

The benefice of

Astbury, St Mary

with

Smallwood, St John the Baptist





Our New Rector And Vicar

We Are Praying For Someone Who:

- Will faithfully preach and teach the word of God with enthusiasm and humour.
- Has energy, motivation and creativity to help us grow in faith, as we strive to be people of God and witness to the presence of Christ.
- Has an inclusive approach to church, ensuring that everyone is welcome by being approachable, friendly and loving.
- Has a calling to nurture the spiritual journey of our schools, drawing parents and children into the church.
- Has a modern outlook that will inspire younger people in our faith, and a willingness to embrace the needs of all ages.
- Has the ability to balance the individual needs of the parishes and to be a leader in pastoral care, with a flexible can-do approach.
- Is committed to being involved in village life and is keen to support and show empathy towards our communities.
- Will value the contribution of the volunteers in the parishes and assist the PCCs in the responsibilities of running the churches.



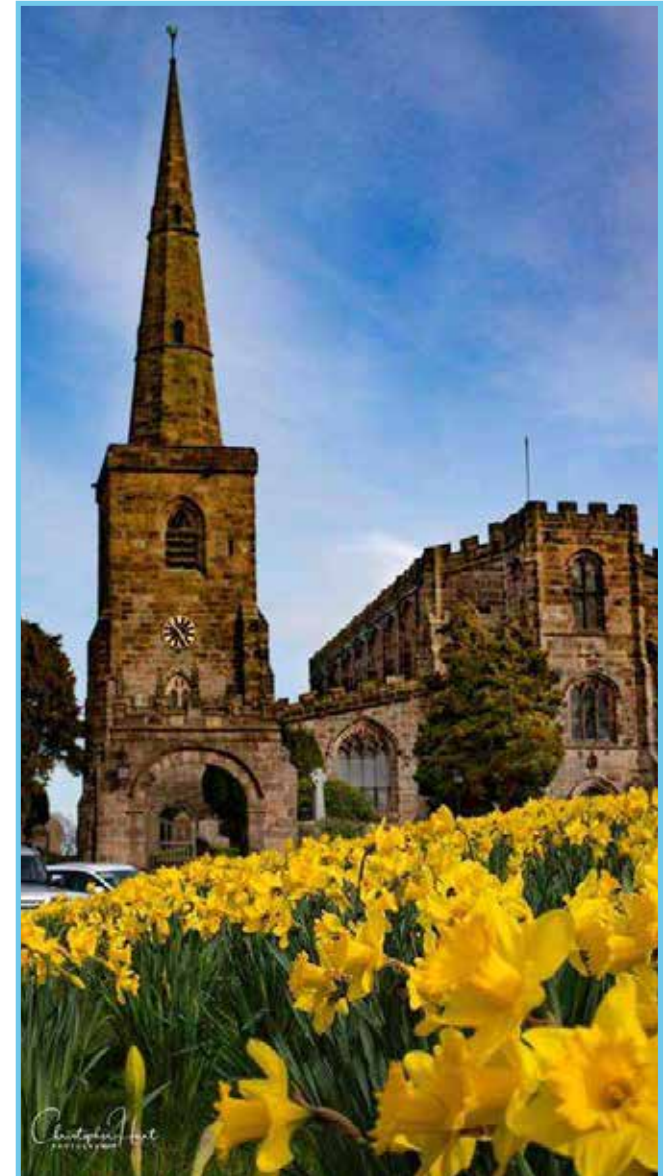
Introduction



We hope that as you read this description of our church, our parish and our vision, God may guide you to become our rector.

- We are eager to grow spiritually as disciples of Jesus.
- We want to help people grow closer to God through our worship and pastoral care.
- We want to contribute to our diocesan vision by reaching out to our local communities with the gospel message of love, hope and welcome for all.

We have purposely kept this profile brief so please do follow web links, read our parish fact sheet or see the church website astburychurch.org.uk where you can find further details.





Our Parish And Local Area

The parish of Astbury lies two miles South-West of Congleton.

