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Punishment: drunkard's cloak

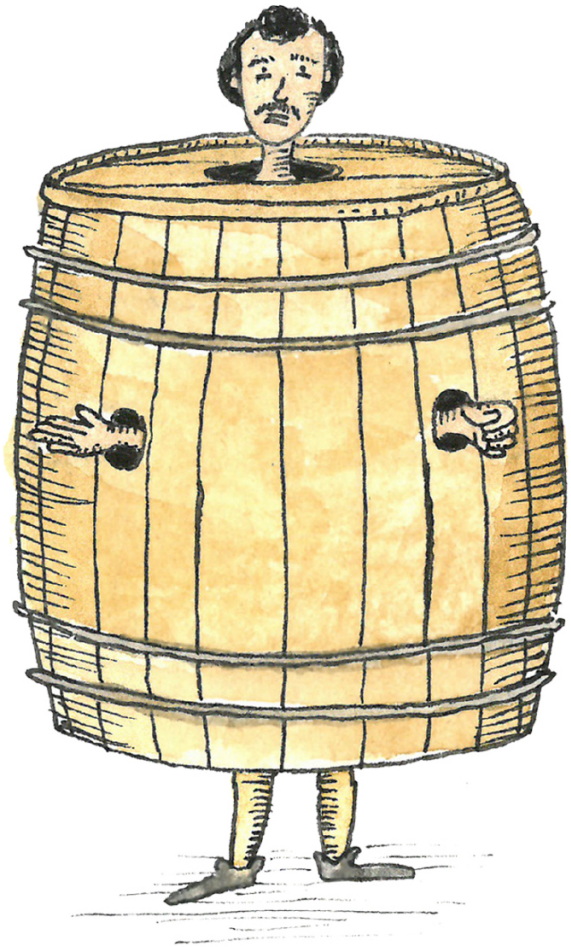
Crime: public drunkenness

Cruelty factor: 

In 1551, Parliament passed an official act making public drunkenness a civil offence. Those caught being disorderly or abusive due to excessive drinking were forced to wear a drunkard's cloak in public for a specified amount of time.

The 'cloak' was actually a barrel with one end removed. The other end had a hole big enough to allow the offender's head to go through, and holes were cut on either side of the barrel for the arms.

This punishment was designed to publicly humiliate the drunkard and served to warn others about what would happen to them if they committed the same offence.



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Punishment: scold's bridle

Crime: gossiping

Cruelty factor: 

This punishment was first recorded in Scotland in 1567 and was used by the English state until the 1800s. Also known as a 'brank's bridle', the device was used to punish badly-behaved, nagging and gossiping women.

The scold's bridle was an iron cage that was placed over the woman's head and fastened with a padlock. A metal plate attached to the bridle was forced into the woman's mouth to hold down her tongue and prevent her from talking. Some mouth plates had spikes or metal strips filed to a point to cause the woman additional pain.



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Punishment: whipping

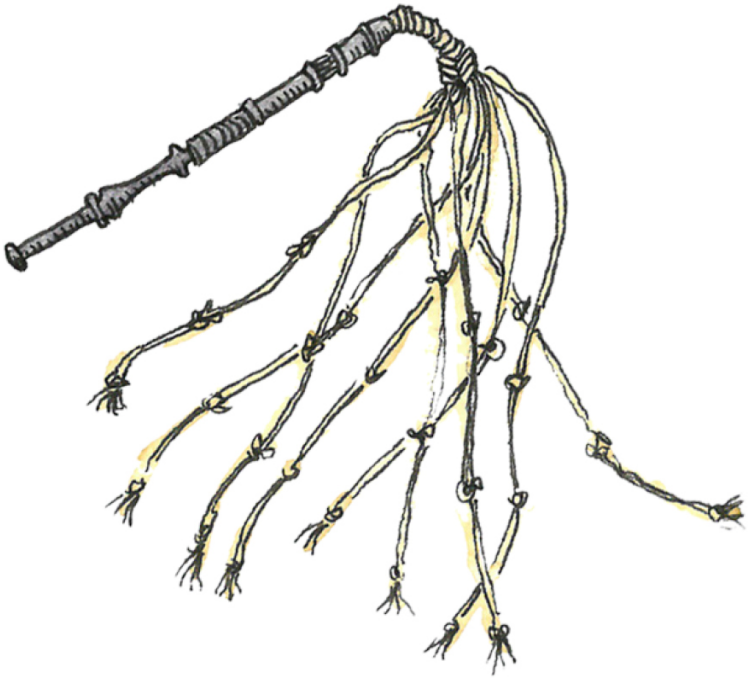
Crimes: begging, homelessness or stealing

