



# St Helen's Church

Ashby-de-la-Zouch

FAITH — LOVE — COMMUNITY



## Parish Magazine

January 2026

# PARISH DIRECTORY

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

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

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

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

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

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

Last month, the cover picture of the local Community Voice magazine was St. Helen's church. Inside, as usual, a small competition asked readers to identify the "mystery landmark." Some will have known it well; others may have paused, puzzled, or shrugged their shoulders.



I found myself smiling at that description — and then reflecting on it. Because *mystery* is an interesting word to use about a church.

For many, the church building has become something of a mystery. Something hard to understand or explain. It may be a familiar landmark. It may be admired for its beauty or associated with weddings and funerals. But what happens inside, and why it matters, is not obvious. The Christian faith, once the warp and weft of community life, can now feel distant - even opaque.

Which raises an uncomfortable but important question for us. St. Paul writes of *"God's wisdom, something mysterious, that goes deep into the interior of his purpose."* (1 Corinthians 2, The Message). A mystery for sharing, not hiding. Good news to hear, not a puzzle for solving. If the church feels "mysterious", i.e. inaccessible, how does that reflect on our nurturing and sharing of the heart of our faith?

But there is another question to ask — even closer to home. For those of us who know the church well, could it be that the mystery has faded in another way? When we clean, polish, mend, organise, and sing, does the extraordinary become familiar? The building becomes a list of tasks. Worship a thing we manage rather than something that still moves and surprises us?

Christian mystery is not about obscurity. It's about depth, feeling drawn into something we can never grasp — the love, mercy, and faithfulness of God. As a new year begins, is God inviting us to rediscover that sense of wonder for ourselves?

January is a season of resolutions, often quickly made and quickly forgotten. What if we adopt a different kind of resolution this year? A resolution to notice again. To look at our church — its worship, its people, the community it serves — with fresh eyes. To ask where we still glimpse God at work, and to let ourselves be surprised.

If we can do that, sharing our faith becomes more natural and more confident. Not because we can explain it but because we have something living and hopeful to share. An invitation rather than an answer sheet - “come and see.”

So, is that “mystery landmark” on the magazine cover a quiet gift for the start of the year? An invitation to rediscover the holy mystery at the heart of our faith. An encouragement to let it shine to those we meet, or who pass by that “mystery landmark”.

I wish you and those you love, a peace-filled New Year.

**Andy Smith**

### **New Early Morning Bible Group– All Welcome!**

Would you like to start the day with some gentle reflection, conversation and prayer?

A new group will be meeting on Thursday mornings in term-time starting on Thursday 15th January. We'll gather in the Hildersham Room from 8.30 ready to start promptly at 8.45 and we will finish by 9.30am. There is still space for one or two more people. If you're interested in this, or any other midweek groups, please speak to Andy Smith or contact the parish office.

**CRAFTING NEWS!**



**ST HELEN'S CHURCH  
PRESENTS!**

# **WE'RE IN STITCHES**



**NO NEED TO BOOK**

## **Craft away the January "Blues"**

Do you need help with a craft project  
or getting to grips with your new sewing machine  
from Santa ?

Do you just want time to unwind and relax with your crafting ?

Bring your own textile project, your UFO's (unfinished objects) or  
join Lisa (Crafter-Noon) and  
do some "slow stitching" - materials provided

All welcome (over 18s please).

EXPERTS ON HAND TO SUPPORT YOU.

**Saturday 24th January 2026**

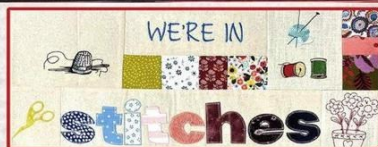
**10am til 3pm**

Heritage Centre,  
4 Church Yard, Ashby-de-la-Zouch,  
Leicestershire LE65 1AA.