- It is largely rural but new housing estates have been built within the parish, and Congleton is expanding rapidly. congleton-tc.gov.uk
- Astbury village is a conservation area with about 250 houses and 660 residents There are about 1180 people living in the wider ecclesiastical parish.
- There is still a strong farming element in the community, but people also commute to the Potteries and Greater Manchester.
- The small, nurturing village school is part of the Chester Diocese Academy Trust. There are eight more primary schools in Congleton and two high schools.
- This part of Cheshire, on the edge of the Peak District, is an attractive area in which to live and work. There are thriving local organisations to cater for all interests.





Our Church



- We share our rector with St John the Baptist, Smallwood, and Somerford Chapel.
- We are constantly vigilant about safeguarding. We stay fully up to date with Diocesan and national requirements, it is on the agenda of every PCC meeting, and we have an experienced safeguarding officer.
- St Mary's was founded in Saxon times and is the mother church of Congleton. It was built between 1150 and 1450 and is Grade I listed. Pevsner's *The Buildings of England: Cheshire* describes it as 'one of the most exciting Cheshire churches' and it is on the front cover of the latest edition.
- The churchyard around the church is still open and is supplemented by one across the A34, with burial space available for about 4 more years.
- The church is an integral part of village life. It does not have its own hall, but the village hall is nearby.
- We have well-prepared plans to re-order the church with a kitchen and toilets.



Our Chapel of Ease



- All Saints' Chapel of Ease at Somerford dates from 1725 and is Grade II* listed.
- It is in the care of our rector, and is supported by our ministry team.
- Afternoon summer services start with Easter Day communion, then evensong on the first Sunday of each month, and a Harvest evensong on the last Sunday in September.
- As access at other times of the year can be difficult, monthly winter evensongs have been held at St Mary's.
- The small, steadfast congregation is represented on our PCC and joins in our parish events.
- The Chapel is self-sufficient financially and the building is maintained in good repair.





Our Rectory



Built five years ago our rectory is a 4-bedroom, well-equipped, detached house.

- It is located on the Somerford Grove development, off Holmes Chapel Rd, Congleton, with easy access to Astbury and Smallwood.
- It is in a pleasant position at the back of the small estate.



Our People

Our congregation is drawn from all age groups.

- People travel from a wide area to attend services. There are 159 on the electoral roll, about 85% of whom live outside the ecclesiastical parish.
- We have a strong ministry team: a self-supporting assistant priest and two readers (one will be licensed in October). In addition, a member of the Smallwood congregation is about to start training as a pastoral worker and will assist in both parishes.
- We have one churchwarden at present, an able administrative support team and enthusiastic volunteers of all ages.
- We have a full, active PCC with a secretary, an assistant secretary and a treasurer. We also have an extremely efficient book-keeper.
- We have a professional and enthusiastic director of music, who is a good organist and trains our choir.



What We Are Like



Over the last four years we have become a stronger Christian community.

- We are now ready to face new challenges and go where God and our new rector may lead us.
- We want to grow our church and create more links with the local area: there is so much scope for outreach. For instance, we are part of a large farming community and there are new housing estates within the parish. Congleton High School has asked us to make closer connections with them.

- We belong to Inclusive Church and want to become more accessible to everyone.
- We do not take ourselves too seriously and we know we are far from perfect – but we do make amazing tea and coffee.





Our Worship

On Sundays:

- 11am services, with Holy Communion twice a month, are family-orientated with lay participation. Common Worship liturgy is used, and hymns and worship songs from Ancient & Modern (2013) are led by a small group of singers, accompanied by organ or keyboard. Tea, coffee and biscuits afterwards can last as long as the service.
- Services at 8am (either Morning Prayer or Holy Communion) and 6.30pm (either Evensong or Compline) use the liturgy of the 1662 Book of Common Prayer. The music at the latter is led by our robed choir, accompanied by the organ. Hymns are from Ancient & Modern (2013) and responses, psalms and canticles are chanted.
- On a 5th Sunday we usually have an 11am benefice service.



- Special services include all the major festivals. World Day of Prayer and 'come and sing' choral evensongs.
- There is a mid-week communion service on Wednesdays at 11.30, either in church or in the village hall during the winter.

- We are a popular venue for life events, when we welcome families who may not normally attend our services. In 2023 we have held 35 baptisms, 12 weddings and 21 funerals.
- Confirmations usually take place annually. This year there were 19 candidates.



