St Helen's Church, in the porch of Holy Trinity or the Congregational Church, or at any of Ashby's Co-ops. Thank you to everyone for the continued support.

As in previous years, the magazine will break for the summer meaning the next edition will be out for September. The deadline for this will be the 20th August so please be having a think about whether there is anything you could contribute. I am looking to introduce more regular columns to the magazine after the summer, so if you have any ideas for this then please do get in touch.

Wishing you all an enjoyable July and August,  
Emily

## St Helen's Church is part of the **Ashby Churches**

Alliance Church	07753 679147
Ashby Baptist Church	01530 413721
Ashby Congregational	01530 563301
Ashby Methodist Church	01530 412298
Holy Trinity	01530 412339
Our Lady of Lourdes	01530 412237

## FROM THE MINISTRY TEAM

I wonder if you know that the Church of England has a ‘Bishop for Sport’? Well, it does, and it’s the Bishop of Derby, the Rt Rev Libby Lane.

I write this on the day when the English football team plays Slovenia in the Euro 2024 competition. By the time you read this article, that game will be ancient history. It’s only a game, I hear some say. It may only be a game, but judging by the way the fans have travelled to Germany in support, and the TV schedules have been altered to accommodate the matches, you might be forgiven for thinking football is far more than a game. Some might even say that sport has replaced religion as the new source of identity and belonging.

This is a summer of sport: the Euros, then Wimbledon, and finally the Olympic Games, to be held in Paris from July 26 – August 11, 2024. “Paris 2024 wants sports values to become a key part of people’s lives and to prove that we can achieve excellence while also championing sustainability.” So say the organisers on the website.

But what are ‘sports values’? My mind goes back to another Paris Olympiad, the games of 1924, and a famous Scottish athlete, Eric Liddell, whose story is told in the film ‘Chariots of Fire’. He gained fame for refusing to run in the heats for the 100 metres because they were held on a Sunday, opting rather to preach at the Scots Kirk in Paris. So he chose to run in the 200 and 400 metres respectively. He won a bronze medal in the former, and the gold medal in the latter with a world-beating time of 46.7 seconds. Soon after university studies in Edinburgh he joined the London Missionary Society and served in China the land of his birth, until his death aged only 45.

For Liddell, his sincerely held Christian convictions took precedence even over ‘sports values’. It was as simple – and as costly – as that. For him, Sunday was ‘the Lord’s Day’, the day on which Jesus rose from the dead. No matter that he forfeited the goodwill of his team mates; that he let down fellow members of the relay team; that personal glory as the fastest sprinter in the world eluded him. He would not let anything keep him from honouring God. Would you be as willing to stand up for your Christian convictions? Would I?

## Olympic values

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) defines the three Olympic values as follows:

**Excellence** - someone doing the best they can, in sport and in life;

**Friendship** - using sport to develop tolerance and understanding between all people;

**Respect** - having consideration for oneself, others and the wider environment.

These values still hold, but there has undoubtedly been a shift in society. Sport has always been an important part of public school life and education generally, but it is only since the 1960's that Sunday has become a sports day rather than a church-going day. What is a Christian to make of this shift? It is a challenge for parents of sporty children and equally a challenge for any adult who enjoys sport. And it is a challenge many athletes face in these days of social media comment. Witness the criticism of England coach and his team. Sport is a serious business!

Given the shift away from 'keeping Sunday special', how are we to respond? On the one hand, Christians see the positive benefits of sport, and endorse the Olympic values listed above. But we also deepen these purely horizontal values by adding the all-important vertical dimension. It's what makes the difference between a club and a Christian community; between a group of friends who enjoy the same thing, and a fellowship of faith which God has called into being and which exists to worship Him and hold each other to the highest.

The challenge, in this summer of sport, for all of us who seek to honour God, is to work out – individually and corporately – how best to honour Him, while at the same time seizing the opportunities that sport presents. For as Bishop Libby says, “.... sport may be a way of growing the Kingdom of God for the Church. It may also be a way of building relationships with those people which means there are opportunities to share the gospel.”

**Sue Brown**

## HAVE YOU HEARD ABOUT... OUR TEAM OF PASTORAL VISITORS?

June the 23<sup>rd</sup> saw the culmination of a long journey to establish a team of pastoral visitors at St Helen's church. It began some months ago with 'pastoral care' as an agenda item at one of the PCC meetings. Several people felt there was a need to formalise the procedure for visiting members of our church family who for whatever reason are in need of support.

