



The Middle Ages/
Medieval Period
1250 - 1500

Laws

Kings made the laws on a wide range of issues. The king is overall in charge of keeping the peace.

King in charge
Clergy/lords/everyone else
Land was basis of food and
power

Most people worked in farms
All work was done by hand

Crimes

Serious crimes = felonies

Minor crimes = petty

Most common crime is petty

theft = 40 % of crime

Homicide = 18% of crime

Crimes

Outlaws		1351 Act. Not just attempting to kill/betray the king, but a wife killing her husband.
Church beliefs		Gangs of robbers who ambushed travellers. Most were on the run after being accused of committing a crime.
Treason		Sinfulness caused idleness. Moral crimes were punished.
Abuse of authority		Rich and powerful lords would rule through fear and use of their private armies.

How would criminals be caught?

Can you explain the following?:

- Hue and cry
- Tithings
- Chief Constable of the Hundred
- Parish Constables
- Coroner
- Sheriff and posse
- Watchmen (in towns)

How were criminals tried?

Royal court → most serious crimes - jury swore an oath

County assizes (1293) → royal judges to visit counties 2/3 times a year

Justices of the Peace → 1361 Run courts/take over sheriff's duties . Serious cases sent to assizes.

Quarter sessions → Met 4 times a year. JPs enforced law.

Manor courts → Local crimes - petty crimes

Church court → clergy/moral criminals

Medieval Juries

Juries had to know the accused
Listened to 2 lawyers who presented evidence
Juries considered evidence and reached a
verdict
Used their knowledge of the accused to make a
decision - based on their character
Juries swore an oath before God that they
would not lie.
Judge accepted their view.
Few cases took over 20 minutes.

Medieval Verdicts

Medieval juries were usually very lenient and would let the accused go free from some serious cases - especially if they were women.

They were less lenient over petty crime.

Medieval Punishments

1.

2.

3.

4.

Medieval Punishments

1. Fines → fines from manor courts went to the lord - church courts kept fines - kings kept fines from quarter sessions/failing to raise hue and cry.
2. Humiliation → stocks/pillory/penance/cucking stool
3. Imprisonment → not used as punishment - held debtors/forgers - gaols were rough/unsanitary places
4. Death → hanging - or local variations: thrown from cliffs in Dover. Hung, drawn and quartered/burned alive.

Punishments

What punishment would you receive if you committed the following crimes?:

Selling faulty goods =

Failing to raise the hue and cry =

Heresy =

Scolds =

Debtors =

High treason =

Murder in Scilly Isles =

Petty treason =

Your options are:

Fines

Imprisonment

Pillory/stocks

Cucking stool

Burned alive

Hung, drawn and quartered

Tied to a rock and slowly drown

You have been convicted of
murder and sentenced to
death.

How are you going to get away
with it?

Benefit of clergy - neck verse

Join the army

Buy a pardon

Get pregnant

Become a king's approver

Sanctuary

Outlaws



What image do we have of outlaw?

Were outlaws really like this?

Outlaws

Outlaws were feared!

They stole from everyone! Peasants were an easier target than well armed knights and lords! They kept the money for themselves.

Outlaws threatened their victims with arson, asking for money and goods in return for not burning their victims homes down.

Outlaws used violence. They would hold a knife to a victims throat and make him choose money or his life.

Around 10% of murder victims came from outlaw robberies.

However...

In some ways they were like Robin Hood.

They would stage daring rescue attempts for members of their gang. Such as Nicholas Tailor and his gang cutting down Nicholas' brother Henry from the gallows who was being hung for burglary.

Gangs often stayed together for a long time, they had a mixture of members.

Strong leaders including knights and priests (who were useful for writing threatening letters.)

The Folville gang worked around Leicestershire for 20 years. They were led by Eustace Folville and his brothers. Their father was a knight and a lord of a manor.

They were never caught.

They had powerful friends who kept them safe and local people warned them of danger when they murdered royal officials that nobody liked.

How were women treated by the law in the Middle Ages?



How were women treated by the law in the Middle Ages?

- Seen as being inferior to men, did not have same rights as men
- Due to the Church's teaching on the role of women, subject to the rule of men
- Not allowed to be on tithing,
- Not allowed to be on jury
- Scolds a crime for women only
- Did not own her own property,
- Her belongings belonged to her husband,
- She could not divorce her husband.