- Services have been live streamed for housebound members of our congregation and for our local care home

Our Groups

- We have two home Bible study groups, one weekly and one monthly.
- We have a confidential WhatsApp prayer group, which receives many requests from outside the church.
- We run baptism exploration groups and marriage preparation as required.
- In 2023 we held a very successful Christianity Explored course, which we hope to repeat.
- The singing at 11am is led by a small informal group, and at 6.30pm there are about 8 in our 4-part, robed choir. All join together for full choral evensongs, special services and weddings.



- Our peal of eight bells is rung before the 11am and 6.30pm services, and for weddings and special occasions. The enthusiastic group of 17 ringers is sometimes joined by visitors from other local towers.



- Members of our congregation help run the Toddler Group on Wednesday mornings in the village hall, during term time, and our assistant priest visits fortnightly. There are usually about 20 children, with parents or carers.
- Our Ladies' Fellowship has 17 members. They meet monthly on Wednesday afternoons with a speaker, and assist with church events whenever possible.
- Our History Group researches the story of our church and has produced information boards for visitors.



Our School

Astburyschool.org.uk



Astbury St Mary's C of E Primary School

Walk in love as Christ loves you. Ephesians 5:2



- We have close links with Astbury St Mary's primary school, which is part of Chester Diocese Academy Trust.
- Pupils come to church for special services throughout the year and perform their Nativity play during an 11am service.
- There is a weekly community school service on Wednesday afternoons in church or school, led by our incumbent or our assistant priest.



- Members of the congregation fully support the school, reading with pupils in school and helping with May Day.
- The school was rated Good by Ofsted in 2023, and SIAMS is due before December, 2024.
- The school would like a rector who is humorous, energetic, exciting, smiley and welcoming – good at answering questions, explaining clearly about God and telling Bible stories. In particular, the children hope for someone who will be kind, not 'shouty' (but with a big voice!), and who will enjoy singing the songs they know and learning new ones.



Our Community

- We have a good relationship with St John the Baptist, Smallwood and with other local churches of all denominations. Their clergy have participated in our services.
- We take an active part in village life. For instance, with Glebe Farm, we organise a Live Nativity round the village for two nights, attended by over 400 people.
- We contribute regularly to a local food bank.
- We are part of Churches Together in Congleton.
- We help organise the World Day of Prayer and host it in rotation.
- Our Facebook page has over 600 followers.



- We have strong links with Astbury W.I. who provide our fall of poppies for Remembrance and our post box topper!

