**Introduction - How to use this audio tour.**

Welcome to Rufford Abbey Country Park.

Rufford Abbey Country Park is set in the picturesque area of Nottinghamshire’s Sherwood Forest.

This lovely country park has large areas of woodland, parkland and an extensive lake.

At the heart of the park, are the picturesque remains of Rufford Abbey, founded during the 12th century, and later transformed into a grand country house by the Talbot and Savile families.

This tour will focus on the Victorian and Edwardian period when Rufford was a country house and played host to many important people, including Edward Prince of Wales, who would later become King Edward the 7th.

This tour can be followed by leaflet or audio downloads to your device, or a combination of both.

You can decide how much you want to see and how far you want to walk. The tour does not have to be completed all at the same time. The whole tour should take around an hour, depending on walking pace and how long you spend at each point.

The leaflet that accompanies this tour contains a map, which will assist you in navigating around this site. Each part of the site has a number with an audio track associated with it.

To start this tour, make your way over to the Turning Circle, which is the large circular gravelled area at the front of the building, which is Point 1 on the map. Once you reach this point, you should listen to Track 1. After this, move to point 2 on the map and listen to Track 2, and so on.

Please note that this tour has some restricted access for people. There are paths around the house for those with wheelchairs, pushchairs or any mobility difficulties, which we encourage you to make use of, if you feel that using the steps would cause you any issues.

This audio tour project has been managed by Nottinghamshire County Council Heritage Tourism Department and has been produced in partnership with Travel and Tourism students from North Nottinghamshire College.

**Track 1 – The Turning Circle**

You should now be standing in the area known as the Turning Circle.

This area is known as the turning circle and is where carriages would turn around after dropping off guests to the country house, which was owned by the Savile family from 1626.

The Turning Circle was also a meeting point for the men of the Savile family to begin the hunting season. Hunting was an extremely popular sport with the upper classes, and the hunting party would assemble here.

After the invention of the motor car in the late 19th century, cars began to replace carriages as the main form of transport. Lord Savile and his guests were quick to replace their carriages with the new technology of the motor car.

The change from carriages to cars caused quite a conflict between the traditional footmen and the chauffeurs, as the footmen believed that the new technology of the motor car could lead to them being made redundant.

If you turn so that the building is behind you, you will see an avenue of trees leading up to the turning circle, which is called Lime Tree Drive. This was created in 1841 by the 8th Earl of Scarborough. At the end of the drive are the original wrought iron gates bearing the Lumley-Savile coat of arms.

At the end of this drive you will also notice West Lodge, the residence of Lord Savile’s gatekeeper. The gatekeeper had a phone line directly to the butler, to alert him whenever any visitors were approaching.

When events were held at Rufford, many people would meet here and use the steps at the turning circle for group photographs, both servants and royalty alike.

King Edward the 7th often visited the country house. He travelled by train to Ollerton Station and was then driven by limousine or carriage to Rufford. The King’s entourage was made up of at least 16 people, including Alice Kepple, the King’s Mistress, who stayed with him during the night, even though she was married herself. This was accepted, and she was an official member of the King’s entourage.

The King visited Rufford to attend society balls or sporting occasions. He particularly enjoyed hunting and attending the horse racing at Doncaster Races.

Hunting was also seen as a growing activity for women. In 1922 there were 25 women hunters for every 1 there had been in 1880.

The house was often busy, especially when the Savile Family were in residence. From a complete inventory list that was made at the time, we know that in 1856, the country house consisted of 24 servants, 12 gardeners and 13 stable workers. The estate employed 197 members of staff plus 24 women or boys, and 6 part time workers.

Now, please make your way up the stone steps and stop at the entrance to the house.

**Track 2 – Entrance to the House**

Here we are at the entrance to the country house.

Above the entrance door, you will see carved in stone, the Lumley-Savile coat of arms. The window to the right of this door is where the Butler would have been situated. The Butler, as the most important servant in the house, was always to be found closest to the family.

Servants would gather on these steps for official photographs. It was an honour to have your photograph taken. The life of a servant involved much hard work, as the parlour maid now recalls.

