

**Tresham [née Throckmorton], Muriel** (1547x50-1615), gentlewoman, was born to Sir Robert Throckmorton (born by 1513-1581) and his second wife Elizabeth [née Hussey] (d. 1554), at Coughton Court, Warwickshire.

The Throckmortons spanned the confessional divide occasioned by the Reformation with unusual breadth: Robert's brothers Kenelm, Clement, Nicholas, and George had all embraced evangelical religion while Robert, John, and Anthony had held fast to the old faith. The same was true of Muriel's generation. The commitment of her cousin Job Throckmorton (1545-1601) to reformed zeal extended to Puritanism, and he was implicated in the 'Marprelate Tracts' controversy. Muriel's parents, however, professed the Catholic faith of their ancestors. Accordingly, by 1566 she had married her father's ward, Thomas Tresham (1543-1605), who had inherited Rushton Hall, Northamptonshire, from his grandfather and namesake in 1559. Around the same time, Muriel's sister Anne married William Catesby. These marriages bound Catholic families of local standing and redoubled ties fastened in earlier generations. Tresham and Catesby were both honoured with knighthoods at Queen Elizabeth's progress at Kenilworth in 1575, and their father-in-law commissioned glasswork in 1578x9 in proud anticipation of the advancement and honourable public service which would surely await them.

Both Muriel and her husband were raising their family in the new, Elizabethan world. Their decision to persist in their commitment to the Catholic faith and, particularly, to practices that were gradually outlawed, meant that they endured considerable financial and social hardship. Together they had six daughters and four sons, one of whom, Thomas, died in infancy. Their eldest son, Francis Tresham (c. 1567-1605), would later attract infamy by involving himself in the failed coup of Robert Devereux, second earl of Essex in 1601, and, even more disastrously, in the Gunpowder Plot, ultimately dying from illness in the Tower of London in December 1605, leaving the family name tarnished by treason. As sheriff, Muriel's own cousin Sir Arthur Throckmorton was required to search her house following the Plot's discovery, with predictably acrimonious results, but relations between these confessionally-divergent wings of the family were not always hostile, and individual members sometimes exchanged

hospitality.

A Catholic gentlewoman had an important role to play in the protection and preservation of her household beyond the walls of the family home. Between 1581 and 1583, while her husband Thomas was under close imprisonment in the Fleet, Muriel sent letters of petition to members of her kinship circle in which she made use of the language and expectations of femininity, drawing in particular on her position as a wife and mother. In the main, the letters survive only as drafts in Thomas's hand, and they may have been a collaborative effort between husband and wife (Cogan, *Mobilities*, 115). Their rhetorical and emotional force depend entirely on conventional understandings of female concerns and conduct. Accordingly, Muriel's letters privileged family: the household, the children, and a wife's position in her husband's absence. When Thomas returned at last to Rushton in 1593, Muriel acted to protect him from incurring hostile attention and jeopardising his liberty by entreating his cousin and namesake to show 'forbearance in visiting' (HMC *Various*, 74).

Muriel's household was often deprived of its patriarch; Thomas was under various forms of imprisonment between 1581 and 1593. The strictures varied widely, but he was not free to return indefinitely to his Northamptonshire estates or to manage his affairs uninhibited. While apart, Muriel and Thomas sustained extensive correspondence in which they addressed each other affectionately as 'Good Tres'. While Thomas was imprisoned in London and its environs, Muriel seems to have lived nearby, including in their own residences at Hoxton, Shoreditch, and Tothill Street, Westminster. In and near London, Muriel was in contact with networks of coreligionists whose activities undermined the government's proscription of Catholicism. These activities were often audacious: in December 1587, Muriel was due to receive a gilt copy of *A Memoriall of a Christian Life*, Richard Hopkins' recent English translation of the devotional work by the Spanish Dominican friar Luis de Granada, to be sent to her by means of an underground book smuggling racket operating out of the Marshalsea prison (Havens and Patton).