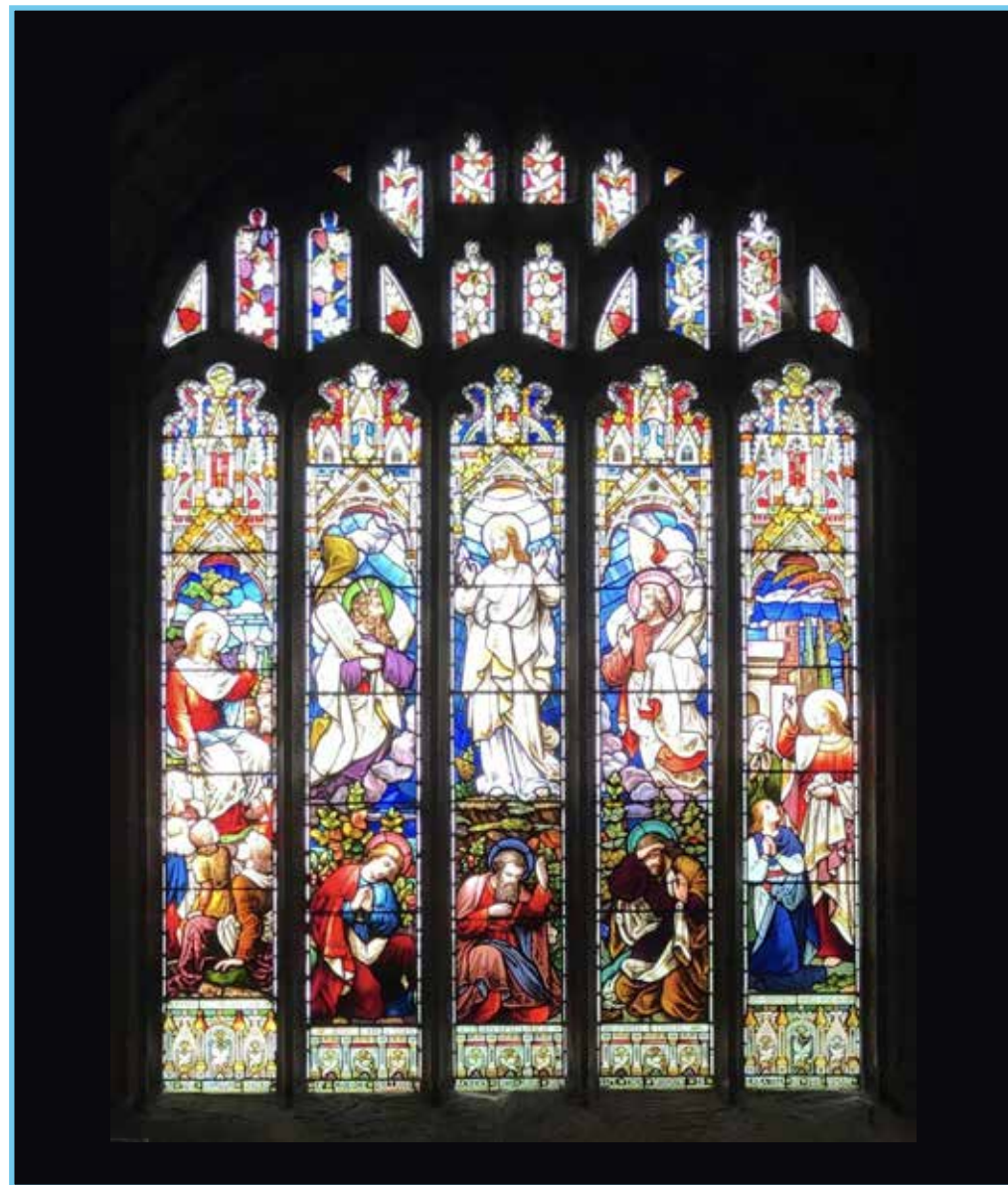




Finance And Fabric

- We are prudent with our money and exercise due diligence in our financial affairs. Our finances are currently stable.
- We usually pay our parish share in full (80% Astbury and 20% Smallwood), although this year may be difficult because of the cost of fabric repairs.
- We give monthly to the St George Foundation stgeorgefoundation.org.uk
- We hold fundraising events throughout the year.
- Following our 2023 Quinquennial report, the most important repairs are to the vestry wall and the spire. The roadside wall is being monitored for any movement. We are working closely with our architect to prioritise these.
- Plans for re-ordering are on hold until the essential repairs are completed.

Thank you for reading
our parish profile



ST JOHN THE BAPTIST SMALLWOOD

PARISH PROFILE 2024





A Warm Welcome Awaits:

A taste of Smallwood:

We think that our village is very special. The church and school are central to our community and work closely together although there is opportunity to strengthen these ties.

Smallwood is a small Cheshire village, rich in rural history and many families who live here go back many generations. Recently we have worked hard as a church and a school to develop our sense of community.

This is a wonderful time of vibrancy and positive change for our village and we look forward to welcoming a new vicar who is keen to grasp this opportunity to develop and build our community strength.

We have great hope for the future of our church: we think big even though we are small.

A warm welcome awaits someone who has the energy, drive and imagination to help us to realise the potential we know we have within our village.

Our Vision:

- To grow our congregation, welcoming all ages with enthusiastic participation in engaging, yet traditional services, drawing people to the Christian faith
- To build stronger relationships with the families of our children and encourage them to be actively involved in our Church
- To offer active pastoral care within the Smallwood community
- To develop our celebrations which enhance our church's offering within the community
- To maintain our financially strong position to ensure we can look to the future with confidence
- To further develop our connections with St Mary's



Our Parish Team:

At Smallwood we have a highly engaged and proactive PCC team which includes two Church Wardens, a Secretary, a Treasurer, an Administrator, a Safeguarding Officer and Deanery Synod Representative.

