



St Helen's Church

Ashby-de-la-Zouch

FAITH — LOVE — COMMUNITY



Parish Magazine

December 2025

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Holy Trinity	01530 412339
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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.



FROM THE MINISTRY TEAM

Dear friends

As I write this letter, I am surrounded by a pile of books to enable me to prepare for services, boxes of Christmas cards to be written so that I can deliver them when I see friends and family, and a 'to do' list!! I am sure that, for many of you reading this, this time of year is busy as we make plans to see family and friends and as we prepare to attend various Christmas events.

All of this can mean that Advent gets swallowed up into the Christmas rush and, after Advent Sunday, we launch straight into the ever-extending Christmas season.

As a child, I remember singing that beautiful hymn on Advent Sunday, 'Thou didst leave thy throne and thy kingly crown when thou camest to earth for me'. The words didn't mean much to me at the time but, reflecting on them now, they are life-changing. The chorus says 'O come to my heart, Lord Jesus, there is room in my heart for thee'.

Advent is a time to reflect and ponder on the enormity of the truth that Jesus came to be with us and to live as one of us – Emmanuel, God with us. The difficulty is that our lives are often too cluttered and our minds too full of things that occupy us, but which might be better addressed once we have grasped the truth of making space for Jesus in our hearts and lives. I find myself often squeezing out what is really important in the longer term for the sake of meeting deadlines and dealing with what seems to be urgent.

This year I have bought the Archbishop of York's Advent book which has been written by Bishop Guli Francis-Dehqani, formerly Bishop of Loughborough and now Bishop of Chelmsford. It is only 99 pages long and consists of 8 chapters so it is manageable!! As you will probably know, Bishop Guli had to leave her home country of Iran, there was an assassination attempt on her Father's life and her brother was murdered in the Iranian revolution. In the book, Bishop Guli makes connections between the themes of Advent and her own experiences of life and the cover of the book says that 'she

writes intriguingly of how angels continue speaking to us today; how fear can prevent us from living well in the present; how pain and loss can be transformed by the power of beauty.' I look forward to engaging with it over Advent!

However you plan to spend the next few weeks, may there be some times when you can stop and ponder, like Mary as she responded to the call of God. May there be moments of being still and reflecting on the enormity of all that we celebrate at Christmas – that God chose to become human in order that we might be reconciled to him. Above all, may we be able to join in the chorus of that great Advent hymn singing 'O come to my heart, Lord Jesus, there is room in my heart for thee.

With my prayers for a blessed Advent and a joyful Christmas,

Rev. Sue

ST HELENS AS PART OF A MINSTER COMMUNITY?

The Church of England nationally is facing a lot of challenges at the moment. Two of the more pressing ones are a falling income and falling numbers of people coming forward to apply to train as a Priest. In response to this, each Diocese is trying to work out ways in which they can reduce their costs and manage with fewer priests.

In our Leicester Diocese, the response has been to propose the creation of Minster Communities. These would be areas containing multiple parishes - sometimes based on geography, sometimes on theological beliefs or styles of worship. What would be fundamentally different, is that instead of one priest being responsible solely for one church or a group of churches (as in the Flagstaff team), the stipendiary clergy would be allocated a specific additional role over the whole of the Minster Area. In our case, this would cover from Woodville to Castle Donington taking in Blackfordby, Donisthorpe, Appleby Magna, Ibstock and a host of other villages - a total of 20 churches. There is enough money being generated by these parishes to pay for four priests to cover this area.

One clergy would be “Oversight Minister” - enabling and responsible for ministry, which would largely be provided by retired clergy and lay readers. They would probably not have time for pastoral care such as visiting the sick and dying, or seeing couples for marriage or about baptising their baby. Other roles would be a “growing faith minister” with oversight of work within schools, youth and families; a “mission and engagement” minister with oversight of work in new housing developments; and a minister with oversight of our buildings.

This model of four roles was set as being necessary to bring a new pattern of ministry rather than the traditional priest and parish. However the exact details as to how it might be implemented was given to the clergy and laity in the area to decide. A “co-ordinating group” was formed and Sue Field and Judith Lewis were part of this. The group produced a proposal, which has been sent to PCCs consider and respond to. These responses will be incorporated into a final proposal and each PCC will have to vote as to whether they want to join this Minster Community.

