

# NORTHAMPTONSHIRE BRITAIN'S BEST SURPRISE

## THE TRESHAM TRAIL

The Treshams were one of the most important landowners in North Northamptonshire from the late 14th century - soldiers, politicians, lawyers and recusants - indeed their influence was in large part destroyed by the Reformation and their continual adherence to the catholic faith.

A remarkable number of buildings survived from the period associated with them: buildings which are highly distinctive. They make an unusual and fascinating study either singly or as part of the Tresham Trail. Outlined below is a journey you might care to make. When an individual building has it's own website this is given.

The family were established at Sywell, north of Northampton today off the A43 ( Northampton Kettering Road ) by at least 1400. Nothing remains here of their period the church has largely been rebuilt and Sywell Hall was itself substantially altered in the 1580's by the Elizabethan diplomat Anthony Jenkinson.

Start the tour at

### RUSHTON HALL

[www.rushtonhall.com](http://www.rushtonhall.com) which lies between Kettering and Desborough.



The house was bought by William Tresham in 1438. He was a succesful lawyer and rose as MP for the county during the second quarter of the century. He also entered Royal service working for both Henry V and Henry VI. The year after buying Rushton he was made Speaker of the House of Commons and was largely in charge of the extensive Royal estates in Northamptonshire. His rapid rise created some enmity resulting in his murder in 1450 as he rode from Sywell to Rushton.

The re building and enlargement of Rushton largely fell to his son another Thomas and grandson John. Their portion largely survives to the south and west of the great internal courtyard. John pre deceased his father who was himself executed following the Battle of Tewkesbury in 1471.

During the 15th century the family acquired further land at nearby **NEWTON LE WILLOWS** to the east of Rushton.

Here remains the church they worshipped in now standing almost alone in a meadow. The only other building is the Tresham's

60ft long dovecote with accommodation for 4,000 doves. Near it are traces of Tresham's mansion in the remnants of a terraced garden.



Sir Thomas, beheaded at Tewkesbury, was succeeded by his grandson another Sir Thomas (c. 1500 -1559). He was active at Court under Henry VIII and Edward VI and further improved the Great House at Rushton. At the Reformation he remained a committed catholic and it was he who proclaimed Mary Tudor Queen in Northampton in 1552. The Queen rewarded him by appointing him Grand Prior of the Knights Hospitallers of St John of Jerusalem when she revived this ancient order in 1557. He is shown wearing the Prior's robes in his splendid alabaster tomb in

**ALL SAINTS CHURCH** Rushton. The tomb is attributed to the Derbyshire sculptors Gabriel and Thomas Roiley.



Sir Thomas was succeeded by his grandson yet another Sir Thomas (1534 - 1605). He was to become the most significant builder in the family which is surprising given that he spent a vast proportion of his life in prison on account of his ardent Catholicism.

### ROTHWELL MARKET

**HOUSE** [www.rothwelltown.co.uk/historyofrothwel](http://www.rothwelltown.co.uk/historyofrothwel) was Sir Thomas's first significant foray in to architecture.



It was designed and built for him by William Grumbold starting in 1578. The town was the largest market near Rushton and Tresham provided it with a new centre for local commerce.

It's cruciform shape hints at things to come but above all it's interest lies in it's sophisticated use of classical vocabulary in it's design and it's decoration - 90 coats of arms of local landowning families together with the Tresham badge - the trefoil. Building work was interrupted by Tresham's imprisonment ( and not completed until the late 19th century when the arcaded ground floor was filled in.

At the same time, 1577, further work was undertaken at Rushton Hall where an oratory was built which still contains a highly unusual plaster relief of the Crucifixion. Tresham's response to the catholic faith is somewhat out of kilter with many old catholic families who were more reticent. He is almost flamboyant in displaying his allegiance and this becomes more evident in his later buildings. These follow his release from the Fleet Prison in 1593.

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The most extraordinary of these is a building in the park of Rushton Hall:

## THE TRIANGULAR LODGE

[www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/rushton-triangular-lodge](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/rushton-triangular-lodge)



It remains almost as he left it. Now looked after by English Heritage it is easy of access. Dedicated to the Trinity, hence the three sides, it is larded with symbols and has been described as 'a profession of faith in stone'.

Concurrently he decided to build a summer house for banqueting and hunting known as

## LYVEDON NEW BIELD

[www.nationaltrust.org.uk/lyvedon](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/lyvedon), new because it stood next to the old Tresham Manor House known as Old Bield. This part of their estate lies to the east of Rushton, south of the road from Oundle to Corby.

The building left unfinished at his death in 1605, is in a form of a Greek Cross and is ornamented with many illusions to the catholic faith. It stands adjacent to Tresham's new garden which also survives with it's terraces, mounds and moated



area. All has been well restored by the National Trust.

Tresham died in 1605 as did his son Francis in the Tower of London having been implicated in the Gunpowder Plot. Tresham's widow Muriel lived on at Lyvedon in the Old Bield which was remodelled by their son Sir Lewis Tresham. Rushton was sold to the Lord Mayor of London Sir William Cockayne in 1619. But there is a coda to this family story which takes the visitor to

## DEENE PARK

[www.deenepark.com](http://www.deenepark.com) Sir Thomas Brudenell, later First Earl of Cardigan married

Mary, the daughter of Sir Thomas Tresham, in 1607. This not only meant that Tresham's remarkable library came in due course to Deene but also that the architectural and ornamental work on the house dating from the early 17th century is influenced



by Tresham's buildings - the south east range with a library formerly above an open arcade, the heraldic openings in the staircase turrets, and the armorial stained glass in the great hall.

This is a fascinating excursion to take bringing alive the political - religious flux of the late 16th century through an exploration of some of Britain's most extraordinary buildings, taking you across some of the most beautiful landscape in the north of the county.

DEENE PARK

TRIANGULAR LODGE  
RUSHTON HALL  
ALL SAINTS CHURCH

NEWTON LE WILLOWS

ROTHWELL MARKET HOUSE

LYVEDON NEW BIELD