In addition, we have a group of people who take turns to read the lesson at the Sunday services, and a very able body of volunteers who offer a lot of support in maintaining the Church.

We are very lucky to have a brilliant, highly experienced organist and a very talented musician who plays all kinds of exciting music for us on one of many instruments! We also have an effective music and sound system, for other occasions which may call for recorded music to be played and a good PA system, all working with a loop system.

The church is funded by regular donations from village residents and we also operate the weekly offering envelope scheme and this is well supported.

Weekly Worship

Currently services take place at 9:30am every Sunday with Holy Communion Service on the 1st & 3rd Sunday and a Family Service held on the 2nd & 4th Sunday of each month.

Our congregation embraces a traditional service however, we enjoy creative ways and new ideas to inspire us and help to share the Word of God.

Connecting with the village

We have a well established Facebook page, purely for the Church, it currently has 78 page followers. This platform is used to promote special services within the community with content being shared to other local groups such as Smallwood Notes, Smallwood News, Smallwood Village Hall & Smallwood Events pages to ensure we reach as many individuals as possible.

Support for the Bereaved, Sick and potentially Isolated:

We are keen to build on our mission to support villagers who are sick or in need of a visit from a friendly face. We know the isolation that can be suffered in rural communities and are keen to find an incumbent who can dedicate time each week to really get to know our community; young and old.

We Love to Celebrate:

There are many occasions when our Church is used to celebrate festivals throughout the year, these special services are very well supported and we often extend invitations to the congregations at Brook House Green Chapel and Astbury, School pupils and family and village residents.

Plough Service:

The plough service is held in the school hall at the beginning of the year. This is an exciting event which includes displaying a range of farming machinery on display and organising a worm charming competition for the children. Refreshments include bacon sandwiches, cakes & biscuits and hot & cold drinks.



Mother's Day & Father's Day:

This is attended by many mother's, father's and families from the village and is an informal enjoyable service for all. A small token gift is presented to the ladies / gentlemen on the respective days.

Easter:

The Church is prepared for Easter being decorated with spring flowers. A traditional Holy Communion service is delivered, followed by the annual Easter egg hunt in the Church grounds after the service, along with hot drinks & cakes for everyone to enjoy.



Rose Queen:

The Rose Queen is chosen from pupils at Smallwood CE Academy. A crowning ceremony is held in Church each June when the queen is invested. The queen represents the Church during her reign and visits other rose queen ceremonies in the area. This is a traditional village event which stretches back over 60 years and is common to many villages in our area.



We Love to Celebrate:

Harvest:

This festival always takes place on the last Sunday in September. It is attended by children from the school via a tractor & trailer procession from the school, through the lanes and onto church, delivering wonderful harvest baskets and flowers to the front of church to be blessed during the service.

The Harvest celebrations continue the next day with a wonderful Harvest Supper held in the Village Hall. There is a small fee for adults and children eat free of charge. All members of the PCC cook & serve the two course dinner. After the supper a selection of the harvest produce is auctioned with proceeds being donated to church funds and the Rose Queen's chosen charities and the remaining donations are passed to the local food bank.



Remembrance Sunday:

For this service we are joined by members of the Royal British Legion. The retiring collection is donated to the Royal British Legion and a member of the local community plays the reveille. Refreshments are then available at the rear of the church. A member of the community (usually a child) is selected to lay the wreath on behalf of the church.



Christmas:

The PCC starts the month by delivering a customised Christmas card throughout the Parish, inviting residents to join the range of services available during the Christmas period. In addition the school children host their annual Christmas performances in church and parents and carers attend in abundance.

We serve mulled wine and mince pies at the end of the services.

We Love to Celebrate:

Confirmation

Confirmation is a regular feature hosted at Smallwood and is available to all KS2 school children from school and for adults in the village, who choose to prepare for confirmation. Our School is very keen to develop the preparation for confirmation and support our young people's first key steps in faith and would welcome the support of the new incumbent with this.

Weddings & Baptisms

We hold a number of weddings and baptisms each year both for local couples and those from nearby and their children. We offer a beautiful service in a small, warm and friendly atmosphere.



We pray for a new vicar who has the vision, enthusiasm and passion to harness this potential, to actively engage with our community and to work alongside our wonderful school, exploring new and creative approaches to developing faith in our young people.



