

Crime and Punishment in Dorset

A Thousand Years of Murder, Mayhem and Mystery

TERRY HEARING

Dorset is usually regarded as a peaceful county, undisturbed by the problems of the inner cities. However, like all communities, it does have a criminal past, and this book explores some of the by-ways of that unexpected history.

The story begins with skulduggery in the Royal Family in the tenth century AD, delves into the earliest court records of the seventeenth century, and progresses through much human folly to treason and murder in the twentieth century.

The violence of earlier times is reflected in the punishments meted out to wrong-doers. Curiously domestic violence was often not regarded as criminal unless it turned into murder: on the other hand theft of even minor property was subject to savage penalties. However, the gradual development of a more civilised society is illustrated in Dorchester Prison. For several centuries it was merely a pen for holding prisoners before trial and probable execution, but for the last two hundred years it developed into a place where substantial attempts were made for reform and rehabilitation.

There will never be agreement as to why the overall crime rate is going down in the twenty-first century: logic gives way to emotion, and statistics are mistrusted. Dorchester Prison has closed after 700 years, but the battle to maintain the Queen's Peace goes on.

Terry Hearing ranges over a millennium of Dorset's history to recount the evil, the bad, the misguided or the simply unlucky, and how they were dealt with – sometimes brutally, sometimes with surprising care – to reveal unexpected aspects of the county's less reputable past.

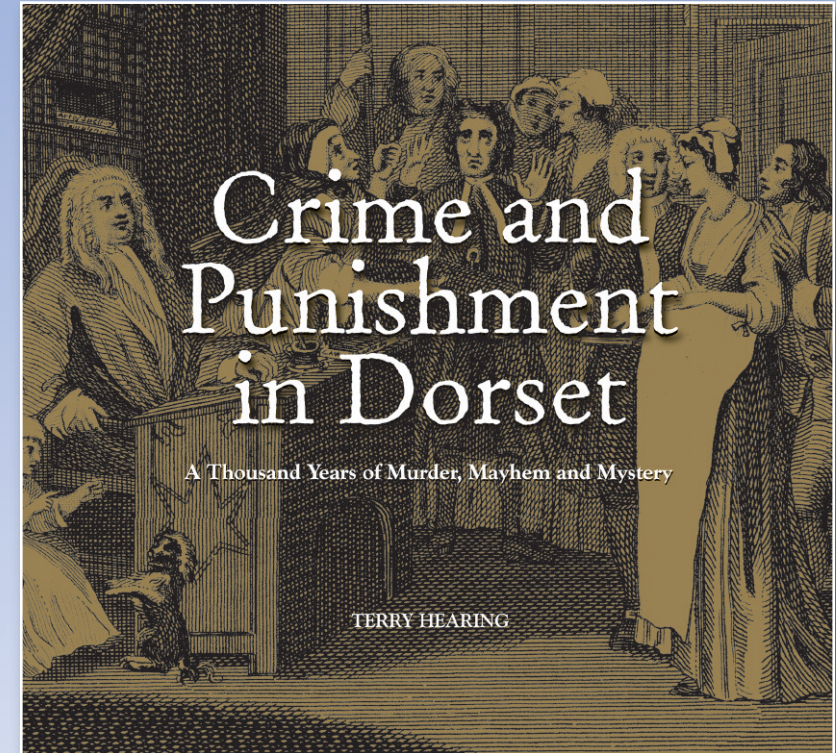
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Terry Hearing was Principal Lecturer in History at the former Dorset Institute of Higher Education. He was a Justice of the Peace on West Dorset Bench for twenty-two years; Chairman of Dorset Probation Committee 1985-95; Board Member of the Central Council of Probation 1991-97; Member of the Lord Chancellor's Advisory Committee for Dorset 1990-96; Member of the Board of Visitors at HM Prison The Verne 1980-85; Prison Visitor HM Prison Dorchester 1967-78. He published *Dorset Justice*, (Dorset Magistrates' Association) a history of the County Magistracy, in 1999. His transcription and calendar of the *Dorset Quarter Sessions Order Book 1625-1638* was published by the Dorset Record Society in 2006. His most recent publication, for Dorset Books, was *Dorset History in 101 Objects* in 2012.

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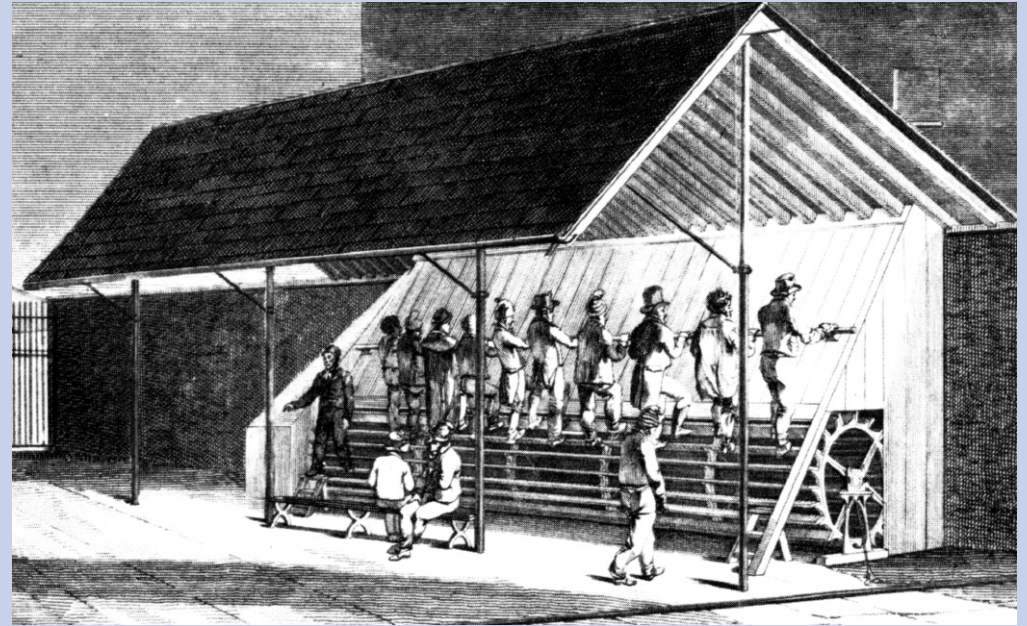

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Dorchester Prison gate.



Treadmill.

Left: John Browne, early seventeenth-century Dorset magistrate.

Right: Execution site at top of Icen Way, Dorchester.



Below: A pillory in action.

Example of a double-page spread.

