

Lady Godiva

Who: Lady Godiva, Leofric (husband, Earl of Mercia and Lord of Coventry), King Canute (Cnut), Coventry's residents, Peeping Tom, Roger of Wendover (Hertfordshire monk who wrote Flores Historiarum – Flowers of History – that first reported the Godiva story), Matthew Paris (made the story popular with Chronica Majora), religious tourists attracted in 14th century by adding the detail that Godiva asked people not to look, Puritans – added story about Peeping Tom, Ranulf Higden, whose Polychronicon – circa 1257 – confirmed that Leofric stopped collecting all taxes except for those on horses, Edward I – 1272-1307 – ordered an inquiry that confirmed tax collection did stop

What: Ride, horse, dare (Leofric dared his wife to ride naked on the promise that he would stop collecting the tax), Canute's bodyguard (paid for by the tax), Canute is famous for telling the tide to turn back (to prove to his courtiers that he was not as powerful as they claimed), Heregeld (type of Danegeld), surprised Leofric when she did, long hair covered her body (Bible: Corinthians), Godiva asked people of Coventry not to look, one man did look, tailor, blinded by wrath of God, Leofric converted to Christianity, Flores Historiarum, Chronica Majora, Domesday book

Where: Coventry, St Albans Hertfordshire (monk historians), The site of St Osburg's Nunnery in Coventry, Cathedral Lanes Shopping Centre – has statue of Peeping Tom

When: 1035AD, midday on market day, 1235 – publication of 'Flores Historiarum', 1250 – Chronica Majora 14th century – detail about her asking people not to look added to attract religious pilgrims, 17th century Reformation and Puritans add detail about Peeping Tom, 1043 Lady Godiva and her husband founded a Benedictine house for an Abbott and 24 monks on the site of St Osburg's Nunnery in Coventry, which had been destroyed by Danes in 1016 – this later became the Cathedral of St Mary, Lady Godiva is said to have had her jewellery melted down to make crosses for the Abbey, 1067 – Lady Godiva died, 1257 – publication of Polychronicon, 1272-1307 – reign of Edward I

Why: To cut tax, stop collecting the tax, (why the dare) because Godiva sponsored local arts and Greek and Roman art included nudes, Matthew Paris disliked taxation

How: Naked, £160 (value of Godiva's estates), Tax on landowners based on a hide of land – a hide was enough to feed a family (The abbey of Coventry held three hides). In 1016 Sweyn Forkbeard's son, Canute, became King of England. After two years he felt sufficiently in control of his new kingdom to the extent of being able to pay off all but 40 ships of his invasion fleet, which were retained as a personal bodyguard, with a huge Danegeld of 72,000 troy pounds (26,900 kg) of silver collected nationally, plus a further 10,500 pounds (3,900 kg) of silver collected from London. The largest single collection of the Heregeld tax came in 1018 and totalled £82,500 of which £10,500 came from London), a month's pay