

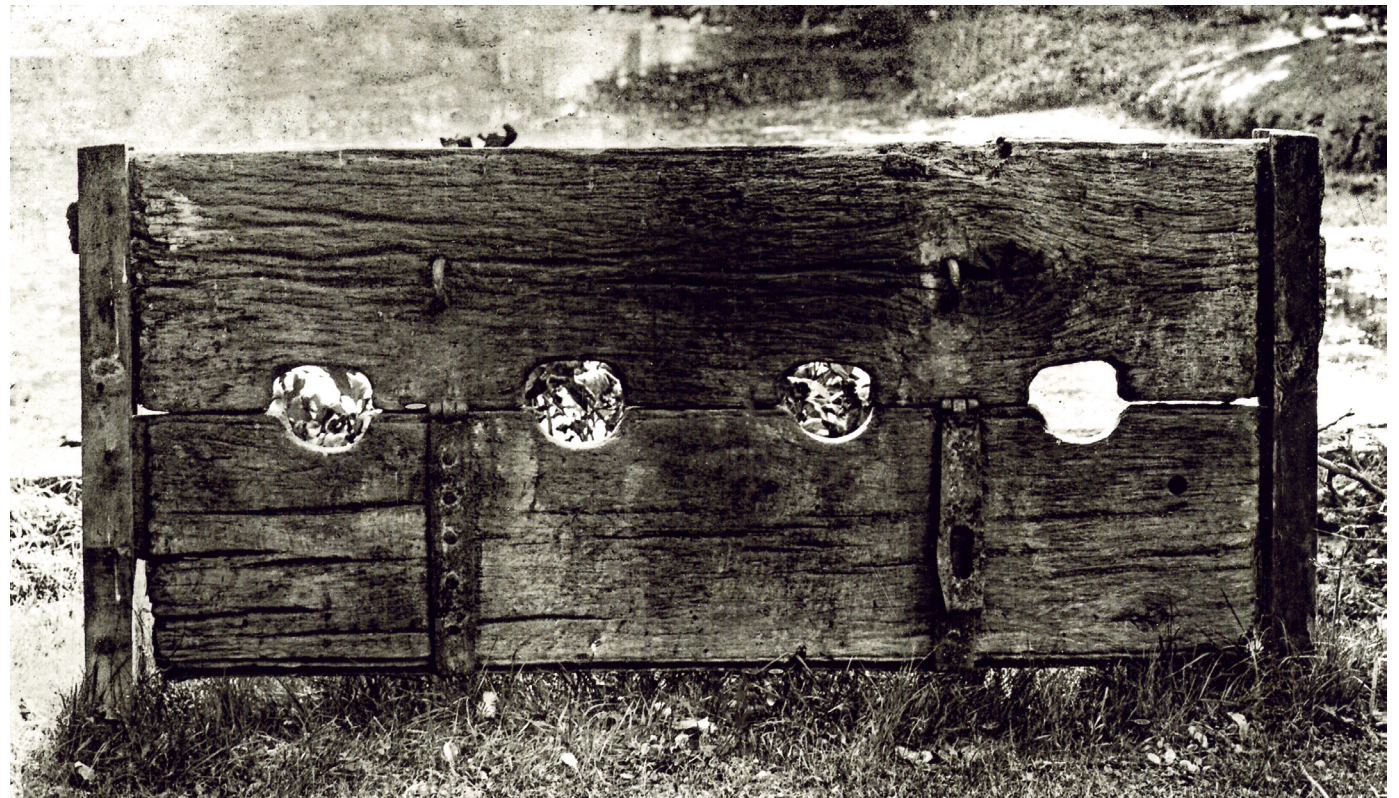
The stocks are the commonest instrument of punishment and many still survive. The 'victim' sat with his ankles secured for as many hours or days as the court ordered. Having already waited his turn manacled to the iron bars of The White Hart in the Corn Market of Wimborne, he now suffered being pelted with rubbish.



The pillory was a one-size-fits-all contraption which secured the head and hands. A tall man would be forced to bend, a short man might be on tiptoes. Often the crime, such as selling unfit meat, was advertised by a heap of maggot ridden flesh piled up below his face. In Wimborne the junction of West Borough and the Square used to be called Pillory Street.



The 'cucking' or **ducking stool** was mainly used to chastise nagging women! Again the court ordered the number of immersions. With hands, elbows, legs and feet secured to the chair, the victim suffered a drenching or at worst drowning if the men did not raise her fast enough. The one on record for Wimborne was on the River Allen.



The Town stocks (owned by the Manor of the Deanery) once stood in the Cornmarket, they are now part of the Priest's House Museum collection.

Young children could be **birched**. Tied to the bench, the birch was used for six, twelve or even twenty strokes - a salutary lesson for petty thieving such as scrumping apples from the vicar's orchard. The child would not sit down comfortably for many days.

