

Medieval and Tudor Crime and Punishment



Norman Law

The Normans invaded from France in 1066 and took over the country. Anglo-Saxon law continued to be used, with men standing as tithingmen and members of the community chasing after criminals themselves. Weregild and trial by ordeal were abolished. People could still be fined but the money wouldn't go to the victim or their family, it would go to the king. People were shamed after some crimes now, for instance by being put in the stocks so people could throw rotten vegetables at them.

Forest Law

The Normans set up forests to hunt deer, which weren't all woods but had open land, farmed land and villages in them. By the end of the medieval period there would be about 80 forests covering a third of the area of England.

The Church

The Church had its own courts for dealing with religious crimes like blasphemy (being rude about God or the church). Punishments were usually less harsh than other courts. People could pretend to be churchmen by reciting a bit of the Bible. This meant they could be tried by the Church to escape execution. Ordinary criminals could claim sanctuary in a church and no one was allowed to go in and get them.



Later Medieval Period

Because the population was growing and the better-off people in the towns thought they should control everyone else, new jobs were created that were a bit like the police, but unpaid. They were called constables, beadles or watchmen and they were ordinary villagers or townspeople. The gentry and merchants also had a new job to do, as Justices of the Peace. These were appointed by the king. They held courts and gave out punishments to criminals.

Tudor Period

The system was the same as the medieval period, but there were some specific crimes that became a problem. Heresy became more common in the Tudor period because of King Henry VIII and his children changing the religion of the country. The punishment for heresy was being burned at the stake. Because of the changes in religion, there were also rebellions and many people were executed for treason.