A number of us volunteered for this role and following a process of safer recruitment, we met for the first time in April. There it was decided that we would function as a team and respond to requests for visits as a team, working in pairs and observing the Church of England safeguarding requirements. Our key responsibilities will be the visiting of parishioners who are housebound, disabled or elderly, ill or recovering from illness or surgery or those who live in residential care or who are in hospital. In addition we will visit those who have been recently bereaved if they so wish. Regular meetings will be held to iron out any issues that may arise as we move forward and we are to wear identity badges while we are working on behalf of the church.



### **Members of the Pastoral Team.**

Front row (l to r): Mo Clark, Adrienne Sedgman, Caroline Millward

Back row: Shân Dyer, The Rev Sue Field, Eileen Coombs

And so to June the 23<sup>rd</sup> when the team was authorised during the morning service. We agreed that we feel called and equipped by God's grace for the ministry of a pastoral visitor. The congregation was asked to prayerfully and lovingly support us in

our work and finally we were presented with our lanyards that hold our identity badges for visits.

Please continue to pray for us as we begin this new ministry at St Helen's and should you be aware of anyone who might benefit from such support, please speak to one of our team.

Shân Dyer

## MESSY CHURCH

We thoroughly enjoyed exploring the story of Jacob's ladder at Messy Church this month!

Reverend Sue has also invited us to her garden - 3 Upper Packington Road, Ashby, LE65 1EF for a **Messy Church picnic on 28th July at 3:30pm.**

**SAVE THE DATE!**

See you there!!!



Pat Stafford

THE CHURCH  
OF ENGLAND



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reflections and prayers

## COMPASSIONATE AND WELL INFORMED

Well, I got myself into a very tricky situation recently, when I ignored my husband's advice and responded to a simple request from one of our parliamentary candidates on Facebook.

The question was simply:

'What would you like to see from this election?

My response - innocuous enough, I thought - was:

'I would like to see a compassionate and well-informed discussion about immigration.'

A reply was swiftly given (not from the candidate, I hasten to add)

'If you love them all so much, why haven't you taken them in?'

Followed, shall we just say, by a great deal of inaccurate information (and that's putting it very kindly!) about the way asylum seekers are treated to a luxurious lifestyle, courtesy of the UK taxpayer.

My comment before signing out?

'I asked for a well-informed and compassionate discussion. Which part of that request do you disagree with?'

Whatever your political allegiances, I know that I don't need to ask members of the Flagstaff team of churches for *compassion* and I thank you all for your generosity in responding to my past appeals on behalf of Loughborough Town of Sanctuary: for hats, scarves and gloves for adults; Christmas gifts for children; and more recently for donations towards football boots for young asylum seekers.

By the time you read this article, the results of the election may well have been declared, but in any case, this magazine is not the place for me to 'get on my soap box' as Mike would describe it - or barrage you with my own political views! In my next offering though, I will tell you more about our current attempts at LToS to extend compassion to those asylum seekers we have come to see as friends - and I might well ask for your assistance!

On the other aspect of my ill-advised request on Facebook, however, I

probably can help!

In amongst the unhelpful rhetoric and insult-trading that so often seems to masquerade as 'debate', it is often more difficult to be *well informed*.

I recommend two sources of balanced and properly researched information: the House of Commons Library website and the Oxford University Migration Observatory.

[Asylum statistics - House of Commons Library](#)

[Migration Observatory - University of Oxford Migration Observatory](https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk)<https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk>

Happy (?) reading - and please join me after the election in praying for both aspects of my request!

Let's hope our new government will be both compassionate and well-informed!

**Pat Stafford**

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# Journey in Faith Course

## What is the Journey in Faith Course?

A 3 term course that provides the time and space for people to:

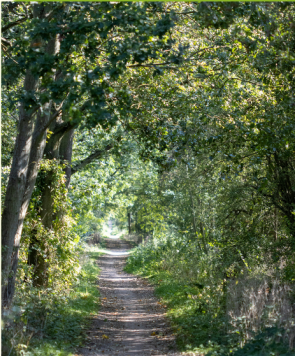
- Grow in their knowledge of the Christian faith
- Deepen their relationship with God
- Explore how to live out faith in the whole of life

## Who can join?

It is open to anyone—there is some reading to do between sessions but you don't need to have done any studying before.

