



Lock-Ups, Stocks and Whipping Posts

by Martin Stallion



Lock-ups

Village or parish lock-ups, also known as *cages*, were used to hold prisoners and drunks, usually overnight, until they could be taken before a magistrate or sober up. Names used in other counties included *round houses* (from their shape) and *blind houses* (as they had no windows). The earliest lock-ups were often part of another building, as at Thaxted Guildhall. Later types were separate buildings, either wooden or brick, sometimes with two or more separate cells inside. Many were built around 1810-1820 but they gradually fell out of use as parish constables were

replaced by full-time, paid police officers based at police stations with their own cells, from 1836 onwards.

Stocks

These were wooden structures used for the punishment of offenders after conviction. Their feet were locked between two beams. An Act of 1405 required every town and village to have stocks. They ceased to be used by about the 1830s.

Pillories

These were also wooden structures used for punishment after conviction but in this case the prisoner's head and hands were locked in. They were abolished in 1837 and none appear to have survived in Essex, although the Waltham Holy Cross whipping post was also listed as a pillory by the Historical Monuments Commission.



Whipping posts

They were normally wooden pillars with handholds at different heights to restrain a prisoner while he or she was whipped.

Surviving examples

Remarkably, fifteen lock-ups still exist in various parts of the current Essex Police area, one with stocks inside and another with the stocks forming the doorframe. There are seven other stocks, some with whipping posts.

Where to see them

Most of the lock-ups are easily visible from the road, although three are on private land with no public access. Two lock-ups, Great Bardfield and Thaxted, are open regularly to the public and have display boards and dummy prisoners inside. Others can be opened up by arrangement with the current owner, usually the district or parish council, but are generally empty inside. Three stocks

are still in situ on the village green and can be seen at any time. Others are on display in the local museum and one in the parish church.

Your five star accommodation!



Great Bardfield cage

This is in Bridge Street in the village centre and is open on weekend afternoons from Easter to the end of September. It was built in 1816 and was supposedly last used in 1925. The very solid wooden door is studded with bolts, including the figures 1816. There are two cells inside, one of which contains a prisoner. You'll also find two display panels on the history of law and order in Bardfield, and a short audio recording.

Thaxted cage

Undoubtedly the oldest cage in Essex, it's inside the well-known timber-framed Guildhall which was originally built around 1400. You can see the door and barred window from outside and the interior, in one corner of the Guildhall, is open on Sunday afternoons from Easter to September. This one has two prisoners and a few unwelcome furry visitors, plus a display panel.

The Museum Reference Library has a booklet, *Thaxted Guildhall: the history and associations* by Mark Arman, with more information about the building.



Canewdon lock-up and stocks

Located in the High Street next to the church, they date from about 1775, although they were repaired in 1914 and again in 1983. They were originally next to the pond in Lambourne Hall Road. The stocks inside have three pairs of footholes and an upright whipping post. There is a metal grille behind the doors and metal bars on the window.

Great Dunmow lock-up

This one is in North Street, between the pond and the Star Inn and was in use as a lock-up until 1843. The front door and windows appear to be later than that and the premises were used as a soup kitchen in the 1890s and later a shoemaker's shop. There is a much older door at the back which is probably the original one for the lock-up: it has a sturdy lock and a ventilation grille.





Orsett village lock-up

Another wooden, weatherboarded example from the late 17th or early 18th century. It's now on the north side of the High Street, having been moved there in 1938. The small double window has iron bars. The village pound, for keeping stray animals, is next to it.

Braintree cage

Located in New Street near the church, this must be a late example, as it dates from 1840, the very year in which Essex Constabulary was formed, and was presumably therefore used by its officers, at least until the town's first police station was built in 1843. Michael Bardell's booklet *Braintree Cage in its social and historical setting* gives a good description, especially of the interior which has a flagstone ceiling to prevent escapes through the roof.



Rayne lock-up



This one dates from about 1819 and is behind Mary's Cottage on Shalford Road at Rayne Hall Green. It appears to be privately owned and used for storage but is easily visible from the footpath. The door has circular ventilation holes with a metal grille behind.

Roydon lock-up

This wooden, two-cell building is on the High Street. It dates from about 1800 and ventilation is provided by two long metal grilles above the double doors. The stocks are next to it but are not wholly original, most parts having been replaced in 1947.



Steeple Bumpstead lock-up



This small lock-up is next to, but not part of, the parish churchyard wall. Built in the late 18th or early 19th century, it has a slate roof and a large ventilation hole above the door. It was restored in 1977 but is now looking rather neglected.

Tollesbury lock-up

Another one next to a church, in Church Street, otherwise known as the Square. Originally built around 1700, but



clearly much renewed since then, it has a pyramid-shaped clay tile roof and a small ventilation grille in the door. A display panel alongside gives a note on its history.



Bradwell-on-Sea lock-up and stocks

This unusual building is built into the wall of St Thomas's churchyard, East End Road. It is built of brick with a pointed, tiled roof. The stocks and possible whipping post form the door frame. Historic England describe it as 18th century but Pevsner's *Essex* gives it a later date of 1817. Sadly, the building is empty inside.

Purfleet dovecote

And, finally, some very undesirable accommodation. This huge, 500 nest-box dovecote at High House, Vellacott Close, was built in the 17th century but was reputedly sometimes used as a lock-up. One hopes the pigeons did not object to their temporary fellow residents.



Taking stock

You can see the other surviving sets of stocks at
Colchester Castle Museum Great Canfield Kelvedon Hatch
Little Easton Church Epping Forest Museum

Finding out more

Factfile 18 in the Museum Reference Library lists and illustrates all the lock-ups, stocks and whipping posts, with full details of locations, ownership, access, and architectural descriptions from the Historical Monuments Commission and English Heritage.

Visit us

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