Tea and coffee available  
bring your own lunch

**Suggested donation for the day £5**

**If you'd like more details contact:**  
**Mo (the coordinator) 07748 157649**  
**Anne (group leader)**  
**Instagram: @new\_vintage\_sewing**



St Helen's Parish Office  
07565 191852 [parishoffice@sthelensashby.net](mailto:parishoffice@sthelensashby.net)



Ashby Knit and Natter (We're in stitches)  
St Helen's Church Ashby de la Zouch



# CELEBRATIONS

Peter and Sally's diamond wedding celebration:

It was so lovely for the church family to share in the celebration of Sally and Peter's special wedding anniversary. Such a wonderful service celebrating 'love'.

This is the beautiful prayer they said together...

*Heavenly Father, we humbly thank you for all the blessings to us- For the things that have enriched our lives; for the people who have blessed us with their love and friendship. We thank you for our marriage, for our home, our family, our friends; for the good times we have spent together, and for the hard times that have brought us closer to each other and to you. We ask you to forgive us when we have fallen short. We ask that you continue to bless and strengthen our marriage, that our home may be to us and friend and stranger, a place of joy and happiness. We ask this in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*



## Mo Clark

A wonderful thanksgiving service was held in November for little Jorgia and her family.



St Helen's Choir also held their annual Christmas celebration on the weekend of the carol service. A chippy lunch was enjoyed in wonderful company.



Church was also full for Ashby String Orchestra's 'Carols and Strings' concert– a collaboration with members of St Helen's choir.



Messy Church made a Christmas cake!



Members of PRG took part in the annual Santa fun run in Ashby– looking suitably festive!

# 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](mailto:helen.davis@yfc.co.uk). Alternatively you can scan the QR code. Thank you for all your prayers and support.



## Crackerteria Thanks:

A heartfelt thank you to everyone who came to support our annual Christmas 'Crackerteria' event, raising much needed funds for Moldova Youth For Christ.

Around 15 of our young people cheerfully waited on tables and welcomed visitors to our pop up cafe- what a wonderful atmosphere!

Moldova YFC work with vulnerable children and their families; this event raised enough funds to support 20 children at one of their centres for over 5 months. Praise God.



Members of Rock Solid also enjoyed contributing to a well attended Christingle service at Packington Church as they helped to share why Jesus is the best gift in the world!

*Isaiah 9: 2,6 "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."*



## ASHBY JOY

Ashby JOY is a 20s and 30s ministry made up of people from across Ashby's churches. We generally meet weekly for a range of activities including socials, topical discussions, bible studies and watching 'The Chosen'. The idea behind the group is having a community to journey through life with so we prioritise sharing fellowship as well as tackling bigger topics of faith.

Our months will roughly follow this structure in 2026 (with some variation):

1st week: chips, chat and 'The Chosen'

2nd week: topic discussion hosted by a member of the group

3rd week: social

4th week: bible study or similar

We would welcome anyone between 20 and 39(!) to join us, whether you have been a Christian for a long time or you are just exploring faith for the first time. If you, or someone you know, would like to get involved, please get in touch with Tim in the parish office and he can put you in touch.

If you are not in this age group— apologies— but please do pray for us. We would greatly value your encouragement.

Blessings,

**Emily Darlington**



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THE CHILDREN'S SOCIETY

## OPEN DOORS-UNWRAP HOPE

Epiphany is traditionally associated with the visit of the Magi to Jesus, bearing gifts. How about making a gift of hope for persecuted Christians in the form of a gift to Open Doors?

If you were present at the Team Service at Holy Trinity on November 30<sup>th</sup>, you will recall that our preacher was Lee Proudlove of the mission agency we support, Open Doors. You may also have picked up the Open Doors magazine for November and December 2025 from which the title of this article is taken. Its focus is on unwrapping hope for children. If you weren't there, may I suggest that you take a look at the website: [www.opendoorsuk.org](http://www.opendoorsuk.org).

The statistics are shocking. Did you know that one in seven Christian believers worldwide faces persecution of some sort or another? We are lulled into a false sense of security here in Britain where persecution is mild or non-existent and we are more likely to be met with indifference or ridicule at worst.

Those of us with longer memories may remember how Open Doors came into being. It was some 70 years ago that a Dutchman called 'Brother Andrew' made news with his smuggling trips behind the Iron Curtain. It was at the height of the Cold War. His aim was to provide Bibles for those who were unable to access them and their message of hope because they were living under Communist regimes. Brother Andrew went on to smuggle many more Bibles into needy parts of the world. You can read about his ministry in the book he wrote: 'God's Smuggler' (published by Hodder and Stoughton).

