

ST MARY'S CHURCH

ASTBURY PARISH PROFILE



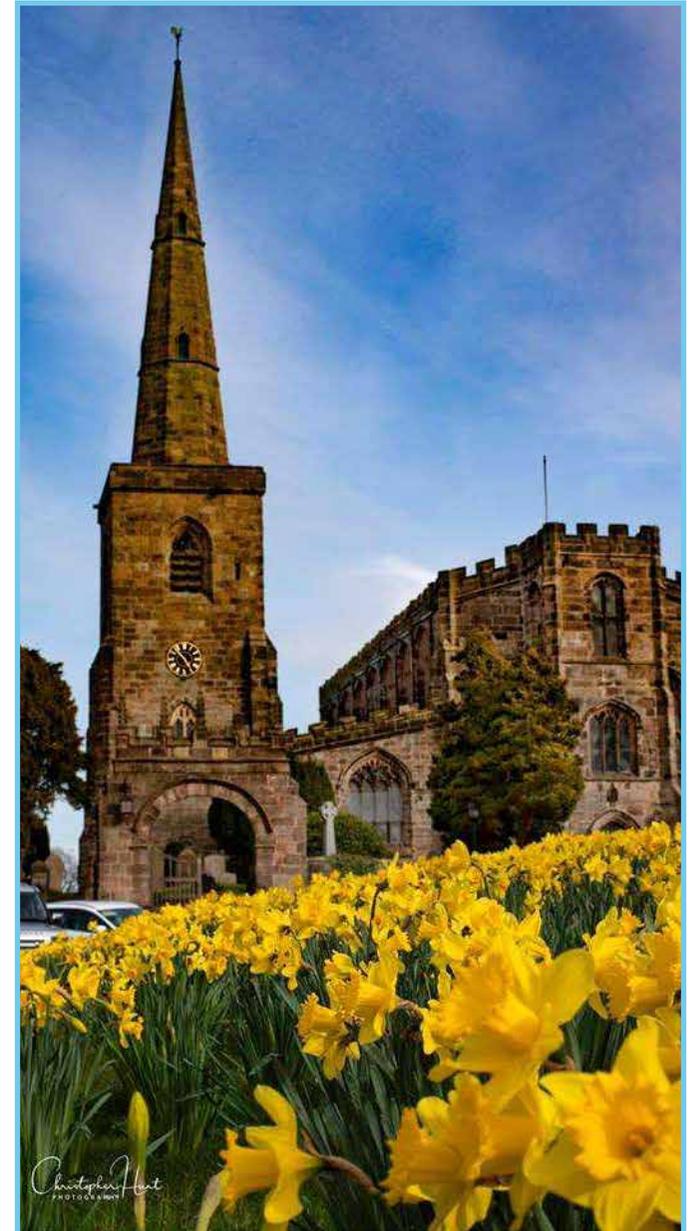
INTRODUCTION

WELCOME TO THE PARISH PROFILE OF ST MARY'S CHURCH, IN ASTBURY, WHERE WE CAN OFFER YOU THE VERY BEST OF ANCIENT AND MODERN IN YOUR CHURCH AND HOME.

We pray 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.
- We have an open-minded, welcoming congregation; faithful, committed lay leaders; and a strong PCC.
- Our beautiful, ancient church is in a picturesque village, close to Congleton – a growing market town with a lively community and good amenities.
- We share our rector with St John the Baptist, Smallwood: 80% Astbury, 20% Smallwood.

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 details of people, organisations and church history.



OUR PARISH AND LOCAL AREA

- The parish of Astbury lies two miles south-west of Congleton. It is largely rural but three new housing estates have recently been built within the parish, and Congleton is growing rapidly. congleton-tc.gov.uk



- Astbury village is a conservation area with about 250 houses and 660 people.
- 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

- 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 church is an integral part of village life. It does not have its own hall, but the village hall is nearby
- We intend to build a new kitchen, toilets and a meeting room in the near future.



- Also within the care of the rector is All Saints' Chapel of Ease at Somerford. It dates from 1725 and is Grade II* listed. (Services are only held at Christmas and monthly in summer.)



- The churchyard around the church is still open and is supplemented by one across the A34, with burial space for at least five years.
- 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 one of our churchwardens is our safeguarding officer.

OUR RECTORY

Our Georgian rectory was sold by the Diocese and has been replaced with a newly-built, 4-bedroom, well-equipped detached house on Somerford Grove, off Holmes Chapel Rd, Congleton.

