

Changes in Crime and Punishment in Britain, c.500 to the present day – Medieval period (c.500 – 1500)

How did these issues result in crime being committed?

Created room for crimes such as rebellions and revolts.

Led to theft of goods and property.

What problems were there?

Poverty- Many people during this time lived in poverty.

Famine – Extreme lack of food lead to famines e.g. the Great Famine of 1315-17.

Warfare – wars were expensive and led to destruction of towns and farmland. Armies would feed themselves by stealing food and property.

Medieval England

Disease – such as the Black Death of the 1340s left villages deserted and land unfarmed, leading to more poverty and famine.

20% of all crime from 1300-1348 were murder or manslaughter.

High taxation – such as the Poll Tax of the late 1370s that resulted in the Peasants Revolt in 1381.

Growth in trading resulted in the growth of Highway Robbery.

Violent crime was very common as people had access to weapons and farming tools.

Common crimes in this era:



Norman laws highlighted **offences against authority** (Crown and Church) such as treason, revolt, sheltering criminals, blasphemy and heresy.

Some crimes were **specific** to this era:



• Forest Laws – trees could no longer be cut down for fuel or for building.



• Scolding – the use of offensive and abusive speech in public.



• Treason – Defying authority, not just the king but also the husband who was the head of the family.



• Outlaw gangs – ambushed travellers and robbed house.



• Heresy – Spreading false Christian beliefs.



• Rebellions – e.g. the Peasant's Revolt in 1381, Jack Cade's Revolt in 1450 and the Cornish Rebellion in 1497.

How was the law enforced during the medieval period?



Hue and Cry – The alarm would be raised and the village would have to case the criminal down. Those that did not join in were fined.



Tithings – Groups of 10 men responsible for each other. They had to police problems such as disturbances, fire and wild animals.



Trial by ordeal – God would be called upon to determine if someone was guilty of a crime. The accused would be put through an ordeal, if they recovered from it then God was showing that they were innocent. Ended in 1215.



Justices of the Peace (JPs) and Parish Constables – Key individuals in keeping law and order during this time. JPs were appointed from 1326 to assist sheriffs to control the shires. Parish Constables maintained law and order in communities and reported to JPs.

The role of manorial, church and royal courts in the later medieval era



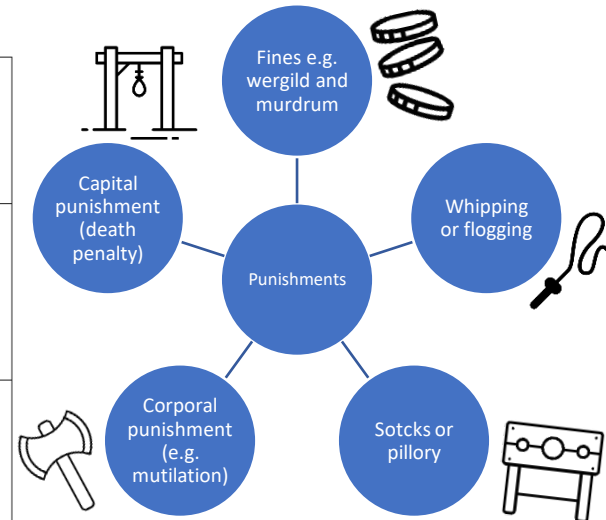
Manor courts – a form of local court used to judge petty crimes that affected the area e.g. thefts, land disputes, fights and theft.



Church courts – were for churchmen and were more lenient than regular courts. They never sentenced anyone to death. For moral crimes such as not attending church.



Royal courts – heard the most serious cases. Juror came from the criminal's local area. 1293 – King Edward I ordered these courts to take place 3 times a year.



Norman definition of a criminal – someone who has 'disturbed the king's peace'.