Today, Open Doors works right across the world, unwrapping hope for persecuted children and their families. It seems very appropriate that we should consider how we might help at Epiphany-tide. After all, our Saviour knew the dangers of persecution at first hand: He was forced to flee soon after His birth with his parents to Egypt to escape the clutches of King Herod.

So let me encourage you to have a good look at the Open Doors website, to subscribe to their Prayer News, and if possible to give a gift which will help to unwrap hope for those currently experiencing persecution. This Epiphany-tide, why not make a point of giving to remind persecuted believers that they are not forgotten in the pressures they face?

**Sue Brown**

## **WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY**

Internationally, the week of prayer for Christian unity runs from Sunday 18th January until Sunday 25th January. This year WPCU takes Ephesians 4 v 1-13 as its central text which includes the words “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling.” (Ephesians 4:4).

Plans are emerging for a prayer meeting on Thursday 22nd January in Ashby, so please keep your eyes on the weekly newsletter for more information.

Why not consider using your personal time with God during this time to pray for the Body of Christ locally, nationally and around the world. Within our area, pray for the shared witness of all of Ashby’s Churches, for the continued Minster Community talks. Nationally, pray for the Archbishop of Canterbury in the build up to her consecration and her coming ministry. Pray for persecuted Christians around the world, and most importantly, pray as the Spirit leads!

More information can be found at <https://cte.org.uk/wpcu2026/>

**Emily Darlington**

# GARDENING TIPS FOR JANUARY

## Hello and welcome to 2026!

January is the start of the gardening year and a time for fresh ideas, grand plans and renewed energy for the next twelve months ahead.

There is very little to do in the garden at this time so enjoy the peace and quiet of January. In the past, Winter was a, "Tidying up time", with perennials cut back, borders tidied and leaves swept away. But things have changed as the trend is towards our gardens to be more wild life friendly with dead leaves now identified as non-hazardous. However, it is still worthwhile removing them from a pond or a lawn.

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. Examples of these are Hellebores such as Niger and Christmas Carol, Winter-flowering Honeysuckle, Snowdrops, Witch Hazel, Mahonia with bright yellow flowers, Winter Heathers and Viburnum tinus.

Getting ready for the year ahead is exciting and standard routine jobs include chitting first early potatoes, planting sweet pea seeds, as well as planting bare rooted roses.

Tasks to do in the flower garden include pruning Honeysuckle, Wisteria, Rhododendrons and Rose bushes whilst dormant. Cut back ornamental grasses and tidy up perennials. Finally, 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. Prune fruit trees and plants such as apples, pears, currants and gooseberries. But leave stone fruit trees such as plums, cherries and apricots until the summer.

Why not visit our local garden centres as they struggle for business at this time of the year. An added advantage of visiting garden centres is stopping for a hot drink in their café.

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.

Finally, start planning what you want to do in the garden in 2026. Now is the time to order seeds and plants.

***May 2026 bring you Joy and Growth!***

**Alan and Alison Cross**



For news and views in North West Leicestershire read your local newspaper

# Ashby Times

on sale every Thursday at your local newsagent

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[advertising@ashbytimes.com](mailto:advertising@ashbytimes.com)

## OUR WORSHIP IN JANUARY

	am	pm	<b>Wednesday</b>
<b>1<sup>st</sup> Sunday</b> 4th January		<b>6pm</b> Evensong	1st Wednesday–7th Holy Communion 10.30am In Church
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday</b> 11th January	<b>10.30am</b> Holy Communion		2nd Wednesday-14th Holy Communion 10.30am Prior Park Community centre
<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday</b> 18th January	<b>10.30 am</b> Morning Worship		3rd Wednesday– 21st Morning prayer 10.30am In church
<b>4<sup>th</sup> Sunday</b> 25th January	<b>10.30 am</b> Holy Communion		4th Wednesday– 28th Holy Communion 10.30am In Church

### 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– see poster                     |

# **DATES FOR YOUR DIARY**

**Sunday 4th January– Evensong for Epiphany– 6pm**

**Friday 9th January– Messy Church– 4.15-5.30pm– Heritage Centre**

**Monday 12th January– Minster Communities Meeting-7pm– Holy Trinity**

A meeting with Bishop Martyn to 're-set' the Minster Community in our area. Please do come along to listen and have a say re the future pattern of ministry across our churches.