## What does a previous participant say?

"If you want to know more about yourself and your Christian faith, then JiF is the course for you. You'll be welcomed and challenged, affirmed and changed, and you'll definitely be glad you came."



## Course Details

### Introductory Session

Saturday 28th September

9.30-12.30 at St Martin's House

Tuesday evening	St Mary's, Barwell
Wednesday evening	St Hilda's, East Goscote
Wednesday evening	St Mary's, Nanpantan
Thursday evening	St Andrew's, Aylestone
Thursday evening	Framland



Please consider a donation of £40 per term to cover course costs

## How do I join a course?

For more information email:  
[liz.rawlings@leicestercofe.org](mailto:liz.rawlings@leicestercofe.org)

To book a place:  
visit the Hub or follow the link  
[Journey in Faith course \(JiF\)](#)  
[The Hub Diocese of Leicester \(anglican.org\)](#)



## St Helen's Church & Heritage Centre



As part of the  
**National Festival of Archaeology**  
this year at St Helen's our events will be:

### **Guided Tour of St Helen's Church** **Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> July at 2 pm**

- Learn more about this Grade 1 listed 15th Century church, its history and some of its people.
- Find out about its close connections to royalty.
- Discover its links to the early Puritan movement in England.
- See the only pilgrim memorial in England and a very rare finger pillory

### **Guided Tour of St Helen's Churchyard** **Monday 15<sup>th</sup> July at 2 pm**

- A brand new tour, not to be missed.
- Hear about some of the Ashby personalities of centuries gone by who are buried here.
- Learn from the grim report of the Board of Health in 1849.
- Listen to the tale of the bodysnatchers.
- Find out when the gravestones were laid flat - and why.

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[www.sthelensashby.net](http://www.sthelensashby.net)



# CONNECTIONS– A PROGRAMME OF REFLECTIVE SESSIONS

How often do you hear loved ones, friends, colleagues, even passers-by complain of time “flying”; of the endless challenge of juggling too many tasks in multiple roles; of the need for more hours in the day? How often do you make the same complaints?

Over the next 5 months, through the period of the church calendar called “Ordinary Time”, we’re going to run a programme of reflective sessions and activities that are intended to help us to spend time in God’s presence and to “connect” – with God, with Ourselves, with Others and with Creation.

Some will follow a traditional “quiet day” format, some will offer activities to help quieten our busy minds. We hope that all who come will find them a time when they feel God’s presence and may leave them feeling energised and refreshed.

The current plan is for the following sessions:

## **Wednesday 31<sup>st</sup> July 7.30 – 9.30 p.m. The Feast Day of Ignatius of Loyola**

A session to introduce and try out the principles of Ignatian spirituality. This session will be led by Debbie Challenor, a Spiritual Director in Leicester Diocese, a member of the team of Spiritual Directors at St Bueno’s, the Jesuit Spirituality centre in North Wales and a member of the Iona Community.

## **Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> August 1.30 – 4.00 p.m. Mary**

An afternoon of craft-based activities exploring the theme of Mary (the Feast of the Assumption is a few days later). A sort of “Messy Church for Grown Ups”.

## **Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> September 9.30 a.m. – 12.30 p.m. The Return of the Prodigal Son**

Henri Nouwen day is later in the month. A chance encounter with a reproduction of Rembrandt’s “The Return of the Prodigal Son” led Nouwen on an unforgettable spiritual adventure – might it do the same for us?

**Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> September – 1.00 – 4.00 p.m. Marking the Autumn Equinox**

A guided walk in Charnwood Forest to mark and reflect on the Autumn Equinox which follows a few days later.

**Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> October 9.30 a.m. – 12.30 p.m. Getting the Balance Right**

As we come to the end of National Work – Life week, a session to explore how we might “better” balance the multiple calls on our time and take time for ourselves too.

**Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> November 9.30 a.m. – 12.30 p.m. A Call to Obedience**

A session marking the feast of St. Hilda of Whitby.

I hope that there is something in there to appeal to most of you. You don't have to attend every session – though I hope some of you may want to! – please feel free to dip in and out as your interest, and diary, leads you.

I also hope that you'll feel comfortable inviting anyone you think might enjoy or benefit from coming along. All are welcome.

To make organising the events more straightforward, if you are interested in taking part, could you please speak to Andy Smith, or email him ([mailformrsmith@changesmith.solutions](mailto:mailformrsmith@changesmith.solutions)) or call / text him on 07896519807 to register your interest?

