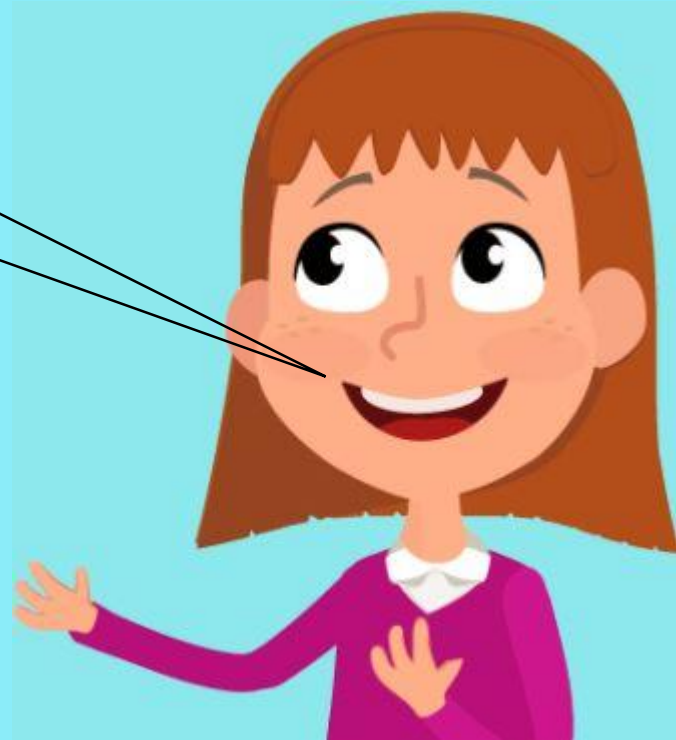


Crime And Punishment In The Middle Ages



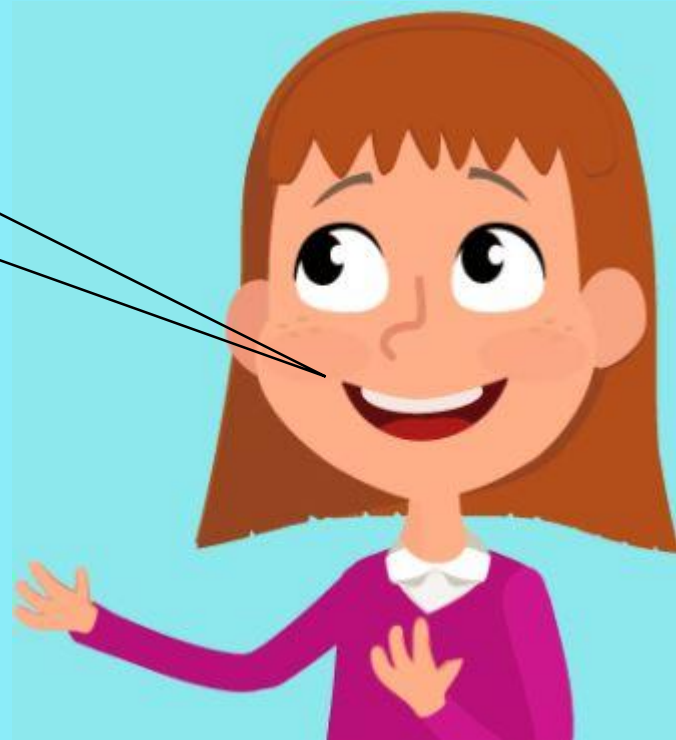
What were the middle ages?



The middle ages covers the time from the invasion of the Normans in 1066 and ends approximately 1500.



Who were the
Normans?



1066 was the year of the Battle of Hastings. This is when the Normans, led by William the Conqueror, invaded England and began what is known as the Norman times. Punishment and law enforcement became centralised rather than local. Harsher punishments were used to help the new king establish rule over his new kingdom.



After the Normans invaded, there were many rebellions and the new king dealt harshly with the rebels and also innocent people not directly involved. For example, in lands near the rebellions crops were destroyed and animals were killed. Some estimates suggest that 100,000 people died of starvation because of food shortages caused by the punishments that William ordered. The Normans built lots of castles across the land and law and order was governed from these castles. One aim of the castles was to remind the local people who was now in charge.



