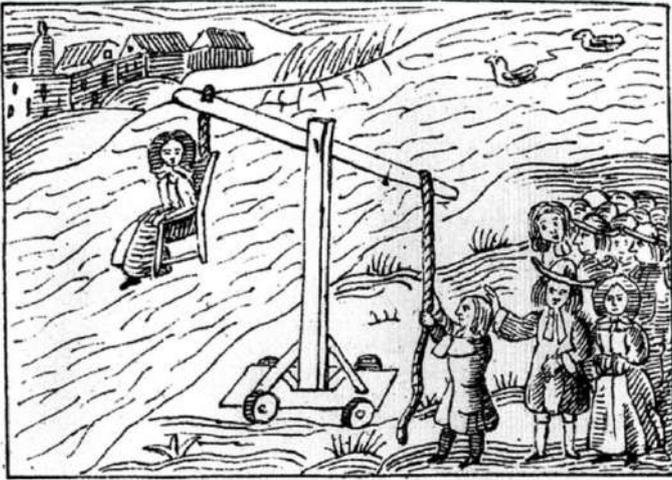


# Crime and Punishment - The Stuarts

## 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.

