



# St Helen's Church

Ashby-de-la-Zouch

Loving God, Loving Others, Loving the World



# Parish Magazine

January 2025

# PARISH DIRECTORY

**General inquiries: in the first instance, please contact the parish office.**

Parish office: [sthelensashby@gmail.com](mailto:sthelensashby@gmail.com) // 01530 411607

Community Heritage Building, 4 Church Yard, South St, LE65 1AA

Opening times: Monday, Wednesday, Thursday & Friday 10am - 1pm

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

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# FROM THE MINISTRY TEAM

Dear friends,

As I write this, we are just drawing to the end of 2024 and most of us will be thinking about taking down our Christmas decorations and getting 'back to normal'.

For many years, I have been fortunate enough to spend holidays on the Maltese island of Gozo. One year I was able to fly out on New Year's Eve so saw the end of the Christmas celebrations. Although, like most places in the West, there is some commercialism, there is also a lot of focus on the nativity story itself. Just above the ferry port, an area of huts have been built and this is called Bethlehem, from December until Epiphany, there are local craftsmen working and selling goods in these huts and a live nativity is performed there culminating on 6 January with the arrival of the Wise Men on horseback (who have come over from Malta on the ferry!!!).



I also attended a live nativity in one of the village squares outside the church and a lot of the villagers took part. This was very moving and it does seem that the nativity story is very firmly part of the celebration of Christmas in that area.

In our culture, we tend to include the wise men in our celebration of Christmas and forget that they belong to the season of Epiphany which is why many Cathedrals, other places of worship, and some homes, only introduce the three Wise Men on 6 January and leave nativity sets up until Candlemas, the time which marks the end of Epiphany.

The season of Epiphany is an important one and the word means



‘manifestation’ or ‘revelation’. At Epiphany we remember how Jesus was revealed to the Wise Men but these Wise Men are symbolic of Jesus being revealed to the wider world and indeed to us. These three men took considerable risks to come and visit Jesus but their trust and their actions led to a whole new understanding of God and his love for all people. When the Wise Men arrived at the stable and saw Mary and Jesus, they fell down and worshipped him. What a reaction to a newborn baby! We

don’t hear any more about them but we assume that they went back to where they had come from and told people what they had seen. Their lives had been transformed by the revelation of God’s love.

As we enter this season of Epiphany and begin a New Year, may we allow our lives to be transformed in such a way that this not only affects us but is a manifestation to those around us of the love of God in Jesus which is for all people.



With my prayers and best wishes as we begin another year together,

**Sue Field**



Ashby String Orchestra entertaining us with their Christmas concert last month.



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# GARDENING TIPS FOR JANUARY

Welcome to 2025!



Enjoy the calm and peace of January. There is not a lot to do in the garden now but there are a few jobs for the milder days in January. It used to be that late Autumn and early Winter were, “Tidy up times”, in the garden with cutting back dead perennials, sweeping leaves and tidying borders. Now the trend is more wildlife friendly with more relaxed gardening chores.

We have stopped removing dead leaves from borders as they are not the hazard they were once thought of for harbouring all sorts of pests and diseases. Only move them from lawns and ponds. If you are looking for shrubs and plants with Winter interest then here is a few to be considered. Many of them are, by necessity, tough flowering when the weather is often at its worst and they can also offer colour and scent to cheer up the January garden. Examples of these are Hellebores such as Niger and Christmas Carol, Winter flowering Honeysuckle (*Lonicera Fragrantissima*), Snowdrops, Witch Hazel, Mahonia with bright yellow flowers, Winter Heathers and *Viburnum tinus*.

Winter bedding plants need dead heading. Dead-head Viola, Pansies and Cyclamen and they will reward you with more flowers. The vegetable garden will be quiet but keep harvesting leeks and parsnips as well as

removing yellowing leaves from Winter Brassicas. Also start thinking about preparing the soil for the coming year. January is the time to buy seed potatoes and later in the month start chitting the first earlies. Keep them in a cool place and leave for the shoots to appear. The process takes around 6 weeks by which time the shoots should be around 2.5 centimetres long.