My day would start at 6 am by getting out of bed, I would wash, dress and brush my hair into a bun, which unfortunately meant no time for breakfast.

At 6.30 I would go downstairs and begin to open the blinds and start to clean the fireplaces.

At 7.30 am I would sweep and dust the dining room, and then lay the table for breakfast.

At 8 am I would assist in serving breakfast.

At 8.30 am, finally I would be allowed to have my own breakfast.

Other chores would follow, and my day would finish around 10.30 pm.

I would be paid £6 a year.

One story that the servants often recounted is about the hunting dogs and the sausages. It was a tradition to start each hunt with a hearty breakfast. One servant would carry a tray of each item of food. One particular morning, the servant carrying the large tray of sausages tripped and fell, the sausages flew through the air and landed on the ground in the vicinity of the hunting hounds, who quickly gobbled them up. Due to this, the hounds were not hungry and less effective on a hunt, and so the hunt was cancelled at the annoyance of the hunting party.

From here, make your way into what was once, the house. This part of the house has no roof. Be aware that the floor may be a little slippery in wet conditions. As you enter, go over to the noticeboard on the blocked up fireplace on the opposite wall.

**Track 3 – Inside the ruins of the country house**

You are now standing in the ruins of the Brick Hall of the country house. The house was remodelled around the ruins of the Cistercian monastery.

You would have entered this room through a large wooden screen. The hall derived its name from the old red brick floor. There were 4 windows in the west wall, the remnants of which you can still see. These windows gave ample light on the east wall adjacent to it, where there was an open fireplace. The noticeboard is situated where the hearth would have been.

This room would have been 59 feet by 30 feet, 6 inches. Tapestries hung from the walls and exquisite lamps hung from the ceiling. Beautifully carved wooden chairs and vases of exotic plants adorned this room.

The photographs on the noticeboard you are standing near will give you a good idea of what this room once looked like. There is also a map on the board showing you the original layout of the building.

If you turn to face the hand railed staircase towards the end of the room, you will see another noticeboard to the left of it. This wall would have had a doorway leading to the magnificent long gallery, which was accessed through Lord Savile’s library.

The library would have been used often by the Governess of the House, as she now explains.

I was born in Poland and I came to England to seek employment at Rufford Abbey. I started as a governess and I often spent time in the library with the Savile children where we had lessons. We used the range of wonderful books the library contained. I remember the door to the library was in the North West corner of the brick hall. The library had a dark oak polished floor and open bookshelves covered three of the walls to a height of 12 feet. The walls were panelled with deep velvet brocade and the fireplace was carved from white stone. A door from the library opened from the long gallery, where the family would put on plays, hold dances and there were many secret liaisons. Although, as a governess, I was not allowed to put myself in any circumstance that might affect my reputation. In fact, I was expected to remain invisible at social gatherings.

In 1938, due to high death duties and taxation, Lord Savile’s trustees decided to sell the estate and all of its holdings. The young 3rd Lord Savile was still only 19 and at the time was, by law, too young to inherit.

It was later used by the military and fell into disrepair, before being taken over by Nottinghamshire County Council, in the 1950s.

Make your way over to the steep hand railed staircase at the far end of the room. Take care when descending these stairs. Mind your head as you exit the doorway at the bottom and continue walking straight ahead across the grassed area, until you reach a slight slope in the ground. Turn around and face the building you just came from.

**Track 4 – The Demolished Country House**

You should now be standing in the grassed area, where the ground gently slopes away.

This is where the country house would have ended before it was demolished in the 1950’s. The long gallery would have extended out to this point, above which would also have been the King’s bedroom suite, which was redecorated every time he visited. The King’s bedroom was richly ornamented in white and gold. There was no expense spared, and a private phone was installed for the King. The King would sleep in this room with his little dog, Caesar, a white terrier who wore a silver collar with the inscription “My name is Caesar and I belong to the King.”