I look forward to walking alongside you.  
Yours In Christ

**Andy Smith**

“You do not need to work to become spiritual.  
You are spiritual; you need only to remember that fact.  
Spirit is within you. God is within you.”

*Julia Cameron*

# FAITH INSIDE THE PRISON SYSTEM

Here is part one of the testimony of Bob, who has been a friend of Pam and David Watson for many years. To be continued in the next edition.

“My name is Bob and I am a Christian. It feels good to say that right at the beginning. This real life story is just a small part of my life, but along with something else that happened to me a few years earlier, just shows me how wonderful and indeed powerful the Holy Spirit is if you believe.

I was a peer mentor in the multi-skills workshop helping the instructor to teach the students the practical and theoretical work. Moreover, I helped the students who had problems with English or Maths to improve their skills and do the paperwork required to pass the qualifications undertaken in the workshop. I had been in the workshop since February 2020 as a student and then the Orderly and finally the peer mentor. I really enjoyed working with the students helping with whatever they were struggling with and the instructors to prepare for new students and learn the coursework they were going to teach.

Due to various problems, the workshop had gone through 4 instructors in 9 months, which was not ideal for me or the students. The turnover of students was even higher as they could not get started or settled, especially those with additional mental health problems. In between one instructor leaving and the next starting, there were often weeks when the workshop was closed. The new instructor would have skills but would never have taught the qualifications or indeed taught before. Consequently, the students were getting irritated, bored and some moved on to another job.

On the 17th July 2023 a new tutor started who had never worked in a prison environment before and was in the workshop with no prison training on anything. This included not having his own set of keys and radio, along with the correct radio procedures for various reasons including what to do in an emergency situation. This included pressing the alarm button on the radio and giving the correct code for help and/or pressing the alarm button on the wall in the office. As he was untrained by the prison, and by the education provider for the prison, he had a chaperone who was the deputy manager of the education department and had worked in two previous prisons, so would have known the correct procedures to follow in any given sit-

uation. As the morning progressed, the tutor started by talking about health and safety in the workshop which one of the students had heard a couple of times before and were moaning about having to hear this all again. They just wanted to get on with some practical work. But the new tutor had no clue about where each student was in their learning journey, or what each module of each of the 4 courses that were taught in the workshop included. He needed time to read it all up and learn where each student was. As the morning progressed it was clear that the new tutor was struggling with everything and most of the students sensed this and their unhappiness at the situation.

In the afternoon the new tutor had found out where some of the students were and started to give them work, I was helping one of the students with some of his paperwork. The workshop seemed to be settling down as the tutor started to talk to the students that were left. One of the students that had been given a task to do came over to me and asked for some help with the task, which was to complete wiring up a domestic electrical ring main from the fuse box to two double plug sockets and back to the fuse box. I went through the task step by step making sure he understood before moving on to the next part. He seemed happy with that but he was stuck with one concept. The fuse box was represented by a block of wood and the whole wiring was not connected to the mains electrical supply. He wanted to know why. He argued that it should be a real fuse box and be properly connected but I knew that this was partly for cost and partly so that nobody was electrocuted. So I explained this to him but he became fixated on the fact that the fuse box was a block of wood....

A prayer request from Pam, on behalf of Mark:

‘Our dear friend Mark, whom some of us remember from his Ashby and St Helen’s visits 30 years ago and at David’s funeral, faces another Parole Board on 1st August. Please will you pray for Mark, particularly as he is having to get to know, and be known by, a new outside Probation Officer. And for the Parole Board members as they peruse his case files, and for the professionals involved as they prepare to discuss their cases for/ against what we are hoping for– which is ‘direct release’ to Leicestershire. There is a guide to such prayer available in print on the church welcome desk.

Thank you and God bless you,

## OUR WORSHIP IN JULY

	am	pm	Wednesday
<b>1<sup>st</sup> Sunday</b> 7th July		<b>3.30pm</b> All-Age Worship <b>6pm</b> Evensong + Soiree	1st Wednesday-3rd Holy Communion 10.30am In Church
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday</b> 14th July	<b>10.30 am</b> Holy communion with Baptism and Confirmations		2nd Wednesday- 10th Holy Communion 10.30am Prior Park Community centre
<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday</b> 21st July	<b>10.30 am</b> Morning worship	<b>6pm</b> Hymns and Pimms	3rd Wednesday-17th Morning prayer 10.30am In church
<b>4<sup>th</sup> Sunday</b> 28th July	<b>10.30 am</b> Holy Communion	<b>3.30pm</b> Messy Church at the rectory	4th Wednesday- 24th Holy Communion 10.30am In church
			5th Wednesday- 31st