Now is the time to order seeds and plants. Ideally why not visit our local garden centres as they struggle for business at this time of the year. As January is cold and frosty for us, and our birds, now is a good time to look after our wildlife. Continue to re-fill your nuts, seeds and fat ball holders; we have certainly found that we go through a great deal more in the way of bird food throughout the Winter months. Please remember that bird baths can freeze during prolonged cold spells which deprives the birds of a much-needed source of water.

Other January jobs can include:

- Removal of perennial weeds as there is less risk of standing on other plants or damaging fresh shoots.
- Many Roses have shed their leaves so, if you had black spot during the previous Summer, it's worth sweeping up any of the fallen leaves and disposing of them.
- Protect very tender plants such as Calla Lily, Cannas and Agapanthus by moving them into a greenhouse, or covering the containers with fleece etc. This is also true for Tree Ferns and any warm-country plants.
- A mild spell in January is a suitable time to cut back Rosa Rugosa in order to remove spindly stems.

**Have a Happy and Healthy New Year!**  
**Alan and Alison Cross**

## A LIGHT IN THE WORLD

**The third in a new column highlighting the various initiatives we are connected with as a church and how being involved in these helps us to live out our faith. This month we have an additional update from Pat about donations made to Loughborough Town of Sanctuary...**

Pretty much all our recent worship emphasised the need for true generosity at Christmas and it is hard not to make links with the nativity story and the plight of refugees, even today.

So I must begin by saying a HUGE thank you for your response to our Flagstaff appeal for Christmas gifts for the children of asylum seekers in Loughborough. Another (Loughborough) church group sorted gifts for the adults and I had the following lovely message from the housing officer:

*“Just wanted to say a massive thank you for the gifts, we managed to sort out both children and parents and started to distribute them this afternoon.*

*We had lots of happy faces here!*

*Please pass the message to everyone who helped with the donations, we really appreciate what you did.”*

As for my own Christmas - of course, Mike and I were fortunate to receive some lovely Christmas gifts from friends and family - but this year I think there was one gift in particular which was very special.

You may remember previously that I have mentioned Basim\* and told you a little about his journey from a pretty horrific back-story in Chad to a new chapter of his life, now officially recognised as a refugee and living in Loughborough. He is currently supported by a Christian charity called Exaireo in a shared house, with a support worker and a programme of activities and training to help him achieve employment and independence. Meanwhile, he volunteers on our Town of Sanctuary rota for ‘meet and greet’ sessions outside the immigration centre, where his Arabic is often helpful to those reporting there and his empathy with other asylum seekers is clear. He also volunteers at the local community centre - and attends



Loughborough College ESOL classes as well as our Monday afternoon LToS English conversation sessions.

He always helps us set up for these sessions, serves tea at the break then clears away, and carries all my bags to the car, so I usually give him a lift home on my way back to Coleorton. He often asks me in for a cuppa, but I usually say that I can't stop, as Mike will be cooking the tea!

Last week, I had a message from Basim\* saying: 'Tell Mike not to cook tea tonight'. I wasn't sure why, but all became clear when I pulled up outside his home and he insisted that I come in. He has a small cooking area in his room and mainly eats food from 'Your Store' - a community organisation which offers members a weekly shop from donated items at a much reduced cost.

In his small fridge in the kitchen area, a range of ready-prepared ingredients from this source were waiting. He deftly combined rice, tuna, chick peas and spices, spooned them into two foil containers marked 'Pat' and 'Mike' and popped them into a Christmas gift bag. 'Now' he said, 'Send Mike message to heat oven and then drive quick .. but careful!' Happy Christmas!'

I don't think we have ever appreciated a gift so much - and the meal was delicious! The generosity of those who have been through so much - and still have so little is truly humbling!

