



Viewpoint

## Thirsty works



Time: 15 mins

Region: East Midlands

Landscape: rural



**Location:** Normanton Church, Rutland Water South Shore, Oakham, Rutland LE15 8RP

**Grid reference:** SK 93262 06282

**Getting there:** Follow signs for Rutland Water South Shore to the Edith Weston car park. From the car park keep the reservoir on your left and follow the paths for half a mile

**Keep an eye out for:** Ospreys – these rare brown and white birds snatch fish out of the water

Turning on a tap, flushing a toilet, boiling a kettle – many of us do these things so often we take them for granted. But how water reaches us and where it comes from are complicated processes.

Rutland Water reservoir was built in the 1970s as Britain's growing population created surging water demand. During construction, the historic Normanton Church was partly submerged. It is now Rutland's county landmark – and a symbol of something else.

What does this isolated church tell us about our thirst for water?



From the church drink in the vast expanse of Rutland Water - this is one of Europe's largest artificial lakes. Covering over 11 square kilometres it's about the size of Lake Windermere. When it's full we are surrounded by 140 million litres of water – the amount in 56 Olympic swimming pools.

Seeing all this water in one place highlights how much of it we use. On average each of us in Britain uses 150 litres a day, enough to fill three bathtubs.

Reservoirs help meet this demand but with great effects on our landscapes; 50 years ago we would be looking across natural woodland and grassy meadows. Rutland Water was created by damming and flooding the Gwash Valley. The process took five years and totally transformed the area.

During the work Nether Hambleton and Middle Hambleton villages were cleared, with the loss of homes and farms. Normanton Church was also due for demolition. It was built in the 1820s as a private chapel for the Normanton estate. Public outcry saved it before the valley was flooded.

But the church walls were half a metre below the proposed reservoir's water level, so the building could collapse from erosion. To prevent this, the church was set in an island – like a castle in a moat - and the inside filled to the windows with rubble.

Although the church was protected for future generations, other buildings in the valley were not. How would you feel if your home came under threat? Would you make way for water?

Saved but submerged, the church represents a loss and a gain. It also shows our need for water and the competing demands upon our land. The water industry creates jobs, open spaces and wildlife habitats but can also change landscapes irreparably and erase whole communities.

Normanton Church is a symbol of the struggle between preservation and progress, plus a reminder of the social and financial costs of our national infrastructure.

## A wet patch

It might seem strange that this huge reservoir is in England's smallest county. But Rutland is ideal; the average climate, number of rivers and moisture-retaining clay soils are natural water sources.

Rutland is also within reach of the regions with the greatest water demand – East Anglia (the driest) and South East England (the most populated). As a result there are several reservoirs in the East Midlands, including Staunton Harold, Ladybower and Carsington. Many supply neighbouring parts of the country.



## A dry patch

One of Britain's most famous 'drowned villages' is the hamlet of Mardale Green in Cumbria. It was submerged in 1935 to make way for Haweswater Reservoir.

But it hasn't completely vanished. When the reservoir level drops Mardale Green's remains appear above the water - including walls, gates and tree stumps.

These spooky returns have become more frequent in recent years due to our increasingly dry summers.