**Saturday 24th January– 'We're In Stitches'- 10am-3pm– Heritage Centre**

Craft away the January blues. Do you need help with a craft project or getting to grips with your new sewing machine from Santa? Bring your own textiles project, your UFOs (unfinished objects) or join Lisa and do some 'slow stitching'- materials provided. All welcome (over 18s please). Experts on hand to support you. Tea and coffee available, bring your own lunch. Suggested donation for the day is £5.

**Burns Night Supper– 7pm– Heritage Centre**

Tickets now available! £18.50pp available from Social Committee members or contact the parish office for more information.

**Tuesday 27th January– Heritage Talk– 7.30pm**

Julie Starkey presents 'Churchyard Stories: St Helen's Churchyard and its People'. A talk developed from our popular churchyard tour, with additional research. How long has our churchyard been in use? How has it evolved over time? The stories of some of those who rest there. Tickets £4 on the door, including light refreshments.

# A LIGHT IN THE WORLD: LOVE

This is the second sermon from a short series which introduced our new vision statement. The readings from this particular service were: **1 John 4 vs 7-19 and Luke 6 vs 12 -15**

“St. Helen’s is a community that is deeply rooted in God and faithful to Christ.

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.

Our mission is to grow together in God’s love and to share that love and the gospel of hope through our words, our actions, and by building strong, connected relationships within Ashby and the surrounding villages.”

God is the source of all love, he pours his love into our hearts and he has shown us in Jesus just how complete and overwhelming that love is. A few verses earlier than the passage we’ve just heard in 1 John, there are these words: See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God, and that is what we are. And that leads on, as we have just heard, to “We love because he first loved us.” And, that we are to love one another, those who with us are children of God, those of us who, with confidence, call God Father, those in whom God dwells, our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Loving God is not necessarily easy – it is costly in many ways to put him and his priorities first. Loving one another is probably even more difficult...

## LOVING ONE ANOTHER

Have you ever thought about what a mixed bag these disciples were? We don’t know a great deal about many of them, but we do know that they comprised fishermen, at least one tax-collector who would have had a history of having been in cahoots with the Roman occupiers, a Zealot – one of a radical group determined to get rid of the Romans by force.

Judas Iscariot, who is thought to have possibly been from southern Israel, whereas the rest were probably from Galilee.



And Jesus expected these widely differing people to live together, work together, to be, in the words of his prayer in John 17, to be one, as united with one another as Jesus was with his Father. He had instructed them to love one another as he had loved them. His love for them was costly in the extreme – we are included in that overwhelming costly love, and it is love of this depth and quality which he prayed and longed for his followers to show to each other – that he commanded them to show to each other.

Take a look around this church. You will know some of the people here well, others less so, perhaps others not at all. You will find some people easier to get on with than others – just as, I imagine, the disciples found it tricky to get on together.

We do hear several accounts in the gospels of them arguing. Not to mention all sorts of complex and, indeed, heated situations in the early church, as recorded in the book of Acts. Those early disciples were not perfect. Any more than we are. There were all sorts of different personalities trying not just to rub along politely together but to discover what it meant to do more than that, to love one another. They kept on trying.

And the church ever since has had to keep on trying and praying and seeking the presence and power of the Holy Spirit to enable us to live in that quality of love. It is a constant challenge. When it is taken seriously, it becomes something that stands out as being utterly different and distinct from the usual values of the world – you are probably familiar with the words of a Roman writer, Tacitus, who wasn't a Christian but could still say "See how these Christians love each other".

I'm not, by the way, talking about friendship here. Friendship is a wonderful thing and many of us will have good friends within this congregation. But while it's absolutely not possible to be friends with everyone, even in a congregation the size of ours, it is possible to love everyone.