**Pat Stafford**



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# FROM THE ALBUMS



The choir stalls and church, were full to the rafters for a beautiful service of Carols by Candlelight.



Members of the Mothers Union made 101 Christingles ahead of a well attended service.

Two lovely Donkeys from the Phoenix Children's foundation brought our crib service to life!





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## OUR WORSHIP IN JANUARY

	am	pm	Wednesday
<b>1<sup>st</sup> Sunday</b> 5th January		<b>3.30pm</b> All age <b>6pm</b> Epiphany Evensong	1st Wednesday– 1st Holy Communion 10.30am In Church
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday</b> 12th January	<b>10.30am</b> Holy Communion		2nd Wednesday-8th Holy Communion 10.30am Prior Park Community centre
<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday</b> 19th January	<b>10.30 am</b> Morning Worship		3rd Wednesday– 15th Morning prayer 10.30am In church
<b>4<sup>th</sup> Sunday</b> 26th January	<b>10.30 am</b> Holy Communion	<b>Messy Church</b> <b>Venue tbc</b>	4th Wednesday– 22nd Holy Communion 10.30am St Helen's
			5th Wednesday– 29th Holy Communion 10.30am

### Regular activities:

- |                           |  |
|---------------------------|--|
| Monday mornings           | - Little Fishes 9.30 - 11.30am during term time  |
| Mondays                   | - Pilgrim group                                  |
| 1 <sup>st</sup> Wednesday | - We're in stitches – 2 till 4pm                 |
| Thursdays                 | - Choir practice – 6.30 till 8.30pm              |
| Fridays                   | - Heart- warming Space 2-4pm                     |
| Saturdays                 | - Parish Prayers – 9.30am in the Hastings chapel |
| 1st Saturday              | - Pause for Paws– 10.15-12.15 at the tower door. |

# **DATES FOR YOUR DIARY// JANUARY**

## **Ashby Street Pastors Commissioning Service– Sunday 12th January– 2.30pm at Ashby Baptist Church**

A service to give thanks and pray for the work of Ashby's team of street pastors, who have now grown to 13 in number! The service will be followed by their AGM and refreshments will be served.

## **Burns Night Supper– Saturday 25th January**

Celebrate Burns Night on Saturday 25th January 2025 at 7pm  
St Helens Community Heritage Centre

Traditional Scottish haggis supper with a “Wee Dram”, Neaps & Tatties followed by a Trifle dessert. Vegetarian option available. Supper will be “Piped in” in the traditional manner. Tables will be set for 6 people . Larger tables available on request. Tickets £18.50 available form Liz smith.

## **Heritage Talk by Clare Strachan– Tuesday 28th January– 7.30pm**

‘Small things forgotten: churches and the little stories of parish life in post-medieval England’. Tickets are £4 on the door and include light refreshments.

# ASHBY STREET PASTORS COMMISSIONING SERVICE



Ashby Baptist  
Church  
Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> January  
2025  
@ 2.30pm

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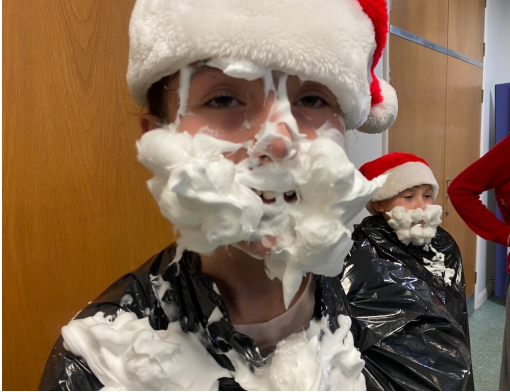
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Thank you for all your prayers and support.



## Crackerteria

Thank you from the staff of Crackerteria and from Youth For Christ in Moldova for your support. A very healthily sized team of Ashby young people waited on tables, chatted with customers and toured Ashby inviting people to join us. They very much enjoyed your company. It looked like you enjoyed theirs.