In present strife, 'even in this owre great want of frendes' (BL Add. MS 39828, fol. 75r), Muriel looked to the constancy of early kinswomen. She had two influential female correspondents of her own acquaintance. The first, Elizabeth *née* Hastings (d. 1621), Countess of Worcester (styled Lady Herbert), was married to Edward Somerset (c. 1550-1628), fourth earl of Worcester. Muriel and Elizabeth had been educated together in the household of Elizabeth's mother, Katherine Hastings [*née* Pole], and Muriel would call upon this shared memory hoping to inspire generosity from one mother to another: 'when both you and i wer yonge and brought vpp together vnder yor right virtuus mother (ane excellent paterne in this corrup[t] age of manners of al womanly modesty gravity and christion governmentt...)' (BL Add. MS 39828, fol. 87r). Muriel's second correspondent, Bridget, Countess of Bedford, was her maternal aunt. Twice widowed, Bridget had married Francis Russell (1526/7-1585), second earl of Bedford, in 1566. In both cases, Muriel struck up a correspondence with fellow women in advance of approaching their husbands. Despite serious confessional differences and Francis's participation in the prosecution against Tresham two years earlier, Muriel's intervention through the offices of her aunt appear to have induced him to exercise clemency. In 1583, Muriel wrote to Bridget as a 'Looly wife on my knees' to protest the domestic arrangements of her husband's confinement:

'wher he is now vnder a waywarde warden ... in worss wise devided from wife and children, and too too badly lodged ... and that which is worste, in ofte hearing vngodly, lascivius, and blasphemus speches, And withall so skanted of romth and beddinge, is this vile chamber thus pestered with enormities...' (BL Add. MS 39828, fol. 84r).

A gentlewoman's care of her children afforded her considerable influence, and her wider kin, too, benefited from her counsel. Muriel Vaux, her niece and probable goddaughter, made an importunate match with the Vaux servant George Fulcis, and it fell to the Treshams to try to rescue the Vaux family prospects. Muriel's sister-in-law Mary, Lady Vaux, was a close confidante, mirroring the affection shared by their respective husbands. She remained close, too, to her married daughters, as well as to other family. Bonds of kinship held fast. In a letter to Mary Vaux in 1596 Muriel wrote

that she and her daughter Lady Mounteagle were invited to stay with her aunt, the Countess of Derby (to whom she had written in unhappiness in 1583), and to go hunting in Brigstock Park — notwithstanding the anti-Catholic objections of the Countess' servant, Parker (HMC *Various*, p. 89).

The Tresham daughters made advantageous matches to Catholic gentlemen across the country and the spectrum of religious and political conformity, doubtless aided by their father's generous provision of portions between £2,000 and £3,000 each, well above what might have been expected for his rank. Notable elevations included the marriage of Frances and Edward, later 10th Baron Stourton (1556-1633), and Elizabeth and William Parker, Baron Morley and Mounteagle (1574/5-1622). The marriage in 1605 of Muriel's youngest daughter, Mary, to Thomas Brudenell (1578- 1663), later first Earl of Cardigan, came just months before the death of Thomas Tresham that September, but brought especial joy to both parents. Muriel lived out her widowhood at Lyveden, nine miles from the Brudenell seat, Deene Park. She continued to recuse herself from the established Church, but with the legal responsibility occasioned by her widowhood had to contend with the attendant statutory fines. She continued to draw on the support of her kin and on men and women of influence. She was thus sustained by the relationships she had cultivated throughout her life. Thomas Brudenell assisted her in legal and financial matters in the last decade of her life and would serve as her executor. Petitions to Sir Robert Cecil sometimes won clemency. On 27 October 1609 she wrote in gratitude for Cecil's 'late charitable letter' to the Attorney General 'towching my releif against the incapacitie w[hi]ch the malice of one mr John Lambe [Sir John Lambe (c. 1566-1646)] (...a tediows & vehement aduersarie of myne) endevuoured to haue drawn vppon me', bestowing her thanks for this and other unnamed acts of kindness with a gift of 50 trees from the celebrated orchard at Lyveden for Cecil's own at Hatfield (TNA: SP 14/48, fol. 186r).

During the general atmosphere of panic in November 1605, Muriel concealed her family's papers, together with a number of seditious books and pamphlets, in a wall cavity. So successful was their concealment that they were not discovered until 1828, and they are now a treasury for modern scholars. Muriel died in 1615 at Lyveden. She

willed that she be buried 'by my husband ... that as we lived and died together in the feare and love of god ... we shall arise together' (TNA: PROB 11/127/1, fol. 178r) in the parish church of St Peter at Rushton (demolished 1799).

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## Sources

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2. *Archives*

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3. *Likenesses*

n/a

4. *Wealth at death*

following the payment of undisclosed debts, willed bequests of £658 (total) as well as payments of £6 13s 4d per year for the duration of the lease of Pipewell: will, 1615, TNA: PROB 11/127/1, fol. 178. However, she was reported to have left debts exceeding this: SP 16/49 fol. 54r.