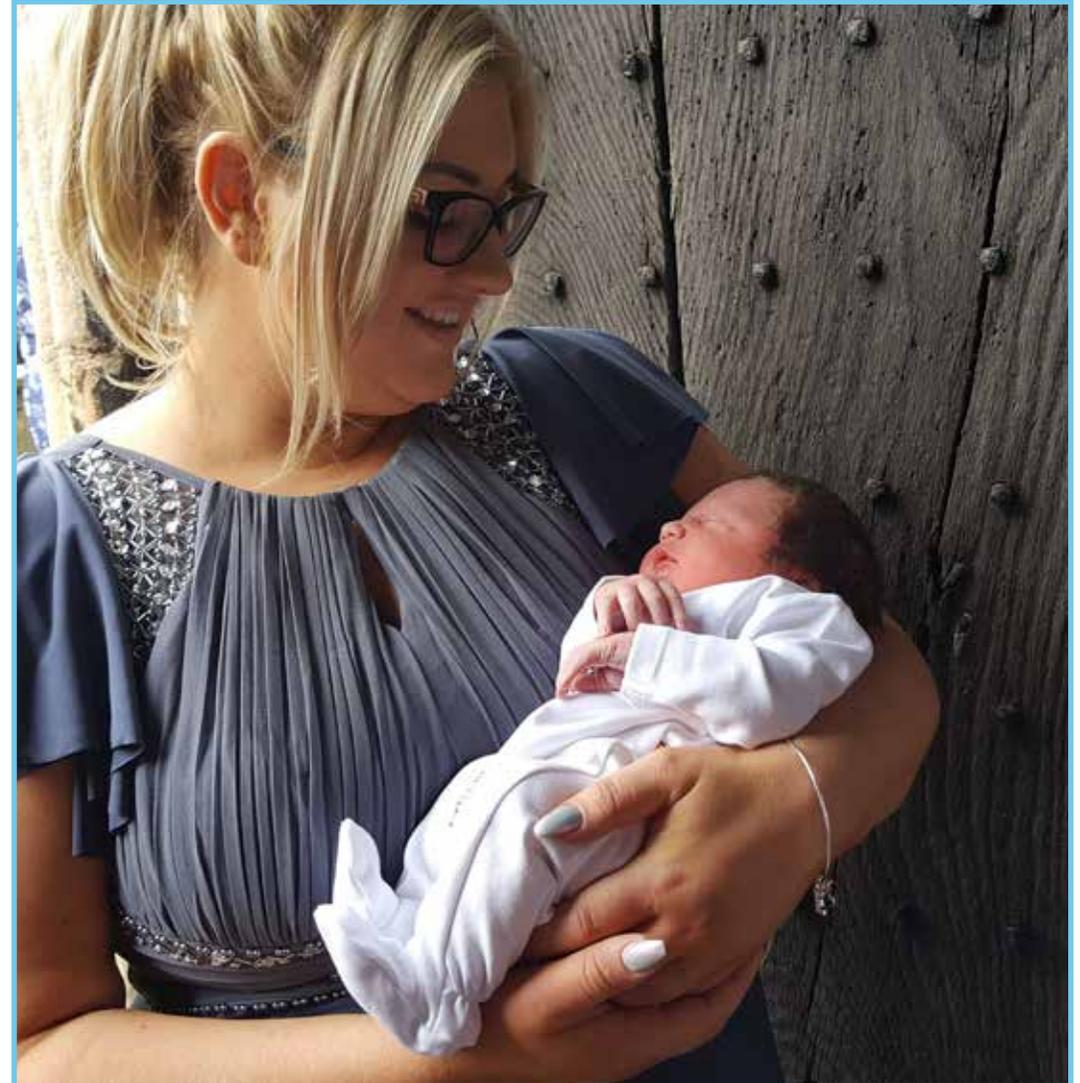
It is in a pleasant position at the back of the small Anwyl estate (design Llandrillo, plot 48), with easy access to Astbury and Smallwood.

anwylhomes.co.uk/our-developments/somerford-grove-congleton



OUR PEOPLE

- Our congregation is drawn from all age groups. The youngest was born on the morning of her aunt's wedding!
- People travel from a wide area to attend services. There are 136 on the electoral roll, about three-quarters of whom live outside the ecclesiastical parish.
- We have two dedicated churchwardens and four deputy wardens.
- 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, trains the choir and has started recruiting junior choristers from Astbury primary school and the local high school.



WHAT WE ARE LIKE

In a recent questionnaire, our congregation described themselves as **friendly** and resilient, and our church as **spiritual** and relevant. Comments included:

"After a long absence from attending a regular church, I was amazed how **welcoming** and **relevant** worship at St Mary's is to my life".

"This is a church I look forward to going to and I can **develop my Christian values** with the help of the congregation and ministry".

"St Mary's is the most welcoming and **inclusive** church I have ever attended. To see the children 'play' in church during **family** services and never be told off for making a noise is **fantastic**".



- We are ready to face new challenges and go where God and our new rector may lead us.
- We were a pilot parish for Setting God's People Free but this was put on hold because of the interregnum. We hope to engage in this initiative again, and we had also begun to explore what it might mean to be a more inclusive church.
- We want to grow our church and develop our links with the local area: there is so much scope for outreach. For instance, we are part of a large farming community; there are three new housing estates within the parish; we have numerous baptisms, weddings and funerals; and we have a local church school.
- We do not take ourselves too seriously and we know we are far from perfect, but we do make amazing cakes.