Thanks, too, to donors of baked goods, kitchen volunteers, the Baptist Church who allowed us use of their cosy building and to Storm Darragh who seemed to blow in plenty of customers.

Moldova Youth For Christ provides for the basic needs of young people in Moldova— food and shelter— as well as education and pastoral care to interrupt the cycle of poverty that leads to young people being trafficked and exploited in other ways. Your support is delightfully efficient—the price of a cup of tea wonderfully multiplies as it is translated into loving action by Moldova Youth For Christ. Proceeds from this year’s Crackerteria will allow a centre for vulnerable children to welcome, feed, educate and keep warm 20 children for 4 months.

*‘Oh, the joys of those who are kind to the poor!’*

*The Lord rescues them when they are in trouble.’*

*Psalm 41:1*

# PRIEST ROOM GANG

Back in November our youth group, PRG, celebrated Thanksgiving by hosting a meal for their family and friends. A full three course dinner was prepared by them in the heritage centre for 25 people and, although this kept them very busy, fun was had by all.

Here are some words by Hannah about the evening:

“I had so much fun making the thanksgiving meal with everyone to give to our friends and families and I enjoyed eating it all together it tasted delicious there was so much food and it was a lovely evening. Thanks Liz for organising.”



PRG also enjoyed their annual Christmas party, sharing food and reminiscing on their Amsterdam trip with enthusiastic karaoke. Thanks to Judith Lewis for helping us organise the entertainment. The PRG classic game of the tooth box challenge was played, with Annabel clinching the victory, closely followed by Hannah.

If you know of any young people who would be interested in joining PRG, they generally meet fortnightly on Thursdays from 5-6.30pm in the community heritage centre. Please contact the Parish office for more details.





**JP SPRINGTHORPE & C<sup>o</sup>**

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## 2025

Here is the new year. Normally we like a thing that's new, but a whole year is more than a thing. Unlike a specific item, a new year is surely full of possibilities. You have the option to choose how it will turn out, although it will include some good luck and some bad luck.

Have just noticed this new year is a milestone, being the end of the first quarter of the twenty-first century. Because of that, may we stay positive as we look to do new stuff.

To inspire us across the threshold of the new year, and for each of its 365 days, I've chosen a saying of Jesus that's also a promise:

*'Ask, and it will be given you;*

*Search, and you will find;*

*Knock, and the door will be opened for you.'* Matthew 7:7, NRSV.

This sounds so good you have to ask, can it be true? First we check what it means. It starts with the word 'ask' but who are we supposed to be asking? Verse 10 makes it clear – we are asking the Father, and that means the whole quote is a sort of prayer. Jesus suggests that it's up to you to make your request, to decide what to search for, and to find the door.

What is the door exactly? Here I need to step back and give you the task of working it out. The answer you come up with is entirely dependent on your situation. If I say what the door is for me, it won't help you at all. As with much of the bible, it isn't meant to be specific. You're meant to ponder it, mull it over, and bide your time. To try to restrict the words of the bible into one precise meaning is a mistake, as it isn't meant to describe a glorious piece of mechanical engineering.

Going back to the quote of Jesus, there must be a catch, for I know I cannot ask for a new Rolls Royce and a yacht on the Med. You probably guessed that too. The request has to be according to God's will, because the Lord's Prayer has the clause, '... thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.' What then to ask for? You might start by asking God, 'Can I be your friend?'

Since Jesus has already said to us, 'You are my friends,' your request is entirely reasonable. The whole bible really has one message, 'I love you,' says the Lord God. Check it out.

For example, in the parable of the prodigal son, the father sees his wayward son returning and runs out with arms wide open to meet him. Why might it be any different between us and our Father in heaven? Once you achieve friendship with God, respectfully ask the Holy Spirit what to request. Obviously there's a lot happening here, and there's no rush. Go steady, step by step, and have the patience of a saint and the determination of an Olympic gold medallist.