The Greek word the New Testament uses for the love Jesus talks about is, as I'm sure you know, Agape. It's the kind of love that Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 13 – patient, kind, generous, not self-seeking, forgiving and so on. But I think that Paul left out something from his list – if you will allow me to say so. Love notices. Agape love is the kind of love that puts itself out to notice others; to notice if someone is in need of any kind. It's the kind of love that won't allow people to sit ignored and left out on the margins, it's the kind of love that is welcoming, encouraging, the kind of

love that, in the words of our vision statement, makes us a community of people where everyone can feel safe and can bring their unique personalities, skills and talents so that they and others can grow and flourish. Jesus calls us to love one another in all our wonderful differences and contrasts. And all our annoying quirks and peculiarities. To demonstrate to the world around us that there is a different way from individualism and self-centredness. And that, as we explore what this means in practice, it will lead us together further into our vision statement, so that we share more widely that love and the gospel of hope through our words, our actions, and by building strong, connected relationships within Ashby and the surrounding villages.

## **LOVING TOGETHER**

So, how might this love work out in practice, something that is not just for us here, but that looks outward beyond our doors. We've just sung "let love be found *among us*".

We need each other to be God's love in the world – to be his eyes, ears, hands, feet, voice. We have different gifts and talents, we have different levels of energy, we are at different stages in our lives. We notice different things. We are interested in different things.

So when it comes to loving the world, we need all of us. When we ask "who is my neighbour", we cannot all be everything to everyone. There are those of us who are active in serving the people we bump into day by day, there are those who take seriously Jesus' call to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit those in prison, there are those who are responding seriously to the impact that climate change is having on some of the most vulnerable in our world, there are those who are able to give financially, those who can give their time, or those who work with their hands. You know and I know that I could go on – and on – and probably too often do...

None of us can do all of this on our own. We need each other. And we really only can do it together if it is something that flows out of us being a community of love, looking out for, nurturing and supporting one another; a community where, when we get it wrong, we can ask for and receive

forgiveness from one another. A community where together we increasingly learn more of what it is to be loved by God and to respond to that by learning to love one another.

I think love very often starts by noticing. But it's difficult to notice how people are if we don't know them. So, if you are coming over coffee after the service, why not make an opportunity to talk to someone you don't know, or don't know very well – I'm not suggesting you start by describing your deepest darkest secrets, more just sharing what makes you tick, what you are involved with in your daily life, where you fit in to the local community. Not just today, but any Sunday. You could pray for your new acquaintance during the week. And next time your paths cross, ask them how things are going. Small beginnings, but all contributing to building up a community that is held together in the love of God and can be used by him to share that love beyond our own doors.

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# JANE AUSTEN

Here is a prayer from the famous English author, born 250 years ago.

## ***Have Mercy and Grace on Us***

*Give us grace, Almighty Father, so to pray, as to deserve to be heard, to address Thee with our hearts, as with our lips. Thou art everywhere present, from Thee no secret can be hid. May the knowledge of this teach us to fix our thoughts on Thee, with reverence and devotion that we pray not in vain.*

*Look with mercy on the sins we have this day committed, and in mercy make us feel them deeply, that our repentance may be sincere, and our resolutions steadfast of endeavouring against the commission of such in future.*

*Teach us to understand the sinfulness of our own hearts, and bring to our knowledge every fault of temper and every evil habit in which we have indulged to the discomfort of our fellow-creatures, and the danger of our own souls.*

*May we now, and on each return of night, consider how the past day has been spent by us, what have been our prevailing thoughts, words, and actions during it, and how far we can acquit ourselves of evil.*

*Have we thought irreverently of Thee, have we disobeyed Thy commandants, have we neglected any known duty, or willingly given pain to any human being? Incline us to ask our hearts these questions, O God, and save us from deceiving ourselves by pride or vanity.*

*Give us a thankful sense of the blessings in which we live, of the many comforts of our lot; that we may not deserve to lose them by discontent or indifference.*

*Be gracious to our necessities, and guard us, and all we love, from evil this night.*

*May the sick and afflicted be now and ever in Thy care; and heartily do we pray for the safety of all that travel by land or by sea, for the comfort and protection of the orphan and the widow and that Thy pity may be shown upon all captives and prisoners.*