The Diocese is focussing on the hoped for benefits of greater collaboration and sharing of resources between parishes, along with greater involvement of the laity in the running of worship and pastoral care. However it has to be said that not everyone sees it this way.

There have been experiments with “ Mega Parishes”, Minster Communities and Oversight Ministers in other parts of the country. Far from improving things, they seem to result in further falls in income, numbers of people attending church and a disappearance in legacies. The turnover in clergy rises as they either realise that they have been forced into a role they don’t enjoy and isn’t fulfilling, or they burn out from the workload involved.

The proposal also relies heavily on increased numbers of lay folks becoming involved. When we can’t find people to be Churchwardens, Treasurers, Tower Captains etc, then quite where all these new volunteers will come from, is uncertain , to say the least !

Because a workable plan has not been able to be worked out for our Minster Area, **the Bishop is coming to visit us on January 12th** - hoping to “re-set” the progress towards a Minster Community. However it does provide an opportunity for us to ask questions and express our concerns as to how

these proposed changes will affect us.

To ensure that we have questions that cover everyone's concerns we are also holding a **meeting for all the parishioners in the Flagstaff Team on Tuesday 9th December, 7pm** at the Community Heritage Centre, Ashby. There will be an opportunity to understand the process so far, and why it has become bogged down. There will also be a chance to express your concerns and formulate questions which we can put to the Bishop when he visits in January.

If you care about preserving the relationship we have with Rev Sue and not allowing her to be given a workload that could crush the sturdiest then PLEASE come to these meetings and get involved.

Martin Vaughan

ECO-INITIATIVE GROUP

Over the past few weeks, the Group has been sharing some ideas to promote a more eco-friendly Christmas. These tips aim to help us all move to reducing our consumption and waste by recycling, reusing and looking out for 'greener' alternatives. Here are reminders of some of our tips, plus some more suggestions which we hope will be helpful: -

- In the lead-up to Christmas, charity shops will welcome unwanted toys and household items to put on sale.
- When buying Christmas cards, try to buy packs which are not wrapped in plastic film; shiny and glittery cards and wrapping paper are not recyclable.
- Wrap presents in a reusable bag or fabric, and tie with ribbon or string (sellotape is made of plastic).
- Look for gifts that come with as little packaging as possible, or packaging that is recyclable.
- Opt for 'pre-loved' or second-hand gifts; charity shops are full of good quality items.
- Handmade and homemade gifts are always welcome.
- Try to buy Fairtrade products: you'll be helping Fairtrade farmers earn a decent living, and encouraging a more sustainable and ecological way of farming.
- Organic produce means fewer chemicals, which benefits the environment and helps wildlife.

- Give a 'Gift of Time' voucher, eg: an offer to help with housework or gardening, cooking a meal, or taking a friend out for coffee.
- Give a 'virtual' gift through charities or buy membership to a wildlife or nature-friendly organisation, eg: Woodland Trust, National Forest, Friends of the Earth.
- Plan meals so that food isn't wasted.
- Choose 'wonky' or loose fruit and vegetables to cut down on packaging.
- Reuse Christmas decorations from previous years, and avoid buying Christmas crackers which contain plastic items.
- Instead of plastic decorations, try fabric bunting or use natural items - pine cones, dried fruit and fresh foliage.
- If choosing to have a real Christmas tree, look for FSC-certified or organic / locally grown, preferably a tree with roots that can be planted outside after the festive season.
- Shop locally, try to support local independent businesses.
- Try vegetarian meal options or cut down on meat and dairy produce.
- Compost your vegetable waste.
- Carry on caring for God's earth throughout the year, not just at Christmas. To be able to flourish and survive, nature and wildlife need us to make the right choices more than ever.

SAFEGUARDING

All volunteers who give of their time in any capacity in our church and community centre are asked to be familiar with the Church of England Code of Safer Working Practice

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2021-07/code-of-safer-working-practice-02.07.2021.pdf>

Please may I ask that you take some time to familiarise yourself with this code . Please let me know if you require a printed copy (a copy is available also in the welcome desk).