I'll finish by declaring my ask regarding 2025: for the Holy Spirit to pour out his blessings on the people of Ashby, whether or not we go to church.

Go well, and find joy and happiness for the whole of the New Year.

**Richard Vann**

# LOST CASTLES

I am sure that every reader of this magazine will be aware of the castle that stands right next door to St Helen's Church. However, how many of you realise that Leicestershire was once littered with castles? Of course, they were not great stone edifices like Ashby Castle, and they have left so few clues of their existence that most people won't know that they were even there. You may have guessed that Castle Donnington got its name from a castle, long since disappeared, but there were once also castles at Whitwick, Ravenstone, Shackerstone, Earl Shilton, Hinckley, Sapcote and elsewhere.

My Heritage Group, Pudding Bag Productions, has recently been working with Ashby Museum to make a series of short films (2 minutes or less) of nine of these castles. The films will form part of a temporary exhibition at the museum which will open on 6th January 2025 and run until April. The exhibition will explain more about these castles, who built them (where this is known) and how long they lasted. You will also be able to see what there is left.

These castles were built of earth and timber and were known as motte and bailey castles. Many of you will remember exactly what a motte and bailey castle was from school history lessons but for those who don't know, or can't remember, let us take a closer look. This type of castle was brought to England by the Normans when William I needed strong defensive positions to help sustain his conquest. Others were built in the 12<sup>th</sup> century during another period of trouble, about which more shortly. The motte itself was a large earthen mound, upon which was built a strong wooden tower or keep. The motte was usually surrounded by a fence and often a moat. This was the castle's last line of defence and gave defenders a significant advantage over any attackers. It would be surrounded by a fence and often a moat too.

Around the motte was the bailey, a large fenced area into which soldiers and local people could retreat for safety. The bailey would be surrounded by a strong timber fence and usually a second moat as well. The bailey would contain wooden buildings of various sorts, including



kitchens, stores, stables, possibly a chapel, barracks, and workshops. It could house and sustain local villagers, as well as soldiers, during an attack or siege and they could also bring their animals with them.

The castles that we looked at for the exhibition mostly came into existence either following the conquest in 1066 or during a period of history between 1135 and 1154 known as *The Anarchy*. When the only legitimate son and heir of Henry I died in The White Ship disaster of 1120, Henry made his daughter Matilda his heir. Despite opposition from some of the nobility, who couldn't accept the idea of a female monarch, when Henry I died in 1135, Matilda should have become the reigning Queen of England. However, before she could be crowned, her cousin Stephen of Blois rushed across from France and seized the throne. This led to a civil war and hence the term The Anarchy. It ended with the death of Stephen in 1154 and, as his son had also died, the crown passed to Matilda's son who became King Henry II. Of course, the story of The Anarchy is much more complicated than that, but suffice it to say that this period of war gave rise to hastily erected motte and bailey castles such as those mentioned above.



The picture I have included this month shows the remains of Shackerstone Castle. This is an unusual view, not normally possible as it stands on private farmland not open to the public. This photograph was made possible by a recent archaeological excavation of the village which

allowed us into the site and also cleared up a controversy over whether or not this mound was in fact the remains of a castle or merely a garden feature. It stands on land which once belonged to Gopsall Hall (now demolished). However, the archaeologists found plenty of medieval pottery in what they believe would have been the bailey of the castle, showing that there had been settlement there in the Middle Ages. They felt that it was beyond doubt that this was indeed the motte of Shackerstone Castle and the ground also showed clear evidence of a moat and surrounding earthworks. This is just one of the medieval motte and bailey castles that you can find out about at the exhibition in Ashby Museum.

**Wendy Freer**

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St Helen's Church & Community Heritage Centre

On the first Saturday of every month:

# Pause for Paws



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