

Rain Dodging: A Scholar's Romp through Britain in Search of a Stuart Queen

Susan J Godwin

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A layered scholar's memoir, Susan J. Godwin's *Rain Dodging* details and personalizes her research into the late seventeenth-century Stuart court of Queen Mary of Modena, consort to James II.

While studying at Oxford, Godwin became intrigued by Mary and the women of her court. Many of those women were writers—an exceptional role for women of their era. Six years later, Godwin secured a five-week fellowship to study at Oxford's famed Bodleian Library. It was an opportunity to travel and make discoveries in Oxford, London, Scotland, and Cambridge.

The book's related supplementary material makes it a fascinating resource: one appendix describes the roles of Mary's court attendants; another depicts the royal Stuart family tree from 1567 to 1714; and a third outlines the mistresses and offspring of Charles II and James II. A few historical images are included, in addition to the book's helpful information about child abuse and nineteen pages of notes. However, the book also includes some disorienting jumps in time, and it sometimes overemphasizes minor events and glosses over important details.

Godwin's text is part travelogue, part scholarly research, and part intimate revelations. Indeed, alongside her efforts to uncover the mysteries of Mary's court, Godwin interjects elements of her own bumpy evolution as a feminist and writer. She shares her history of family abuse and unhealthy relationships with sometimes violent men; she chronicles her efforts to forge a loving bond with her husband, Tony, and daughter, Jesse. There are anecdotes about odd jobs she's worked and unusual friends, brushes with fame and stars in LA, and a devious schizophrenic boyfriend. Lost luggage and an accident that almost jeopardized her Oxford studies also factor in.

Rain Dodging is an intriguing, sometimes amusing memoir that personalizes a scholarly inquiry into a Stuart queen's court.

WENDY HINMAN (November / December 2023)

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