Many thanks,

Liz Smith (Parish Safeguarding Officer)

ASHBY YOUTH FOR CHRIST

If you would like to sign up for regular updates either follow this link <http://eepurl.com/dvVqrj> or email helen.davis@yfc.co.uk. Alternatively you can scan the QR code. Thank you for all your prayers and support.



A Weekend in the Woods:

On a chilly (and wet!) November weekend members of Rock Solid enjoyed a weekend away together. Nine of our KS4 girls headed to Charnwood for a weekend of walking, climbing, singing, marshmallow-toasting, bible reading and fun as they begin their first year as Rock Solid apprentices, serving their younger peers. The group are growing in faith in God and friendship with one another week on week, and this was seen in moments of hilarity and also vulnerability during the weekend as they shared what belonging to the group meant to them. For example, being part of Rock Solid reminding them that they are not alone on their journey with God. Praise the Lord for this.



We are grateful to St Mary in Charnwood for hosting us overnight and for allowing us to join in the fellowship of their church breakfast.

Crackerteria 2025

This annual and highly anticipated fundraiser will be returning on Saturday 6th December from 10am-2pm at Ashby Baptist Church. Several of our young people will be waiting on at this pop up café, held in aid of Moldova Youth For Christ who do incredibly valuable work with orphans and vulnerable women and girls. This is always an encouraging event for all who attend so please do come along. Why not bring a friend!



Ashby
**YOUTH
FOR CHRIST**



During Advent we will be sending out a short daily prayer, praying for AYFC and local young people. If you have not already subscribed to receive our regular prayer updates, please scan the QR code on the opposite page or visit <http://eepurl.com/dvVqrj>.

(Money raised at the Christingle Service (6th December) will go to The Children's Society)



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MYSTERIES OF CHRISTMAS

There are many stories about Christmas, but the one we're looking at is in the gospels of Matthew and Luke. It's a familiar account, we hear it every year, and it seems quite simple. Jesus is born in Bethlehem of Mary and Joseph. Mysteries? Surely not, but I'll let you decide.

Mary and Joseph, let's start with them. Mary is the ordinary young woman from a poor background, with an honest outlook, and soon to be married. Joseph is equally straightforward, a builder and carpenter by trade, and described as 'a just man.' Then we get some unusual happenings.

Mary's cousin Elizabeth was too old to conceive, then she conceived! Her husband Zechariah had a visit from the angel Gabriel to tell him the news, but he didn't believe it, and was struck dumb for nine months. Is that a mystery? Yes, as this sort of thing doesn't really happen today. The child is called John, and he later becomes John the Baptist, and many churches are named after him. There was something else, easy to miss. At around this time another strange thing happened - the Holy Spirit fell on Zechariah, Elizabeth, and baby John. If God works in mysterious ways, then this is one of them.

A few months later Gabriel returns. This time it's Mary's turn, and you know the message she's given, as we hear it every Christmas. He also says that Joseph isn't going to be the father, but the child conceived in her is 'from the Holy Spirit.' On reading this in the bible, many are thrown into confusion at the medical difficulties surrounding a human embryo starting to form when there is no man involved. At all.

With hindsight, you have to hand it to Jesus, who not only lived as a real man for 33 years, but was able to do things no-one else has managed. Many of them are to do with his death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven after 40 days; then sending the Holy Spirit on large numbers of people in the times thereafter. Back to the Christmas story.

More angels. They appeared to the shepherds on the hillsides shortly after Jesus was born in Bethlehem, and went out of their way to visit him. Mary must have thought she was on the set of a science fiction movie. What next?

Next the wise men arrive from the East, although they have now been embroidered with a lot of detail not present in the bible. We do know they brought gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. What happened to these gifts, particularly the gold, is also a mystery. Maybe they were squirreled away for a rainy day. Do we have any details regarding the wise men?

We now call them The Three Kings, and they rode on camels, and they do seem a cut above the average. We do know they were star-gazers and used the stars to both predict the birth, and to guide them to Bethlehem. They find the baby, worship him, and then an angel tells them to go home on a route to avoid Jerusalem. Strange things do happen, but this unexpected visit of the wise men will also have left Joseph and Mary in a spin. As an aside, why are there so many angels mysteriously popping up here and there?