Cruelty factor: 

In 1530, the Vagabonds Act was introduced to punish poor people with whipping for minor offences. Up until the 1590s, the offender was attached to a cart and forced to walk, whilst having their backs whipped.

During the 1590s, whipping posts were introduced to many towns. The offender would be tied to the post, and the public could watch as the wrongdoer was repeatedly whipped.

The whips came in different forms. They were made of leather or rope and often had a wooden handle. Some were single-tailed whips, while others had many tails to inflict further pain.



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Punishment: hanging

Crimes: stealing or murder

Cruelty factor: 

Public executions drew in huge crowds and had a carnival feel. Stalls sold food and drink, and performers such as jugglers entertained the audience.

The offender was taken in a horse-drawn cart to the gallows. The noose was placed over the offender's head and tightened around the neck. Once the rope was in place, the horse and cart were driven away, leaving the offender to hang by the neck until dead. Alternatively, the offender climbed a ladder to reach the noose.

The body of the person who had been hanged was often left to rot on the gallows. This reminded others of the severe punishment they would face if they committed similar crimes.



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Punishment: boiling

Crime: poisoning

Cruelty factor: 

In 1531, Henry VIII passed the Poisoning Act and boiling became a legal punishment. It was a rare form of public execution and drew in tremendous crowds.

The condemned person was placed in a cauldron containing either water, oil, tar, molten lead or wax. The liquid was either already boiling when the person was placed in the cauldron, or heated from cold to gradually increase the level of pain.

Sometimes the offender would be ducked head first into the liquid, or a system of ropes and pulleys was used by the executioner to lower the criminal into the liquid.



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Punishment: beheading

Crimes: spying, talking about the government, blasphemy, witchcraft, alchemy or treason

Cruelty factor: 

Beheadings were a penalty usually reserved for offenders of 'noble birth' because they were deemed less painful and less dishonourable than other forms of execution.

The offender would climb a raised platform known as a scaffold, then place their neck onto a chopping block. If the executioner was skilled and his axe was sharp, the execution was carried out swiftly. However, a less skilled executioner sometimes took a few swings before the condemned person's head was removed from the body.

The heads of traitors were often put on top of stakes and displayed in public places.



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Punishment: burning at the stake

Crimes: treason or heresy

Cruelty factor:

This type of execution was used to punish heretics (people who would not accept the teachings of the Church). Mary I had hundreds of Protestants burned alive, as it was believed that burning cleansed the soul.

Females who had committed acts of treason, or high treason, were also sentenced to this punishment. An act of treason included a woman murdering her husband.

The prisoner was secured to a wooden stake surrounded by wood. The wood was then set alight, and the offender was burned from the feet upwards. Sometimes, as an act of mercy, the prisoner would be strangled before being burned.



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Punishment: hanging, drawing and quartering

Crime: high treason

Cruelty factor: 

This was a most grisly capital punishment given to men found guilty of high treason (a crime against the King or the government).

There were three stages to this punishment. Firstly, the criminal was attached to a light wooden structure and drawn by a horse from prison to the place of execution. They were then hanged until almost dead. While still on the scaffold, the offender had his stomach cut open to display his intestines, and some body parts were removed. He was then beheaded, and the rest of his body was quartered (chopped up into four parts).

Guy Fawkes had been due to suffer this punishment after plotting to blow up the Houses of Parliament in 1605. However, as he climbed the scaffold, he threw himself off the ladder and died instantly from a broken neck.
Lucky escape!



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