Sir George Savile’s bedroom, in contrast, contained a stone Tudor fireplace with a carved oak chimney piece, portraying figures of owls and grotesque faces and cherub’s heads. In the centre of the chimneypiece was a richly moulded plaster panel of the Savile arms, with the motto “Bee Fast”.

Lady Savile’s bedroom was also in this area, as her Lady’s maid will now explain.

My lady Savile’s bedroom would have been in this part of the house. As her lady’s maid, I was a senior servant, who reported directly to her, but I was still ranked beneath the housekeeper.

My main job was to be Lady Savile’s private servant. I accompanies Lady Savile when she travelled, and performed secretarial duties. I was hired directly by Lord and Lady Savile themselves, rather than by the butler or housekeeper. My salary was £25 a year.

My specific duties included helping my mistress with her appearance, including make-up, hairdressing, clothing, jewellery and shoes. I was also responsible for removing stains from clothing, sewing, mending and altering garments as needed. I would also bring my mistress breakfast in her room and run her a bath.

As soon as my mistress departed her rooms in the morning, I would tidy and refresh all belongings and articles under my care. A shut up room would go stale throughout the night, a good airing, therefore, was the first area of duty. I would throw the windows open and draw the bed curtains. Any clothes that remained outside of the closet were put away in the dressing room. Any accessories associated with washing my lady were also cleaned and put away.

Make your way back towards the building and go down the steps on the left hand side, and enter the first doorway on your right.

**Track 5 – The Cellarium/Store Room for the Country House**

You should now be standing in the Cellarium, which would have been a store room for the country house.

Wine would have been stored in here, along with basic foods such as beef, mutton, pork, bacon, cheese and eggs. Lord Savile would have been judged on the quality of his wine, but it was the Butler who would have managed the stores and selected the wines for supper.

At the beginning of the Victorian period, people relied on the foods that were in season and available locally. When the railways were built, many new and fresh foods were easily transported to places like Rufford. The invention of the steam ship, and of transport refrigeration meant that also meat, fish and fruit could be imported from overseas.

There were no fridges or freezers to preserve food for a long time, so meals were limited by the availability of local food supplies or food which had been pickled or preserved.

The wealth of the Saviles meant that they could afford to build ice houses. There is an ice house located by the lake that would have been used to store ice which was cut from the lake, which was used to keep food cool.

Ice houses were the forerunners of the domestic fridge, and were introduced into Britain in 1660. Originally, there were three ice houses at Rufford, but these were not built until 1820. They were sited in sheltered places away from the sun, with a bank of Earth on top for better insulation. Evergreen trees were often planted on top as a further aid to insulation. The ice houses at Rufford were close to the lake to make the collection and storage of ice easier. Only 2 of the 3 ice houses still survive at Rufford today, and the outside of one is easily accessible to the public.

On the far wall you can see some steps, leading to a blocked up doorway where supplies would have originally been brought in such as pheasant, hares, partridge and rabbit. Game would have been stored in here from the shooting parties that took place at Rufford. On the 3rd of December 1901, the game shot totalled 1,146 animals.

Take in the information on the display boards in this room at your leisure. When you are ready, make your way out of the doorway that is diagonally opposite the one you entered, and exit outside. Enter the next doorway on your right and head towards the large stone fireplace.

**Track 6 – The Frater/Servants Dining Room**

You should now be standing next to the large stone fireplace.

When Rufford was a monastery, the Frater would have been used as a dining room for the Lay brothers.

Later, when the monastery became a country house, it was used as a servant’s hall and dining room, and a massive fireplace was installed.

The servant’s hall would have been decorated for occasions throughout the year, including for Harvest Festivals and Christmas. It was used for parties such as the servants ball on New Year’s Eve, when Lord and Lady Savile would join the servants for some dancing, and the Butler and the Housekeeper would serve the lower servants.

If someone from the estate was married or christened in the chapel, the party might have been celebrated in here. There would be prize-giving services for children on the estate. The girl who produced the best piece of needlework, and the boy who produced the best piece of woodwork, were both presented with a brand new Bible.

With so many servants working for the Savile family, meal times were a busy affair, as one servant explains.