Gabriel would probably say there was a message to be delivered from God to humans, and it was their job to get the message out. An important job. When King Herod found out the baby Jesus was to be a king he breathed out fire and vengeance and malice. Joseph rapidly decamped to Egypt after a tip off from the angel of the Lord, and only later returned to his home town of Nazareth, again prompted by an angel. PS, it's just occurred to me that maybe the gold helped pay for their lodgings in Egypt.

These are some of the mysteries of Christmas, and we're told that Mary pondered them in her heart. One might add that many theologians, astronomers, and medics have also pondered the birth and life of Jesus in the years from then until now. One further thing before we conclude.

The person who knew all the details of the birth, life, and death of Jesus was his mother Mary. Like me, you might be wondering why she didn't write up her own account. It would make a great story, but it never happened. So we'll just have to be content with what we've got.

What are you doing this Christmas? I'm going to be pondering. Happy Christmas!

Richard Vann

GARDENING TIPS FOR DECEMBER

December is a quiet month in the garden, but there are more things to do than you might think. The shortest day of the year is approaching so you will need to keep warm when outside. Pruning and digging will help you achieve this. I expect there are not too many jobs to complete outside so take the opportunity to do some fireside garden planning as well. If you have not done so already, dig over empty borders, raised beds and prepare the soil for the next growing year. Also, put any potted plants together in a sheltered spot in the garden to protect them from any extreme winter weather. You may have to cover the more tender plants with fleece. Preferably, put them in a heated or unheated greenhouse if you can.

Keep pruning in mind, especially Wisteria, climbing Roses, fruit trees and Japanese Maples (these will bleed sap if pruned later into next year). Leave the faded flower heads on any Hydrangeas until Spring as they provide frost protection to the swelling buds further down the stems. Ensure that climbing plants and shrubs are securely attached to their supports with ties. Keep checking your stored Dahlia tubers and keep an eye out for rot. Harvest Holly with berries for making Christmas garlands and wreaths. Stand the berry covered twigs in a bucket of water until you are ready to use them

In the vegetable garden, lift any Leeks, Parsnips and Carrots before the soil is frozen. They can easily be stored either inside or outside. Don't forget to cover Winter Brassicas with netting to protect them from pigeons and have fleece handy for hardy salad crops.

In the fruit garden lift and divide established Rhubarb clumps but take the outer sections preferably as these are generally healthier. Replace all Strawberries that are over three years old as these can harbour diseases and tend to lose vigour and productivity. Now is the perfect time to prune fruit trees to maintain an open, balanced structure. The exception is Plums, Cherries and other stoned fruits that should not be pruned until the Summer to prevent Silver Leaf Fungus. Use clean, sharp secateurs to avoid damaging your trees.

Ensure that you clean out the greenhouse if you are fortunate to have one. Clear away any snow at the tops of greenhouses to protect the glass. Ensure the gutters are clear of dead leaves and insulate any water butts /

taps. On warmer days, ventilate the greenhouse to reduce humidity and risk of disease. Finally, watch out for aphids over wintering on the stored plants.

Keep clearing away dead leaves on your lawn to allow light in and stop dead patches appearing. If possible, avoid walking on the lawn when blanketed by heavy frost or snow as this will damage the grass. Keep spiking lawns to improve drainage and aeration. Ensure you turn off all taps and pack away hoses that are not required.

On a clear day clean out the garden tool shed in preparation for Spring. Clean all tools and give them a wipe with linseed oil on wooden and metal areas to prevent rotting or rusting. Wash and disinfect bird feeders and tables as well as clearing out the bird baths.

If you have a pond, then cover it with fine netting to catch any debris / leaves and remove filters and pond pumps so that they don't suffer damage from freezing.

If you only do one thing in December, then hang out a bird feeder in the garden where you can easily see it but cats and squirrels can't get to it. Finally, from your armchair plan your vegetable garden crop rotation, order your flower and vegetable seeds and take an inventory of tools and equipment which you need for next year. Add them to your Christmas list!

