



# The Hundred Parishes

## An introductory article about CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

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Within the Hundred Parishes there are some interesting examples of early methods of punishment and confinement.

Before the County Police Act of 1839, when local police stations started to be built, temporary detention of villains, especially drunks, was the responsibility of the parish. Lock ups, also known as cages, were often used and some fine examples still exist in our area.



St. George's church in Anstey has a 15th century lychgate. In 1831 the left side was bricked up and a studded door added so the structure could be used as the village lock up. It is pictured on the left. A distant relative of the Hundred Parishes Society's chairman, Douglas Kent, once 'enjoyed' this facility.

In the 18th century a lock up was incorporated into the ground floor of Thaxted's 15th-century Guildhall, shown on the right. It still looks fit for purpose.



Great Bardfield has a 19th century cage, pictured on the left. It is open to the public in the summer months.

Great Dunmow's lock-up, on the right, was used until 1843. About 50 years later it became a soup kitchen, dispensing food which is reputed to have included venison supplied by the Countess of Warwick.





Pictured above are the former lock ups in Great Chishill, on the left, and Barley on the right. Those below are in Buntingford, on the left, and in Steeple Bumpstead on the right.



Newport has a much larger 18th-century 'house of correction' whose original purpose ceased in Victorian times. The building has now been converted to apartments, but retains its 'welcoming' manacles above the front door.



A form of punishment which was 'popular' from medieval times was the use of stocks. The purpose of this punishment was to subject the offender to humiliation. Stocks were sited in public places where the offender could be pelted with anything from mud to rotten fruit. Ancient stocks, with an attached whipping post, can be seen outside Brent Pelham church, below on the left, while the stocks in Great Amwell churchyard, on the right, were updated in the 2020s.



Another set of renovated stocks can be seen at Hellman's Cross in Great Canfield. They are on the site where Elizabeth Abbot was burnt as a witch in 1683. The persecution of so-called 'witches', mostly unfortunate older women perhaps with some kind of physical or mental handicap, had largely died out by 1735 when the Witchcraft Act made it a crime for anyone to claim that a person had magical powers or practised witchcraft.



The Society would be pleased to hear of other examples of stocks and lock-ups within the Hundred Parishes. Please leave feedback on our website or email [hundredparishes@btinternet.com](mailto:hundredparishes@btinternet.com).

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