### Regular activities:

- Monday mornings - Little Fishes 9.30 - 11.30am during term time
- Mondays - Monday Group – 8pm
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday - PCC meeting – 7 till 9pm
- 1<sup>st</sup> Wednesday - Knit and natter – 2 till 4pm
- Thursdays - Choir practice – 6.30 till 8.30pm
- Fridays - Heart- warming Space 1-4pm
- Saturdays - Parish Prayers – 9.30am in the Hastings chapel

# **DATES FOR YOUR DIARY// JULY**

- **SUNDAY 7TH JULY– SUNDAY SOIREE WITH TESSERAE 6-8PM**

Join us for evensong, sung by St Helen's choir, followed by a recital from female vocal quartet Tesserae performing a programme of madrigals, spirituals, folk songs and barbershop. There will be a short break in between for refreshments.

- **TUESDAY 9TH JULY– HERITAGE TALK 'LEICESTER CATHEDRAL REVEALED'- 7.30PM- £4**

Join archaeologist Matthew Morris as he talks about Leicester Cathedral's recent excavations and what they tell us about Leicester and the lives and stories of its people over the last 2,000 years. Matthew Morris has spent much of his career digging up Leicester and, in 2012, he supervised the successful search for the lost grave of Richard III. This event is part of the National Festival of Archaeology.

- **SUNDAY 14TH JULY– DEANERY BAPTISM AND CONFIRMATION SERVICE– 10.30AM (AT ST HELENS)**

Join us as we celebrate and encourage those being baptised and confirmed this morning by the Bishop of Loughborough. Followed by a celebratory BBQ in the heritage centre.

- **SUNDAY 21ST JULY– HYMNS AND PIMMS– 6PM.**

Please see the article on page 20 regarding this enjoyable evening– an opportunity to join together for some of our most loved hymns with refreshments.



# FROM THE ALBUMS



# ASHBY YOUTH FOR CHRIST

If you would like to sign up for regular updates either follow this link <http://eepurl.com/dvVgrj> or email [helen.davis@yfc.co.uk](mailto:helen.davis@yfc.co.uk). Alternatively you can scan the QR code.

Thank you for all your prayers and support.



## **Rock Solid:**

This term we have seen an encouragingly steady number of attendees each week, with lots of them also joining us for our outdoor adventures. To mark the longest day of the year, we headed to Bardon Hill with 18 young people who all had fun improvising games, finding mud, alarming the wildlife and chatting as they walked. Several members of Rock Solid will be joining us as we head to Castle Head— a CPAS Christian summer camp in late August. Please do pray for them, that this would be an opportunity to realise God’s love for them more deeply and to enjoy all the benefits of outdoor adventure.



## **Sk8ers:**

By the time you read this, some of Sk8ers young people will have completed a sponsored stand up paddleboard to raise money for AYFC. Several of the young people who attend the club are school non-attenders due to their behaviour and so we are so proud of the ways they have stepped up to new challenges this year and really shown us what they’re made of.

# HYMNS AND PIMMS

My dear friends,

Sir John Betjeman wrote that “Hymns are the poetry of the people”.

Songs of Praise has been running (albeit with changes to the format) since October 1961 – over 60 years!

Clearly, for many people (including those who may not necessarily consider themselves “religious” – whatever that means) hymns evoke strong and often fond memories of growing up, or of a particular point or event in their lives.

It was for this reason that a couple of years ago we held a “Hymns and Pimms” event at St. Helen’s, and I’m delighted to report that we’re doing that again this summer – **at 6.00 p.m. on Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> July.**

It will be a time to gather, hopefully in warm evening sunshine (!) either in the Heritage Centre Garden or in the churchyard opposite the church door and sing some of our favourite hymns, then relax afterwards with a glass of Pimms (or squash, or cup of tea) and snacks in the CHC and CHC garden.

We’re still putting together the programme, but we already have a couple of wonderful hymns on the list to sing, so please do make a note in your diary, and take the opportunity to invite friends, family or neighbours, who might not want to come to a service, but might find this appealing.

Hopefully, we’ll have reverted to warm and sunny by then, and I look forward to seeing – and hearing you! – then.