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to You All!

Alan and Alison Cross



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OUR WORSHIP IN DECEMBER

	am	pm	Wednesday
1st Sunday 7th December		3.30pm Christingle 6pm Evensong	1st Wednesday–3rd Holy Communion 10.30am In Church
2nd Sunday 14th December	10.30am Holy Communion		2nd Wednesday-10th Holy Communion 10.30am Prior Park Community centre
3rd Sunday 21st December	10.30 am No service at St Helen's– services available at Coleorton and Staunton	6.30pm Nine Lessons and Carols	3rd Wednesday– 17th Morning prayer 10.30am In church
4th Sunday 28th December	10.30 am Holy Communion		4th Wednesday– 24th No service.

Regular activities:

- | | |
|---------------------------|--|
| Monday mornings | - Little Fishes 9.30 - 11.30am during term time |
| Mondays | - Pilgrim group |
| 1 st 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– see poster |

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Sunday 30th November– Advent Carol Service– 6.30pm

Congregational carols and choral pieces to begin the Advent season.

Friday 5th December– Messy Church– 4pm– Heritage Centre

Staunton Harold Carols by Candlelight - 7pm

With carols sung by St Helen's Choir and refreshments after the service.

Sunday 7th December– Christingle Service - 3.30pm

In aid of the Children's Society, with music by the Junior Choir.

Sunday 14th December— Carols and Strings– 7pm

An evening of festive music by Ashby String Orchestra, with some carols lead by St Helen's Choir. Tickets £10 on the door, children free.

Tuesday 16th December– A Christmas Cracker– 7.30pm

Join us in church for an evening of secular Christmas readings with mince pies and mulled wine. See weekly notices for information about tickets.

Sunday 21st December– Nine Lessons and Carols– 6.30pm

Join us for our annual service of carols by candlelight, with traditional carols and choral pieces lead by St Helen's choir. Refreshments served afterwards.

Wednesday 24th December– Crib Service– 4.30pm

Children are invited to come dressed as a character from the nativity scene ready to join in with our retelling of the Christmas story.

Midnight Communion– 11.30pm

Thursday 25th December– All Age Communion for Christmas Day– 10am

A LIGHT IN THE WORLD: FAITH

Here is the first of three recent sermons, unpacking our Church's new vision statement:

Last month, Sue preached at this service about our new Parish Vision Statement and there is also a short article about it in September's Parish Magazine. At the heart of it is a 3-word strapline: Faith – Love – Community. Those of us preaching over the next 3 weeks have been asked to take one of those words and elaborate on it. I'm first and my word is Faith.

Going further in our Vision Statement it talks about being faithful to Christ, and then it says,

We are called to welcome everybody with open arms, offering a safe and nurturing environment where each person can explore the Christian faith at their own pace.

"Explore the Christian faith at their own pace." This is the heart of it because I guess that for many of us one of the things we get tied in knots about is our own self perception that we are simply not faithful enough. Indeed I think it is sometimes a reason why people either stop coming to church, or don't feel they are worthy enough to come back if they have lapsed, or indeed makes them reluctant to take the first step of coming to church in the first place even when their instincts are drawn to it. Not faithful enough.

I have a question, then. And be warned if you are familiar with the TV programme QI, this is a wrong answer claxon moment. What is the opposite of faith?

I won't embarrass you by asking you to answer it in front of everyone, but for me the opposite of faith is not doubt. Doubt is healthy. Doubt is a dynamic element of our faith journey. Doubt enables us to grapple with deep questions to which there are no seemingly easy answers. Doubt is good.

No – for me the opposite of faith is not doubt. It is certainty. I have no worries with people who express their doubts. I have far more worries, sometimes, about people who won't entertain doubt and insist on the certainty about every part of their faith.

Now, I could have picked a gospel reading this morning which is tailor-made to a sermon about faith. I have chosen to stick with the appointed gospel for today in the calendar of readings and see what it might have to tell us about faith.