I would come down to the servant’s dining room when my Lady allowed me a short break. Six times a day at Rufford Abbey, a full meal was served. 2 breakfasts, 2 lunches and 2 dinners, 3 for the servants and 3 for the family. The servants would eat jams, pickles, pies, bread, cheeses and sausages.

Exit the room through the doorway you entered. Turn right, and follow the path to stop near the picnic tables outside the Savile restaurant. Turn and face the building.

**Track 7 – The Kitchens**

You should be standing outside of the Savile Restaurant, facing the building. The area now occupied by the Savile restaurant were once the kitchens to the country house.

In Edwardian times, food became very important socially.

When the King visited, banquets were held in his honour, where approximately 30 dishes would be served over 9 courses. When the King came to stay, he would bring his own kitchen staff, comprising of maids, cooks and butlers. The usual Rufford staff would have to give up their rooms for the King’s staff, which caused friction between them.

Lord Savile spent a lot of money on food and its preparation. Food was specifically chosen and cooked to show off his wealth. Meals were served by servants who were expected to be faultlessly clean, polite and competent. There would be big trouble for any servant who dropped a plate or was noisy with the cutlery. If any items went missing, the servants rooms would be searched, and the thieves dismissed instantly, without references.

Dinner parties were showy and expensive. There were usually 8 to 10 courses. Dinner parties were so important to the reputation of wealthy Edwardians that the cook could earn far more than the butler. The servants themselves ate much plainer food, their main meal of the day was at midday, rather than in the evening like the Savile family.

Kind Edward the 7th admired French cooking, and the upper classes soon followed his lead.

Those employed at Rufford ate reasonably well, as one of Rufford’s garden boys explains.

Those here at Rufford who are on a slightly higher wage can occasionally afford to purchase bacon, cheese or sausage. As we live in a rural area like Rufford, us servants eat bread and vegetables such as onions, turnips or potatoes.

From this point, follow the path to the Orangery building, easily identified by the circular windows at the top. Once inside, head for the information panels on the far wall.

**Track 8 – The Orangery**

You should be standing in the Orangery, near the information boards on the far wall.

Originally, the Orangery was built as an open air bath house and garden pavilion by Sir George Savile in 1729, at a time when bathing was rare. It included 2 towers, a portico (porch) and a circular pond, and also housed a collection of Roman sculptures and antiques.

Later, it was converted into a winter garden, or Orangery, with a glass roof, fountain and underfloor heating.

It provided exotic fruits and flowers put on display when guests arrived, another sign of wealth.

As well as the Orangery, Rufford was well known for its beautiful gardens. A description of the formal gardens was written in the Gardener’s Magazine on the 18th June 1910. The detailed article begins “The mansion occupies a commanding position in a large, finely wooded and highly picturesque park, and is surrounded with pleasure grounds that are not less remarkable for their extent than for their beauty.” The article also goes on to describe the Kitchen garden, and several separate themed areas, including Japanese and Roman gardens, containing large numbers of species of roses, carnations, trees, shrubs, flowers and fruit.

George Slingsby was born in 1889 and began his working life as a garden boy at Rufford.

“At 14, I followed in my father’s footsteps and started as a mere gardener at the country house. During my time there, I was very fortunate to have seen King Edward come to stay. It was the thrill of my young life. Towards the end of my first year, I was given a little promotion and put in charge of herbaceous borders. I had to make close inspections of all of the plants and report any signs of disease. I had to constantly scrape away bark from the vines in the Orangery to stop attacks from the Red Spider. Later in the season when grapes were forming, I had to carefully remove ill-shaped or imperfect grapes with a long pointed pair of scissors, to ensure a perfect bunch eventually reached the table.”

The lake at the country house was created in 1750 by damming the North end of the existing stream. This lake enhanced the appearance of the park, gave power to the corn mill, and watered nine different types of formal garden.

Exit the Orangery the way you entered, and make your way up the ramp opposite. Go and stand in the South courtyard underneath the clock tower.

