

# Shame of the Public Stocks

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stocks and pillory

In this age, we might wonder what the public stocks were. There is a story of a woman who complained that she was placed in front of her house with a stick tied in her mouth. This was known as a "scold". Sometimes a person was fastened to what was known as a "ducking stool" at one end of a seesaw plank, and ducked in a pond or river! Some crimes were punished by making the offender stand up on a stool in some public place, while fastened to his breast was a large placard on which his crime was printed in coarse letters, as "LIAR" or "THIEF."

This practice was meant to shame and humiliate the person into better behavior. In some colonies the use of public whipping posts were applied against hardened offenders. T

he culprit was seated on a bench in a public place, his feet projecting through holes in a plank (or the pillory) where he had to stand up with his neck and wrists painfully confined in a similar way.

Yet, shaming or no, these last two modes of punishment were a source of no small amusement to those persons who gathered about the victim and jeered. Nevertheless, this type of public shame sufficiently served to deter crime.