

1.1 How did justice change in the medieval period? – Knowledge Organiser

1. Was Anglo-Saxon justice just violent and superstitious?

- Crimes that threatened authority and wealth were serious and harshly punished.
- The community was responsible for law enforcement by tithings and the hue and cry.
- People had a strong sense of duty so there was a low crime rate.
- Guilt/innocence had to be decided by a jury in court.
- Swearing oaths before God was a major part of Anglo-Saxon justice.
- Trial by ordeal was used when a court couldn't decide guilt/innocence.
- Punishment was used for retribution and deterrence.
- Fines and Wergild were the most common, corporal punishments and capital punishment were also used.



2. Did the Normans 'annihilate' Saxon justice?

- William created the Forest Laws which made poaching illegal – this was a social crime.
- William I built castles to watch over the Saxons.
- Rebellions were punished harshly and the death penalty was used for the rebels.
- The Murdrum Fine was introduced - if a Saxon murdered a Norman they had to pay a large fine to the king.
- Trial by combat was introduced.
- Tithings and hue and cry stayed the same.
- Use of the death penalty increased.
- The sheriff was introduced for enforcement.



3. Did justice improve in the later middle ages?

- Statute of Labourers (1351) made it illegal for peasants to ask for higher wages or move to another village.
- Heresy (following a different religion to the country) was also made illegal.
- Communities were still involved in law enforcement but there were more authorities.
- Parish constables were unpaid volunteers.
- Justices of the Peace were appointed by the king to hear trials in court.
- Capital punishment gradually decreased, fines became more common and corporal punishments were still widely used.

4. Did the Church help or hinder medieval justice?

- The Church was extremely powerful – it decided what constituted a crime, what trial was used, and what punishments were given.
- Church courts were used to try people accused of moral crimes and were more lenient than other courts.
- They also tried all clergymen accused of crimes and people had to prove their role by reading a passage from the bible.
- This was known as benefit of the clergy and was often exploited.
- Churches also provided sanctuary (protection from the law).
- Trial by ordeal was used so that God could judge the guilt/innocence of the accused.
- Trial by ordeal was banned by the pope in 1215.

Keywords in this unit

Law enforcement – catching criminals and putting them on trial

Tithings – group of 10 men over 12 responsible for each other's behaviour

Hue and cry – anyone who heard the shout for help had to hunt for the criminal

Oath – promise before God

Retribution – revenge

Deterrence – designed to put people off

Corporal punishment – physically hurting a criminal

Capital punishment – killing the criminal

Poaching – illegally hunt

Social crime – illegal act but is supported by some members of society