Best Wishes  
**Andy Smith**



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## GARDENING TIPS FOR JULY

What are you planning to do in July? Watch the Euros, Cricket, Wimbledon, Olympics ×

Or get on with your gardening jobs ✓ - That's a no-brainer for us! July gives us a sense of fullness of Summer as the garden is in full bloom but there are still plenty of jobs to do.

Prune and reshape early flowering shrubs so that they can put on new growth this year which will hold the flowers for next year. In order to keep your perennials flowering throughout July you must continue dead-heading them. Be sure to support tall plants and climbers in the event of bad weather. Don't forget to deadhead your annuals to ensure further flowering.

Continue the never-ending garden task of weeding, even during hot July days, as it's essential to remove any competition for both water and soil nutrients.

Compost your kitchen and garden waste. Keep topping up any bird baths, ponds and water features during hot weather. Scoop out any algae and floating pond weed.

If you are planning to go away over Summer then set up an automatic watering system to look after pots, baskets, greenhouse crops and veg beds. Water hanging baskets and patio containers daily, when at home, preferably in the evening or early or late in the day.

Keep mowing lawns regularly but raise the cutting height in order to leave grass longer during dry weather. Make your final picking of Rhubarb and remove any flower spikes which start to form. Thin-out heavy crops of Plums, Apples and Pears and remove any malformed, damaged or undersized fruits. Water thirsty crops such as Celery, Beans, Peas, Courgettes and Tomatoes regularly. Peg down Strawberry runners into pots of compost to root new plants for next year. Cover Brassicas with fine netting to prevent Cabbage White Butterflies laying their eggs on the leaves.

Feed house plants once a week with liquid fertilizer and water them

regularly as the temperature and light levels increase. If you have space, and as it becomes hotter, put your house plants outside in a warm sheltered place so that they enjoy the fresh air and extra light. Check them for pests such as Aphids, Scale Insects, Thrips and Mealybugs.

July brings long warm days which continue into the evening – this is perfect for pottering in the garden, hosting BBQs, and enjoying your plant beds, borders and vegetables as they reach their peak. Now that your gardening jobs are under control why not visit some of the local village Open Garden Schemes. The Ashby Open Gardens is on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> of August this year. Tickets are available from The Toolbox and Woodlander. We are opening once again, and for any of our disabled visitors, you are most welcome to park in our drive.

**Alan and Alison Cross**

**villair**

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# JOB OPPORTUNITY



St Helen's Church

Ashby-de-la-Zouch

The Parochial Church Council seeks to employ a Parish Administrator and Communications Officer.

We are looking for someone who is an able, computer-literate administrator and good communicator to support the Team Rector and other ministers and officers in the smooth running, ministry and mission of St Helen's.

The post will be based at St. Helen's Parish Office in the Community Heritage Centre and will be for 12 hours per week at £12 per hour.

For further information and role description, please contact the Team Rector, Rev. Canon Sue Field on [flagstaffrector@gmail.com](mailto:flagstaffrector@gmail.com) or 07885 714829

Closing date for applications: Sunday 4 August  
Interviews: Monday 12 August



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## ABSCONDED!

You might think that when a person entered the workhouse in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they were there to stay, but this is not the case. Adults were free to leave at any time, as long as they gave a few hours' notice. The purpose of this was to allow their clothes, and any belongings, to be returned to them. If they walked out without notice they could be arrested and prosecuted, not only for absconding from the workhouse, but also theft of workhouse property - their uniform! This did happen from time to time and some offenders were sent to prison for a month before being returned to the workhouse.

The Poor Law Unions' Gazette published a list of absconders from workhouses across the country every week. In November 1869, only one person was listed for Ashby, Samuel Fairbrother, a coal miner who had deserted his three children in Melbourne in August 1868; the children were then in Ashby workhouse and a reward of two pounds was being offered for his apprehension.

In fact, another man, Samuel Randall, had done the same in August 1868. His wife had died in May 1868 and his five children were admitted to the workhouse on 21<sup>st</sup> August because he had deserted them. He was not listed in the Gazette until November 1872 when he was described as "supposed to be a native of Norwich, about 38 years of age, 5 feet 8 inches high, slender made, dark hair and whiskers, sallow complexion, a strong smelling skin; a tinman and brazier, whitesmith and bellhanger by trade", and a reward of five pounds was being offered for any information leading to his apprehension. Four other men and two women were also listed that week, all having absconded and deserted their children.

