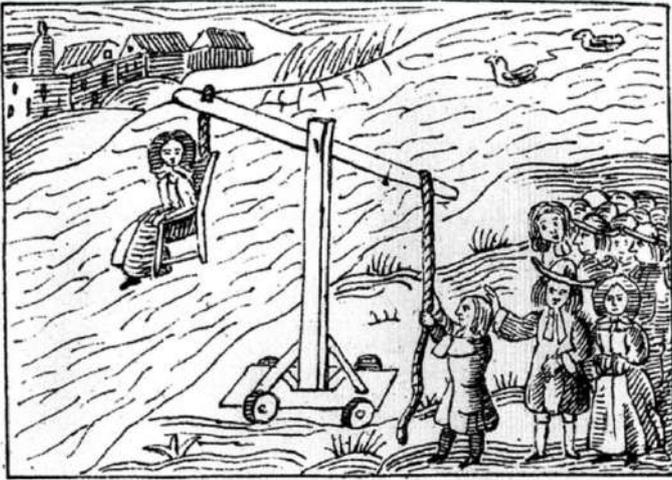


Crime and Punishment - The Stuarts

Fact Sheet

Learn about crimes, laws, trials and punishments in Stuart times, between AD1603-AD1714.



Capital punishment was used for serious crimes, including being a **pirate**. People could also be executed for **witchcraft**. People feared magic, and worried that witches would hurt or steal their children. Several people were accused of witchcraft in Reading, but nobody was found guilty.

Court Justice

A woman accused of being a scold - rude or nagging - might be forced to wear a **Bracket** or a **Scold's bridle** (right). Her head would be locked in the device and she would be unable to talk, eat or drink. Men and women considered rude or dishonest might be tied to a **ducking stool** (above) to be abused by people at or even dunked in water.



Rough Justice

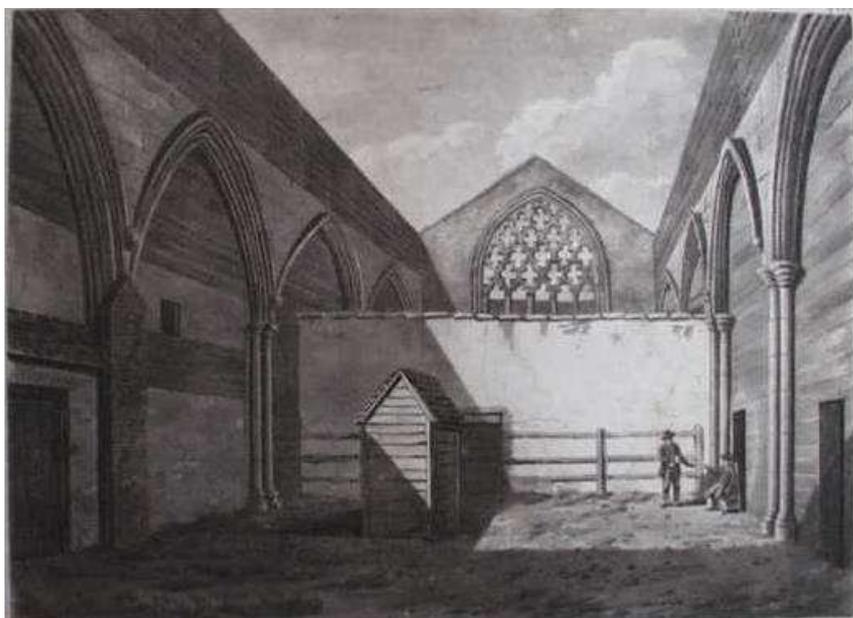
People sometimes took the law into their own hands, punishing their neighbours for crimes. Men and women who hurt members of their family or cheated people in a sale might '**Ride the Skimmington**' (left): the guilty person rode a pole or a donkey backwards around the town while people abused and humiliated them.

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Imprisonment

Town prisons were often dirty, humid and cold places, and inmates (people in prison) had very few rights. Children were sent to prison and lived with other prisoners: they weren't treated differently. Reading had a small gaol next to Saint Lawrence's church and a county gaol, or **Bridewell**, in the old nave of Greyfriar's church (pictured below). In 1646 a Reading woman was imprisoned there for 'jeering' and 'scoffing' at an **alderman**, a senior member of the town council.



Exporting Criminals

From 1654 some minor criminals were sent abroad, usually to the British colony of Virginia in North America. This was called **Transportation**. Children as young as 8 years old could be Transported. Their new lives were tough.

Crime during war

During the English Civil War of 1642-1649, soldiers were garrisoned in Reading. Some townspeople were scared of crimes happening and hid their valuables to stop them being stolen: hidden gold coins have even been found by archaeologists. The Civil War was a period of suspicion and violence. Archbishop William Laud, who was born in Reading, was executed in 1645 and **King Charles I** (right) himself was executed for treason in 1649 at the end of the Civil War.