OUR WORSHIP



- 11am Sunday services are family orientated with lay participation. Common Worship liturgy is used, and hymns and worship songs from Songs of Fellowship are led by a small group of singers, accompanied by keyboard or organ. Junior Church is held in the vestry during term time and Tiddler Church for babies and toddlers is set up in the side chapel so that adults can still hear the service. Tea, coffee and cakes afterwards can last as long as the service.
- 8am, 9am and 6.30pm Sunday services use the liturgy of the 1662 Book of Common Prayer. The music at the last is led by our robed choir, accompanied by the organ. Hymns are from Ancient &

Modern Revised and responses, psalms and canticles are chanted.

- Until the interregnum, we held a monthly Sunday evening Story Time followed by Compline, and only one service was held on 5th Sundays, alternating between Astbury and Smallwood.

[Please note that the current pattern of Sunday services could be changed to achieve a better balance.]



- Special services include all the major festivals. We have also held full Choral Evensongs; World Day of Prayer, Plough and Animal services; and recorded for Radio Stoke.
- On Wednesdays, except during August, there is a well-attended communion service in the village hall followed by a simple lunch.



- We are a popular venue for life events, when we welcome families who may not normally attend our services. In the last year we have held 57 baptisms, 23 weddings, and 14 funerals in church. There have also been 17 funerals at local crematoria.
- Confirmations usually take place every two years.

OUR GROUPS

- In term time, Junior Church meets during the 11am Sunday service. About 10 children (aged 4-14) regularly attend church but weekly numbers are between 2 and 6. They take part in the monthly family service, visit the local care home, and help raise funds for Christian Aid and the St George Foundation.
- Members of our congregation help run the Toddler Group, which is held on Wednesday mornings in the village hall during term time. There are about 18 children, as well as parents or carers.
- Our small but committed house Prayer Group meets fortnightly and has also led services. It is totally confidential and requests can be placed in a prayer box in the side chapel.

- The Ladies' Fellowship has about 28 members and meets monthly on Wednesday evenings. They are the stalwarts of the cleaning and brasses rotas and bake for church bank holiday openings.



- On Sunday evenings there are about 10 singers in our four-part, robed choir, but numbers often more than double for full choral evensongs, special services and weddings, when they are joined

by our small group of 11am singers and recently by children from Astbury primary school.

- We have a small group of committed bell ringers who ring fortnightly before the 11am service. Extra ringers join for weddings and special services so that sometimes all eight bells can be rung.



OUR SCHOOL

astburyschool.org.uk "A Christian family who care, share and learn together"



We have close links with Astbury primary school, which is part of Chester Diocese Academy Trust.

- We have special services for the whole school: at the start of the year, at end of terms, on Ash Wednesday and on May Day. Pupils also perform their Nativity

play in church during a Sunday morning service.

- Some pupils take part in the monthly family Sunday service.
- Every week our previous rector led worship in school, and our organist leads singing worship.



- Members of the congregation are on the board of governors, read with pupils in school and help with May Day.



OUR COMMUNITY

- We are part of Churches Together in Congleton and occasionally host prayer meetings.
- We have a good relationship with St John the Baptist, Smallwood and with other local churches of all denominations. Their clergy have led services.
- We have held Bible study in our local pub, who lend us their parking and support the church.



- 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 500 people.



- As part of the Congleton Heritage and Antiques Festival we held an exhibition: Brides and Blooms - an amazing display of local wedding dresses from over 130 years, and a music workshop: Murdered Anthems and Improper Psalms?
- We contribute regularly to a local food bank.



- Our Advent Stars are displayed in the windows of our congregation's homes, moving every two days to a new location.
- We have run a stall at the Congleton Christmas Fair and helped lead carol singing with pupils from Astbury primary school.



FABRIC AND FINANCE

- We are prudent with our money and exercise due diligence in our financial affairs.
Our current situation is secure.
- We pay our parish share in full: 80% from us and 20% from Smallwood.
- We have completed all quinquennial repairs requested by our architect.
- We give monthly to the St George Foundation stgeorgefoundation.org.uk, and yearly to Christian Aid, and the Church of England Children's Society.
- We have raised £30,000 for the restoration of the organ, mostly achieved through gifts and grants.



OUR NEW RECTOR...

...COULD IT BE YOU?

We are praying for someone who will...

- faithfully preach and teach the word of God
- balance the traditions of the church with a modern outlook, engaging younger people and developing the church's mission
- provide leadership in pastoral care
- help us explore our vision for the future, as we strive to be people of God and witness to the presence of Christ in our community
- create closer links with Astbury primary school and the local community, drawing families into the life of the church
- engage with Congleton Churches Together, the Deanery and the Diocese

Also, Astbury school pupils would like a rector who is caring and helpful, funny, mind blowing, and who can tell Bible stories using sign language!

Thank you for reading our parish profile.

[With thanks to everyone who gave permission to use their photos.]

