



SOULTON HALL

WEM, SHROPSHIRE. SY4 5RS

PRESS RELEASE: TUDOR CODE-BREAKING AND SECRET PRESERVATION AT SOULTON HALL TO FEATURE ON *THE REST IS HISTORY* PODCAST

SHROPSHIRE, UK — Soulton Hall and the extraordinary legacy of "Old" Sir Rowland Hill will soon be featured in a dedicated episode of the globally renowned podcast ***The Rest Is History***, hosted by historians Tom Holland and Dominic Sandbrook.

THE DISCOVERIES AT SOULTON HALL: AT A GLANCE

1. ART HISTORY LEAD & ARCHITECTURAL DECODING

- Groundbreaking research by James Wenn and James Syrett (Byrga Geniht)
- Proved Soulton Hall's 1556 proportions deliberately mirror lost monuments

2. THE PRESERVATION OF SAINT ERKENWALD

- Proportions echo the destroyed shrine of London's patron saint
- Active, live archaeological inquiries investigate hidden court structure

3. LOST ALTAR STONE OF OLD ST PAUL'S CATHEDRAL

- High Altar removed in 1550 was saved rather than destroyed
- Central altar stone smuggled to Soulton and hidden in basement chamber

4. SHAKESPEARE'S 'AS YOU LIKE IT' BIRTHPLACE FOUND

- Setting inspired Thomas Lodge and William Shakespeare's "As You Like It"
- Character "Old Sir Rowland de Boys" directly honours Sir Rowland Hill

5. BIOGRAPHICAL CONFIRMATION OF SIR ROWLAND HILL

- Confirmed his dual role as Protestant Lord Mayor & clandestine preserver
- Unlocked his hidden campaign to save heritage from Tudor state destruction

The upcoming episode explores how a high-ranking Tudor statesman used intellect, coded architecture, and quiet passive resistance to preserve some of England's most vital cultural treasures during a period of intense religious upheaval.

Pioneering Research: James Wenn and James Syrett of Byrga Geniht

Unlocking these long-held secrets would simply not have been possible without the extraordinary work of researchers James Wenn and James Syrett of Byrga Geniht.

Massive credit and gratitude are owed to them for their pioneering architectural analysis and tireless dedication. Their revelations have transformed the understanding of Soulton Hall, demonstrating how intellect, coded design, and quiet determination were used to protect the nation's shared memory during a period often remembered only for widespread destruction.

From Architectural Decoding to Biographical Proof

The breakthrough began through rigorous art history and architectural decoding.

By analyzing the sophisticated proportions and geometric language built into Soulton Hall, James Wenn and James Syrett realized the house was far more than an ordinary Elizabethan country seat—it was a deliberate statement crafted in stone and brick.

This initial architectural lead unlocked crucial biographical confirmations regarding Sir Rowland Hill. As a statesman, publisher, and former Lord Mayor of London who navigated four volatile Tudor reigns, Sir Rowland used his public standing and private intellect to execute a covert campaign of cultural preservation. The physical layout of the building provided the missing key to understanding his hidden life and true intentions.

The Preservation of Saint Erkenwald

Saint Erkenwald was the seventh-century bishop and patron figure of medieval London.

When royal orders directed the dismantling of his famous tomb at Old St Paul's Cathedral, Sir Rowland Hill stepped in behind the scenes. James Wenn and James Syrett proved through architectural analysis that the proportions and structural geometry of Soulton Hall directly echo the recorded dimensions of the Erkenwald monument in London.

This research has since expanded into live archaeological inquiry. Ground observations and parch marks in the central court reveal a hidden square structure, marking the focal point where sacred material is believed to have been secretly reinterred. Investigation into this site remains an active, ongoing field of study.

The Lost Altar Stone of Old St Paul's

In 1550, while serving as Lord Mayor of London, Sir Rowland was tasked by Bishop Ridley and the Crown with taking down the High Altar of Old St Paul's Cathedral. Official accounts led people to believe these key structures were destroyed.

However, research by Byrga Geniht into the spatial layout of Soulton showed that the entire planning of the Hall honored a central basement room planned around a stone whose dimensions match a medieval altar. It is now understood that Old Sir Rowland Hill wished the building to be recognized as a statement that he did not destroy, but rather smuggled out and preserved this focal piece of London's heritage.

A Sanctuary of Resistance and *As You Like It*

Sir Rowland Hill created Soulton Hall around 1556 as a place of safety, scholarship, and quiet resistance. Beyond its hidden spaces used to protect forbidden texts, the hall holds profound ties to English literature. The estate directly inspired the setting and spirit of reconciliation found in Thomas Lodge's work and William Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. The character of "Old Sir Rowland de Boys" in the play directly honours the memory of Sir Rowland Hill, celebrating a legacy of wisdom, shelter, and peace during turbulent times.

Quotations

"Having known Tom Holland for a long time, we have shared many conversations over the years about this special place. Like us, Tom was long intrigued and puzzled by the deeper, hidden story of Soulton Hall and felt there was much more beneath the surface waiting to be understood."

— The Ashton Family, Soulton Hall

"Soulton is a rich and fascinating bridge between sixteenth-century worlds.

Not Just from the late modern, but also between the traditions of Britain and an international Renaissance, showing local distinctiveness even as it connects outwards.

I don't think any house has quite as many surprises per square foot as Soulton"

— James D. Wenn, Country House Expert, The Byrga Geniht Consultancy

Media & Visitor Information

- **Podcast Access:** Tune in to *The Rest Is History* on all major podcast platforms to hear Tom Holland and Dominic Sandbrook explore this story.
- **Heritage Tours & Visits:** Members of the public can explore the historic grounds, coded architecture, and sanctuary spaces in person through pre-booked heritage tours.

Formal Government Citations & Official Recognition

The historical and cultural significance of Soulton Hall has now entered the permanent official record at both national and local government levels:

- **Parliamentary Record & Early Day Motions:** The estate's history, its status as a place of sanctuary, and its foundational link to Shakespearean history have been formally integrated into Parliament. This includes a House of Commons Early Day Motion recognizing Soulton Hall's place in the origins of *As You Like It* and national heritage, tabled by Helen Morgan MP.
- **Ministerial Questions & Written Answers:** A series of formal parliamentary written questions and ministerial responses from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) have officially recorded Soulton's role in preserving cultural artifacts and literary heritage.

- Unanimous Motion in Shropshire Council: Shropshire Council formally passed a motion unanimously celebrating the county's rich heritage connected to Sir Rowland Hill, Thomas Lodge, William Shakespeare, and the landscape of Soulton Hall. The resolution formally endorses the estate as a site of profound national and literary importance.

Media & Research Contacts

Soulton Hall Estate

- **Contact:** The Ashton Family
- **Address:** Soulton Hall, Soulton, Nr. Wem, Shropshire, SY4 5RS, UK
- **Telephone:** +44 (0)1939 232786
- **Email:** enquiries@soultonhall.co.uk
- **Website:** www.soultonhall.co.uk

Architectural & Historical Research

- **Organization:** Byrga Geniht
- **Lead Researchers:** James D. Wenn & James Syrett
- **Website:** www.byrga.co.uk
- **Email:** jdWenn@byrga.co.uk