Who we are & who our children are hoping for:

As the parishioners of Smallwood, we are really excited to be welcoming our new vicar. We are a small but really friendly and caring rural community.

Our church; St. Johns and our school; Smallwood CE Primary Academy are at the very heart of our village. They serve as the hub of the village for young and old and reflect the wealth of history and traditions that surrounds both, whilst being forward thinking to embrace change, and adapt to ensure what we offer reflects what our parishioners need from their Church:

Our pupils at Smallwood CE Primary Academy are, as always, keen to have their say and this is what their hopes are from their new vicar who:

- will respect our opinions
- will get us involved in using the church building & help us to be 'the Church'
- will come into our classrooms to discuss our beliefs with us
- will inspire us to be courageous advocates
- will reinstate story time & support a youth group
- is fun to be around, is engaging with all ages and also listens to what we have to say
- can make worship really fun & relevant for everyone

We have an established Faith & Ethos group as part of the school council. They meet fortnightly to discuss worship, courageous advocacy and school charity projects.

This year, the children have developed the school house system. The children invested a lot of thought and research into the names of each house, they chose four different Saints:

Yellow - St Philomena

Blue - St Cecilia

Red - St Sebastian

Green - St Gregory

In addition to this the children have also launched the Courageous Advocate Awards which are preseted to the children in recognition for actively demonstrating Christian values in day to day life.





Let Your Light Shine

“Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” Matthew 5:16



Our Vision

Smallwood CE Primary Academy instils the love of learning in all who enter through its doors, with our **Christian faith at the heart of everything that we do.**

Through a happy, secure, and stimulating environment, we aim to enable every pupil to **SHINE** in a rapidly changing world and to realise their full potential in life.

Skills **H**ope **I**nclusion **N**urture **E**xcellence

Our Values

Ready * Kind * Respectful * Safe

We are a Church school. We aspire to provide the foundations upon which a strong Christian faith can be built. We encourage every child to develop those personal Christian values so that they begin to understand the value of prayer, love, forgiveness and trust, as well as an understanding of and respect for other major world religions.

We are very much looking for a vicar who will visit us regularly, build a rapport with our children, support worship in school and Church and inspire and excite our young people.





Where we are today:

If you were to visit St John's on a typical Sunday, our attendance is small, usually between 12 to 18 people with a varied age range from 5 to 80. We always have an enjoyable morning worship service, followed by hot drinks with biscuits or cake. Most people stay for a chat afterwards.

We have a number of themed services throughout the year when attendance increases significantly, often seeing the church full. We are blessed with an amazing school next door who use the church regularly for worship & school productions. In addition we hold services in school such as the Plough Service and we also have a desire to expand our celebration services.

We'd love to see younger families joining our services more regularly. We recognise there are opportunities to engage with the families of our school children and would like a Vicar who is keen to lead on this.

Pastoral care in our relatively small parish hasn't been as prevalent as we would have liked it to be and although we recognise this is a time consuming service, there are people in the parish that would benefit from more contact from the Church.

Smallwood is a growing parish. Several new developments have provided the opportunity for us to share our Christian faith and we have a desire to grow.

Community is key at Smallwood and we have a super events team who organise a fantastic annual Fete for the village which is always a tremendous success with around 1000 people coming for a fun-filled family day out.



Our Finances - Dec 2023:

Gross Receipts		Ministry Expenditure	
Collection	1896	Ministry Support Fund	7147
Envelopes	4179	Parish Share	7176
Donations	9936	Insurance	1689
Fees	2256		(£16011.00)
Harvest Supper & Auction	644	Church Expenditure	
	£18911.00	Water	78
Other Income		Electricity	737
CBF Investment Income	884	Decorations & Service Expenses	1564
Sundry	158	Organ Tuning & Maintenance	305
	£1042.00	Fundraising Expenses	97
		Repairs & Renewals	1883
Total Income	£19953.00	Donations	140
		Clergy & Rectory Fees & Expenses	2499
		Bibles for School	402
		Sundry	116
			(7822)
		Total Expenditure	(£23833.00)

We have in excess of £10,000 in the bank account & we pay our Parish Share in full.