The Gospel reading this morning is one of the more familiar healing stories of Jesus. If you leave the actual text to one side for a moment, and all I tell you is that the story begins with ten people with leprosy asking for healing, and ends with one being told, 'Your faith has made you well,' then you might be forgiven for assuming that he was the only one who was healed. The story, though, contains the surprising and maybe even confusing point that while the Samaritan is told that his faith has made him well, the other nine have nonetheless also been granted the healing that they'd asked Jesus for.

From the outset, this suggests two things. Firstly, that God is abundant in his generosity. Jesus does not line them up and test them on their religious knowledge, observance, or even faith. He simply gives them what they ask for (albeit in a round-about way). There is a sign that God's mercy remains fundamentally a matter of grace. That what God offers us in Jesus does not depend on what we do don't do or who we are or are not, but rather that our actions, our identity, our sense of self-worth in God's eyes arise out of grow out of God's gracious free gift rather than anything we have earned.

That's the first thing. The second thing is that if, after the healing has taken place, something further leads Jesus to speak of the Samaritan's faith, then there is probably something going on here that goes beyond the curing of the disease itself. If so, what might that be?

The story, if you remember begins with Luke reminding us that all this takes place on the way to Jerusalem (v11). In this passage, Jesus passes through a mixed area, between Galilee and Samaria, and encounters ten lepers who called out for mercy. We are told that they keep their distance. Standard practice for those with leprous illnesses whose condition isolates them socially as well as afflicting them physically. They cry out for mercy, a simple act of faith at least to the extent that they see something in Jesus

that makes him worth asking. Perhaps that is all the faith that is needed, and perhaps it reflects often all the faith that we can sometimes muster as well. But if so, then it suggest that the simple cry God's mercy is enough. Jesus' response is to send them to the priests, which, again, was the standard practice for those who had been healed. They needed to be confirmed as healed by the priest so that they could enter into society again. But at the point when Jesus commands them, so they have not yet been healed. The healing occurs on the way to see the priest. That might be a detail easily overlooked but it strikes me as significant that they need to make the move to trust in what Jesus has asked them to do. They don't set off with much in the way of certainty. Indeed they're probably full of doubt. They set off with trust and hope. They're not healed first and then set off to see the priest. It's not that they make it to the priest which is significant, it's the fact that they are *willing to follow where Jesus directs. And as they go, they are made clean.*

And that's where the story ends, at least for most of them. It is perhaps interesting that having got what they wanted from God, they move on. Perhaps that's a harsh reading, and certainly goes beyond what is stated in the text. Maybe they were eternally grateful later and showed their thanksgiving. But at the same time it is easy to see how faith can come to revolve around what we get out of it, and thus depend on what we think we can get from God. I wonder what we would say if people asked us what we get out of being Christian. Obviously we could talk about eternal salvation and things like that, but what I mean is that on a day-to-day basis the Christian life may be a hard one with unanswered questions and rough roads to navigate. And when we pray, we don't always get the outcome we want. Faith, not certainty.

But the story does go on. It is the Samaritan who turns to Jesus, not the ones that most people would've expected, and perhaps the Samaritan would not have really expected mercy himself given the hostility between Samaritans and Jews. And here seems to me a detail worth noting. He began the story at a distance from Jesus, isolated socially and unable to approach the master. Now, he comes right to Jesus. And in that change of location we see the thing that takes us beyond the immediate need to something of further significance. That in God's mercy the man is able to come into the

presence of Jesus and speak with him. That through Jesus we are able to know God, to pray to God, not from a distance as those far off, cut off from God, but brought close to him in a genuine relationship.

Finally, in this moment of closeness Jesus tells the man that his faith has made him well. Perhaps whole would be a better word than well because all 10 of them were made well. His faith had made him whole. Literally in the original Greek, 'Your faith has saved you.' Faith that draws us into relationship with the living God. But Jesus also tells the man (who has fallen at Jesus' feet) to rise, to get up. A simple command which carries just the gentlest echo of what Jesus himself will do on the third day after his crucifixion.

Here Jesus shows how this brief and tentative stepping out in faith becomes a powerful moment in the Samaritan's life which begins to point ahead to Jesus' resurrection, his defeat of death and the promise that in him is resurrection and life, and the possibility of being brought close to God.

