

Dinton Stocks



In the 16th century, the vestry, a committee of parishioners chaired by the church's incumbent, was becoming the key body in parish government. Its responsibilities embraced civil as well as ecclesiastical affairs and included keeping the peace, dealing with vagrants, mending roads, and destroying vermin. These important roles of the vestry continued until Parish Councils were introduced in the late 19th century.

Maintaining instruments of punishment, such as stocks and whipping posts, was therefore part of the work of the vestry, and sometimes stocks were set up by the churchyard wall. A few have found their way into the church as historical curiosities, like this set in Dinton, which is kept in the church porch.

Malefactors – drunks, rowdies, vagrants, and scolds – were often put in the stocks for a while, the mixture of shame, inconvenience, and discomfort being a punishment and a way of detaining people until they calmed down or sobered up.

There is one other curious thing about these stocks there are five holes, and an odd number of holes does not seem to go with the usual human complement of two feet.