



Business Roundtable
Institute for Corporate Ethics

Supplemental Reading BRI-1006 SR

**Peeping Tom & Lady Godiva:
Supplemental Reading to
Facebook (A) and (B)**

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Peeping Tom and Lady Godiva¹

Lady Godiva realized her husband Leofic's fiscal policy was devastating many of the citizens of Coventry. The regressive tax was hurting the very people they wanted to help. Many were having difficulties growing their fledging businesses, putting food on the table, or just buying a new pair of shoes due to increasingly higher taxes. Lady Godiva frequently implored her husband to revisit the tax policies but to no avail. She had taken on fighting for such causes in the past and had proven herself a great benefactor and community activist. Changing the tax policy was to become both a personal and professional goal for Lady Godiva.

Leofic, Earl of Mercia, was one of four great magnates of England² and was quite used to lobbying efforts. His wife, however, was persistent and relentless in her own beliefs and labors. Fully exasperated, Leofic finally challenged Lady Godiva to ride naked throughout the town center in order to obtain her proposed tax relief.³ Lady Godiva had heard of other non-violent protests but clearly none of this sort. It was obvious to her that Leofic did not believe she would do it. Lady Godiva, however, was desperate and had some ideas to make the ride more feasible. Furthermore, nothing motivated Lady Godiva quite like Leofic's disbelief.

Initially, Lady Godiva contacted the magistrates of the city and informed them of Leofic's challenge. Given the dire economic status of the town, the community leaders agreed to have all citizens of Coventry return home and remain behind closed doors so as not to see Lady Godiva during her ride through town. The magistrates were grateful to Lady Godiva for taking on their cause and were willing to enter into such an agreement no matter how difficult it may be to carry out.

At noon on the appointed day,⁴ Lady Godiva let down her hair, which covered her in a semi-modest fashion. She then mounted her horse and rode through town, accompanied by two knights. As agreed, the roads were cleared and the market was eerily quiet due to the absence of barter. As she rode, Lady Godiva felt quite pleased with herself for coming up with such a plan to preserve her dignity while taking on her husband's challenge.

¹ Sidney E. Hartland, "Peeping Tom and Lady Godiva," *Folklore* 1, no 2 (1890): 207–226.

² H. R. Ellis Davidson, "The Legend of Lady Godiva," *Folklore* 80, no. 2 (1969): 107–122.

³ Hartland, "Peeping Tom and Lady Godiva."

⁴ "Lady Godiva," *Western Folklore* (January 1950): 77–78.

Startled by her horse's neigh, Lady Godiva turned and noticed an errant young man peeping out through a window.⁵ As Lady Godiva hastily rode home in embarrassment, she did not take time to recognize the man. Her knights, however, soon discovered the peeping young man was Tom the Tailor and informed Leofic.

Leofic and Lady Godiva were told that Tom the Tailor was suddenly struck blind as sort of a divine punishment for peeping, but not before he told his tale to others in his household. Leofic, fully aware of the citizens' agreement with his wife, sought punishment. Given Leofic's political leanings, his first inclination was to pass ordinances, fines, and regulations to control the manner in which citizens could look at one another. After all, Leofic needed to justify the increase in taxes, and development and enforcement of new regulations seemed an adequate solution.

Lady Godiva, although vexed at the thought of Tom seeing her, did not agree with this solution. She knew the townspeople would expect her to speak publicly on the matter, as many within the village wanted to exact further punishment on Tom. Therefore, the manner in which Lady Godiva framed the issue was of great importance. Had it strictly been a simple violation of the agreement? If so, the resolution would typically remain between the parties of the agreement, and Lady Godiva, Tom, and the magistrates could potentially devise a suitable solution.

Had it been a violation of Her Lady's privacy? Could Lady Godiva expect privacy when riding naked through the middle of town? If it was a violation of privacy, the social sanctions on Tom would be more severe—and even more so if Leofic sought remedy via additional laws. Lady Godiva recalled when a young woman was severely punished for peering through the window of a public male bathhouse. In that case, everyone in town *knew* not to look through the windows during certain hours, and the young woman was treated harshly due to the violation of privacy.

Lady Godiva needed to speak to the citizens of Coventry as soon as possible; yet she remained unsure exactly how to communicate the issues to them.

⁵ Davidson, "The Legend of Lady Godiva."