

# Factsheet

## Torture Instruments

The *Torture at the Tower* exhibition brings together replicas of instruments of torture, known to have been used at the Tower over the centuries.

### The Rack

- The rack is probably the most infamous and most widely used instrument of torture. It is thought that the earliest mention of the rack is in the Ancient Greek texts of Aristophanes.
- From Roman times to the Middle Ages there are few records of the use of the rack, but it was increasingly employed by the Spanish Inquisition from around 1252.
- At the Tower of London the rack was sometimes claimed as the invention of the Duke of Exeter, a 15<sup>th</sup>-century Constable of the Tower and so in the 16<sup>th</sup>-century it was nicknamed *The Duke of Exeter's Daughter* although other sources called it '*the brake*'.
- It was standard procedure to show the prisoner the rack first, and then to repeat the questions: only if the prisoner remained obstinate should the rack actually be used. We know that people did surrender – probably because it looked so scary.
- During the religious ferment that gripped England in the 16<sup>th</sup>-century, the rack was used freely not only by the Catholic Queen Mary, but by those monarchs who had broken with Rome – Henry VIII, Edward VI and Elizabeth I.
- Although many variations of the rack have been used throughout the centuries, the basic principle has always been the same – to stretch the victim's body. Eventually if the torture is continued, the limbs will be dislocated and finally torn from their sockets.
- Under Queen Elizabeth I, one of the chief interrogators was Thomas Norton. On 27 March 1582 he wrote to the man credited with creating the English secret service, Sir Francis Walsingham: '*None was put to the rack that was not at first by some manifest evidence known to the Council to be guilty of treason, so that it was well assured beforehand that there was no innocent tormented.*'

*Also none was tormented to know whether he was guilty or not, but for the Queen's safety to know the manner of the treason and the accomplices.'*

- Queen Elizabeth I's Lord High Treasurer Lord Burghley claimed in 1583 that '*... The Queen's servants, the warders [of the Tower], whose office and act it is to handle the rack, were ever by those that attended the examinations, specially charged to use it in as charitable a manner as such a thing might be*'.
- The rack, due to its regional variations in design, was known as the chevalet (little horse) in France, the escalera (ladder) in Spain, and the folter (frame) in Germany.

### **The Scavenger's Daughter**

- The *Scavenger's Daughter*, or *Skeffington's Irons*, was the brainchild of the Lieutenant of the Tower of London in Henry VIII's reign, Sir Leonard Skeffinton or Skevington – hence, by corruption, its popular name.
- The *Scavenger's Daughter* was conceived as the perfect complement to the *Duke of Exeter's Daughter* (the rack) because it worked the opposite principle to the rack by compressing the body rather than stretching it.
- The *Scavenger's Daughter* is rarely mentioned in the documents and the device itself was probably not much used. The best-documented use is that on the Irishman Thomas Miagh, charged with being in contact with rebels in Ireland. It may be in connection with *Scavenger's Daughter* that Miagh carved on the wall of the Beauchamp Tower in the Tower of London, "*By torture straynge my truth was tried, yet of my libertie denied. 1581. Thomas Miagh.*"

### **The Manacles**

- Manacles are iron handcuffs fastened around a victim's wrists, from which he could be hung with his feet off the floor. A prisoner held in this way for a long period of time experienced extreme pain and might have difficulty using his hands for a time afterwards.
- As the reign of Elizabeth I progressed, the ruthless use of the rack, particularly on Jesuit priests such as Edmund Campion and Alexander Briant, provided ammunition for overseas critics of the English regime. This may partly explain why in the 1590s, more writs were issued specifying the use of the manacles.

This could also be a product of the rise of the inquisitor Richard Topcliffe, who seems to have favoured this method of torture.

- In 1594 Henry Walpole, a Jesuit missionary priest, was allegedly subjected to the manacles 14 times, causing him to lose the use of his fingers for a time, and permanently ruining his handwriting. Walpole left graffiti in the Salt and Martin Towers at the Tower of London which can still be seen today.