**Track 9 – The South Courtyard**

Much of the remaining roofed section of the house, with its clock and open domed bell tower is the result of alterations made by Anthony Salvin in the 1830’s and 40’s. This clock was made by John Thwaites of London. This section of the house was inhabited by the male servants, whereas the female servants would have occupied the attic in the North end of the house, which was knocked down. You will notice that there are holes on the side of the building which many people believed was from World War 2, when soldiers carried out gun practice. However, it is actually due to erosion caused by the weather. Currently, Rufford is home to nine species of bats, with many bats roosting in this building.

**Ghost Stories**

This building is believed to be haunted.

Rufford, with its long involved history, would not be complete without tales of a darker, mysterious nature.

Mysterious appearances of the supernatural at Rufford are difficult to explain. However, there is some documented evidence to support the widespread belief that Rufford is haunted. An early register at the Parish Church of Edwinstowe has an entry that describes the burial of a man who died from fright after seeing the Rufford Ghost.

Over the years, Rufford has gained a widespread reputation for being haunted. Stories abound from local people who have claimed to have seen “the little old lady in black” and “the white lady gliding through the trees.”

More recently, there was great alarm when a guest at the house described an appearance of a gigantic monk with a fleshless skull under his cowl.

House maids in the past have encountered with the horror of the apparition of a black monk touching them on the shoulder, or being reflected through a mirror.

Several noble ladies who stayed overnight in the house have recalled the experience of a “cold clammy babe nestling up to them in bed.” Lady Sackville, for example, who visited the country house with her baby daughter many years ago. On retiring to bed, Lady Sackville put her baby daughter in a cot by her bed. In the middle of the night, Lady Sackville felt a cold child getting in to bed with her. She naturally thought it was her little daughter, but when she awoke in the morning, her child was still asleep in her cot.

In 1869, staff at the country house noticed some large, seemingly damp flag stones at the bottom of a staircase leading from the chapel were removed to reveal a skeleton with a bullet hole through its skull. The bones were removed to Wellow churchyard and buried.]

Another ghost seen at Rufford is the ghost of the white lady. She is said to have been Arabella Stuart, who was the great great granddaughter of Henry the 8th, and niece to Mary Queen of Scots. She died in 1615 in captivity while on a hunger strike after being jailed by King James for her secret marriage to William Seymour, who also had a distant claim to the throne. In recent years, her ghost has been photographed in the arch of the cellarium at Rufford.

Past residents of the home deliberately stayed up all night to try and see a ghost, but still never saw one.

Some people have blamed Sir George Savile for some of the supernatural happenings for it is said he dabbled in black magic. No doubt, ghosts or no ghosts, the ancient stones of Rufford could tell some stories.

From this point, turn to face the coach house café, and make your way through the arched entrance on your right to enter the stable block courtyard.

**Track 10 – The Stable Courtyard**

You should be standing in the stable courtyard.

This building once housed the Savile’s collection of horses. The welfare of the horses was one of the most important considerations of any country estate, and this was reflected in the standard of the stable building.

The stable block was built in 1660. Originally it held 20 horses, and the first floor was used for storing horse food and harnesses. Great care was taken of Lord Savile’s horses as they were used for travel, work and hunting.

It was altered in 1737, and again in 1890 when Lord Savile re-roofed it and added exotic finials on the gables, elaborate down pipes and his coat of arms over the two entrances.

Captain Henry Savile’s favourite horse was named ‘Cremorne’. It won 20 races out of the 26 it took part in, including the Derby in 1872, and the Ascot Gold Cup in the following year. Over the horse’s racing career, it earned the total stake value of £22,439.

Cremorne’s gravestone is to be found in the animal graveyard in the Wilderness Woodland, in the grounds of Rufford Abbey. Some of the family’s other pets are also buried here.

In 1980, the stable block was turned into a centre for visitors.

This concludes your tour of Rufford Abbey and its history as a country house. As you exit, please be advised that there are toilet facilities and tourist information in this area. We would encourage you to visit our fabulous shops where you can purchase gifts and souvenirs. We hope that you have had a pleasant day at Rufford Abbey Country Park and have a safe journey home.

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