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APPREHENDING THIEVES AND ROBBERS IN TIMES PAST

On the 1st February 1755, a farmer by the name of John Sutton was returning on horseback from Ashby Market to his home in Willesley when he was attacked. His assailant approached him from behind and struck him several blows on the head with a large fork, knocking him off his horse. The farmer cried "You are some rogue! Take my money and spare my life," whereupon, the robber took a purse from Sutton's pocket, containing twelve shillings, and ran off. The wounded man was found and carried to his brother's house in Ashby, where he received proper care and made a good recovery.

It was reported that a suspect was later arrested and sent to Leicester Gaol. This despite the fact that there was no police force in the modern sense at that time. The English legal system placed the onus of prosecuting an offence on the victim himself, but that would have been expensive. Increasingly, in the 18th century, groups of private landowners and property owners would come together to raise funds with which to pay for the detection and arrest of thieves, robbers and other offenders. Once suspects were caught, prosecution was carried out through the normal legal channels of the courts, and punishment was left to the authorities.

From about 1780, these groups of private individuals started to organise formal groups known as Associations for the Prosecution of Thieves and Robbers. There was such an association in Ashby. When it began is not known but it was in existence by 1801. It held annual meetings in May. One was held at the Queens Head on 30th May 1812 at 11am with dinner being served at 2pm. There was an annual subscription and fines for not attending.

The only example to come to light of the Ashby Association actually being involved in the detection of a group of criminals was reported in a London newspaper called The Sun on 29th September 1801. It stated that at about 7pm on Sunday 20th September, two hackney horses belonging to Mr George Moore of Appleby were stolen from his land at "Norton near Twycross" (sic). The suspects were two men from Dudley who were well known as the "Dudley Jobbers" or horse dealers. One of them, Joseph Rose,

who had various aliases, had already been apprehended at the time of the report, but the other, Richard Rose was still at large. His description was given as: height five feet two or three, has a wound or scar above his left eye, was wearing a fustian coat, a light waistcoat, dirty corduroy breeches, a greasy hat and boots.

The Ashby Association was offering a reward of forty guineas to anyone who apprehended or gave evidence against Richard Rose, or was instrumental in the recovering of the stolen horses. The owner of the horses, Mr Moore, who was himself a member of the Association, offered a further ten guineas. There is no further trace of either of the thieves in the newspapers of the day. The last trace of the Ashby Association was in 1812 when there was another announcement about their annual meeting and dinner. So, whether they were still in existence in 1813 I do not know but there was certainly a need for their services in February that year when the following rather nasty robbery took place:

On the evening of the 8th Feb 1813, the house of Miss Bakewell at Swepstone near Ashby de la Zouch was attacked by “a gang of most desperate robbers.” The gang of four men and a woman entered the house at about 8 pm. While the footman was out, three of the robbers tied up the female servants and “plundered the house.” The other two robbers entered the dining room where Miss Bakewell was sitting alone reading. One of them held a pistol to her head, threatening to blow her brains out if she made the least noise or resistance. They demanded her money, silver and other valuables. She replied that she had very little money but whatever she had they could have. With the help of one of the female servants, she handed over silver valued at about £300 and the robbers left the house. Three of the gang, Samuel Dickens, Daniel Lynn and the woman, were apprehended at Birmingham the following Saturday. They were found with most of the stolen goods in their possession. William Smith and Thomas Cook, the other two members of the gang were also caught.

The newspaper report stated that the stolen goods had been found by the Birmingham police, although Birmingham did not in fact have a police force until 1839. In the same year, Leicestershire formed its own police force. Ashby police station in South Street was not built until 1862.

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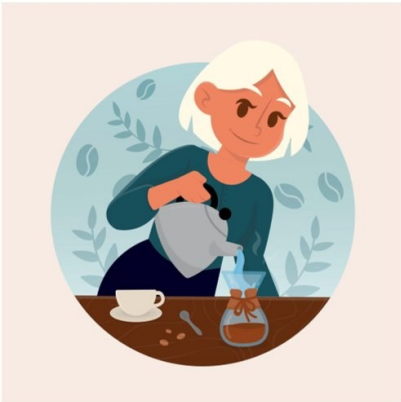
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