*Above all other blessings, O God, for ourselves, and for our fellow-creatures, we implore Thee to quicken our sense of Thy mercy in the redemption of the world, of the value of that holy religion in which we have been brought up, that we may not by our own neglect throw away the salvation Thou hast given us nor be Christians only in name. Hear us, Almighty God, for His sake who redeemed us, and taught us thus to pray, ( and she ends with the Lord's prayer ).*

Jane Austen was born on 16<sup>th</sup> December 1775 and is one the most highly regarded authors of all time. You may have heard of some of her six novels: *Pride and Prejudice*, *Emma*, *Northanger Abbey*, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Mansfield Park*, and *Persuasion*. Jane Austen was a faithful Anglican and knew the bible and the book of common prayer very well. The evidence is in the prayer above. Her father, Reverend George Austen, was rector of the Anglican parishes at Steventon and Deane in Hampshire. Two of her six brothers were also clergymen. Her one sister was slightly older and her confidante. If they all met up for Christmas, it'd be very entertaining!

We're not sure how many prayers she wrote, as we now only have the three that her sister recorded. One thing is clear – her faith was important, and her values come out clearly through the characters in her novels. Her heroes were principled and courageous, but she mocked the pompous and pretentious. You could say that her novels were a satire on the middle-class people among whom she mixed. Witty as well. She is brilliant with situations that have a long-winded introduction, then Wham! the punch line.

Strangely, she never married, so all the romances in her writings must have been pure imagination. Her writing style is rambling and flowery, a style that has now largely gone out of fashion. After reading the first two pages of *Emma*, I stopped, realising I prefer thrillers, where something happens. Quickly.

To conclude, personal prayers are always of interest as they're a window into the writer's soul. That her three known prayers are not famous today is perhaps a comment on their straight-laced formality. Very Anglican. Nevertheless, they are earnest and honest. She died aged 41 on 18<sup>th</sup> July 1817.

You can find her prayers and further details about her on the internet.

# LOUGHBOROUGH TOWN OF SANCTUARY

Just before Christmas a team from St Mary's and St Helen's sorted and wrapped an amazing collection of generous gifts donated by our congregations for children of asylum seekers housed in Loughborough. The gifts - for children from newborns to teens - were presented at a Christmas party organised by Loughborough Town of Sanctuary. They sent us a lovely thank you message, saying 'we only wish all your contributors and volunteers could have been there to see the joy on the children's faces!'

I was reminded of words from Guli Francis- Dehqani's Advent book 'Listening to the music of the soul' :

*'Whatever your views on the facts of the Advent and Christmas stories, they movingly convey that blessings come when we open our arms to those we do not know.'*

*'The stories implore us to soften our hearts. They entreat us to pause and reflect, to remember that behind every statistic is an individual, a family, a child even, with their own joys and sorrows, hopes and dreams. The migrant and the refugee are people like you and me, and very little separates 'us' from 'them': only a handful of circumstances, an accident of birth, a twist of fate in the arena of international politics.'*

[St Helen's Church continues to financially and prayerfully support the work of Loughborough Town of Sanctuary. You can find out more about their vital work in the local area by visiting <https://loughborough.cityofsanctuary.org/> to find their recent winter newsletter.]

**Pat Stafford**

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A photograph showing the lower legs and feet of several people dancing on a light-colored wooden floor. The text 'The Ranter's Barn Dance Band' is overlaid in a large, stylized, blue font with a white outline, curving across the middle of the image.

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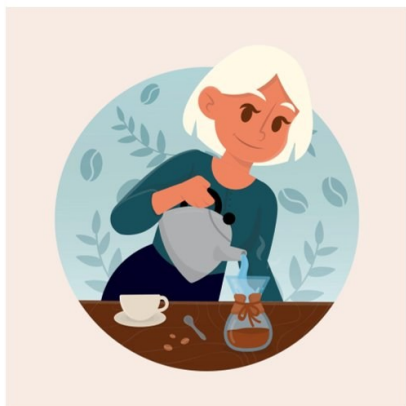
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