In Saxon times King Alfred changed most corporal punishments for **monetary fines** using a sliding scale for the severity of the injury or the value of the injured party but **branding** with a red hot iron letter was also used to identify criminals as follows: H = Harlot; V = Vagabond or beggar; T = Thief; S = Slave, particularly a runaway.

There was a system of **'frankpledge'** whereby ten men stood surety for each other's behaviour. The Hue & Cry was raised after a crime and if caught, the culprit was guarded by the other nine and forced to turn up for trial. In his absence they were fined and

if the accused missed three summons, he would be declared an Outlaw and could be killed without penalty by anyone.

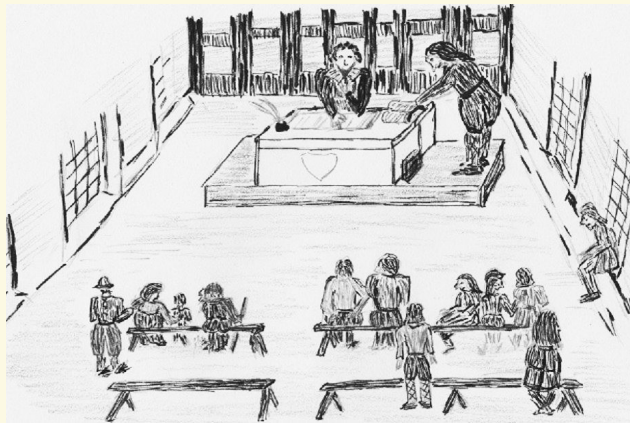
The Normans however were made of sterner stuff! A thief had a **hand amputated**, a counterfeit coiner was also **castrated**. If the wound was cauterised by a red hot blade, the criminal had a good chance of living long enough to reflect on his crime. Men were blinded and maimed for many crimes. Nobles and barons took their quarrel to a higher authority and then fought a **duel to the death**. The survivor won the case. Townsfolk fought with staves, the unconscious man being left for the sheriff to take away. Punishment in the form of the following trials was also used as a form of justice.

Trial by fire involved walking several paces holding a red hot piece of iron. If the wound healed the person was innocent. One woman in Wimborne was accused

of witchcraft. Her hand failed to heal in the allotted three days and she was sentenced to work in the king's kitchen, possibly up at Pamphill, now Kingston Lacy.

Trial by water involved being tied up and thrown into deep water. The victim was helpless. If he floated it was proof of guilt, if he sank, he was innocent but might also have drowned.

Each manor had its own court to deal with minor infringements of the rules. - Stock breaking into a neighbour's field, illegal manure heaps, closing lanes, blocking ditches with rubbish, trespass into the lord's forest or deer park; pound breaking to retrieve a beast. Other functions were more mundane - permission to marry, inherit land, or leave the estate.



The Consistory Court was held in the Minster in the area now used for the shop. There were twelve Governors, one of whom was the Principal Officer or 'Bishop' who acted as the judge. They dealt with accusations of adultery or incontinent living the culprits being obliged to dress in a white penitent's sheet, stand before the congregation during the morning service and then repeat the ritual request to beg forgiveness, not only of God for their sinfulness, but of their friends and neighbours.

The birth of a bastard child often resulted in the woman being sent to a '**house of correction**'. The matter was serious because unless the putative father supported the child financially, the cost would fall on the parish.

Slander and defamation cases were judged on their merits, sometimes with the aid of a lawyer. Drunkenness was punished by time in the stocks.

Those not attending church because they were playing bowls, drinking or skinning a horse were often fined but repeated offences could result in excommunication. Technically no one could have any contact with such a pariah but during the many changes in the accepted religion, one's own brethren, be they Catholic, Baptist or Methodist, would still contrive to meet in secret.

The Consistory Court was abolished by an Order in Council in 1846 although the principal officer, the Official was still appointed as late as 1915. The Principal Officer of the Peculiar and Exempt Jurisdiction of Wimborne Minster now had only one task - to grant marriage licences. Crime was dealt with by Justices of the Peace who had little interest in moral delinquency unless it involved a cost to the Parish.

One last form of justice was found in every town with a church. King Ethelred (the Unready) granted criminals the right of **Sanctuary** beside the altar. How many murderers fled to the safety of the Minster during its long history is not known. For forty days the parish fed the claimant before he was forced to either face the proper punishment or 'abjure' the realm and go into exile. There are no records of such events in the huge rolls of Churchwardens' accounts for the Minster. Neither is there any mention of a gibbet or of hangings in the town itself.

Only the lord of Kingston Hall (Lacy) had the right of Life or Death over his tenants hence the nearby woods which are still called The Hangings to this day.

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