Randall's children spent 5 or 6 years in Ashby workhouse. Three of them were eventually taken out by an aunt at various times in 1873 and 1874, and she probably took the other two eventually as well. As soon as they were old enough, four of them found work elsewhere. The three girls became live-in servants in Leicester; one eventually became a kitchen maid in Marylebone Infirmary. John became a servant in Burton-upon-Trent and then became a soldier of the dragoon guards. Only Charles remained in Ashby and inherited his uncle's chimney sweeping business.

Samuel Randall appeared in the Poor Law Unions' Gazette again in 1873, but I can find no trace of what happened to him after that. It would seem that he never returned to Ashby and by 1881, Charles, the youngest child, was still living with his aunt and uncle in Brookside, Ashby. What about the other absconders of November 1872? Samuel Fairbrother was still being sought in August 1872 but was not listed in November of that year. No further trace on him. Walter Wallam had deserted his wife and children in December 1867 and was still being sought in 1873.

When you hear that adults were free to leave the workhouse at any time if they gave a few hours' notice, you might have wondered why anyone would choose to abscond. Sadly, the above examples make it clear that people did so in order to escape their responsibilities. The Poor Law did not allow a parent to put his or her children into the workhouse unless they themselves entered as well. There was, apparently, a provision for a man to leave for a short time to seek work and then return to collect the family but the only example of this that I know of is that of a Birmingham family in the 1940s. You may be surprised to hear that there even was a workhouse system as late as that. By then, it was no longer called the workhouse and many former workhouses had been turned into old people's hospitals. However, the Birmingham workhouse was still being run on the old Poor Law lines right up to the dawn of the Welfare State. The couple in question were interviewed in a BBC schools' history programme. They described entering the workhouse, with their children, how they were all split up and only allowed to see each other once a month. After some time, the husband climbed over the wall, but once he found work and somewhere to live, he returned to collect them. The wife described how they continued to struggle, but they managed to stay out of the workhouse. At least one happy ending!



The Birmingham Workhouse infirmary became Dudley Road Hospital. The old workhouse buildings were gradually demolished and all trace has now disappeared and been replaced by the modern Birmingham City Hospital. The old workhouse entrance survived until 2017, although derelict by then. The picture shows that entrance just before demolition in 2017. It was known as The Archway of Tears.

**Wendy Freer**



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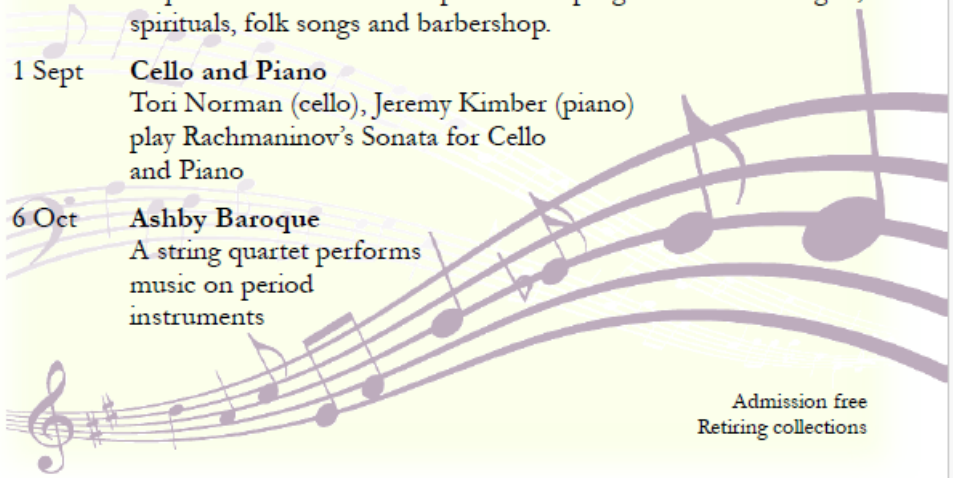


# Sunday Soirée

6pm - 8 pm

Choral Evensong sung by St Helen's choir  
followed by refreshments then a short recital by

- 5 May **Capriccio Ensemble**  
Clare Pitchford (violin), John Bean (cello), Jeremy Kimber (piano)  
play music by Haydn, Mozart, Fauré, Gershwin and Lennon/  
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- 2 June **Organ recital**  
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- 7 July **Tesserae**  
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- 1 Sept **Cello and Piano**  
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