What is meant by the
Feudal System?



The feudal system refers to how power was structured in the country. The more powerful a person was, the more say they had in drawing up new laws.



KING - Owned all the land in the country. He was responsible for making laws and all the laws were written in French.

NOBLES - Were given land by the king and were therefore wealthy and powerful. They could offer advice to the king about laws. Some of them had castles to help them control their area and enforce the law. In return, they would supply the king with soldiers and horses for the army.

KNIGHTS - Some were given land by the Nobles and in return would fight for the King and their Nobles.

SERFS - Owned no land and worked for nobles or knights for very low pay. They had no say about laws.

The Nobles were Norman and often replaced Anglo Saxon Nobles. Anglo Saxon Serfs were legally bound to work for their lord and were not allowed to leave their village. Running away was a crime and if anyone tried, they would be hunted down and severely punished.



What was a Murdrum fine and how did it maintain law and order?



The Normans used the law to establish control over the Anglo-Saxon population. If a Norman was killed by an Anglo Saxon and the murderer was not caught, then all the people in the local Hundred had to pay a large sum of money in compensation. This was known as a Mudrum fine. This was supposed to stop murder and encourage locals not to hide the murderer from the authorities.



What were the Forest Laws?



William enjoyed hunting and declared all the forests in the land to be Royal Forests. Local people could be evicted from the land if they lived in one of these forests. Only those who were rich could pay to go hunting in the forests. The local population were banned from killing animals or even taking wood from the forests. If they did, they would be punished.



This law caused much bitterness and therefore many people did not mind if people broke this law. The King hired men to work as foresters to enforce the Forest Laws. Anyone who was caught faced severe consequences, including punishments such as blinding or even the death penalty.



Were outlaws in the middle ages like Robin Hood?



From Anglo Saxon times, men who tried to avoid punishment by running away were called an outlaw. Women outlaws were said to be waived women. These people lost the protection of the law and could be hunted down and killed with no punishment for the killers. The most famous outlaw was Robin Hood. Outlaws were not like Robin Hood. They were vicious and committed kidnaps, murders, and robberies.



What punishments were used in the middle ages?



As with Anglo Saxon times, punishment in Norman times relied upon fines and some sort of physical punishment depending upon the crime committed. One big difference was that in Norman times, fines were paid to the king and his officials rather than the victim's family. There was an increase in the number of crimes punishable by death.



One major punishment was branding where a criminal was burned with a piece of hot metal. This meant that for the rest of their life they would be seen to be a criminal. The ordeals introduced in Anglo Saxon times continued but a new ordeal was added. This was trial by combat. Under this trial, two people involved in a disagreement would choose to fight each other with swords or big sticks.



As in Anglo Saxon times, anyone over the age of 12 had to belong to a tithing. Many of the punishments took place in public and people would travel to see the guilty suffer.



Crime

Punishment

Stealing

- Fines which were payable to the King.
- Having a hand cut off.
- Placed in the stocks or the pillory.
- Public beatings.

Slander (*Saying untrue thing about someone else*)

- Tongue was cut out.

Someone who kept breaking the law

- Beatings.
- Branding.
- Hanging for men and being burnt for women.

Guilty of trial by ordeal

- Hanging (Men)
- Being burnt alive (Women)

Poaching (*Killing animals on the King's land*)

- Execution by hanging or having head chopped off.

Who was Henry II and how did he change law and order?



Henry II became king in 1154 and introduced some important reforms to crime and punishment. He set up prisons where people awaiting trial could stay and organised royal judges to visit each county twice a year to hear the more serious criminal cases.



How did law and order change during the middle ages?



As time passed, increasingly people began to move into cities. This meant that there was more opportunity for crime. It also became more difficult for the local communities to manage law and order in their area. Therefore, law and order became controlled by the government. Men were appointed to look after law and order in each city. These men became known as constables.



New laws were passed that forbade peasants to ask for more money or move areas looking for another job. It also became a crime to say anything bad about the church. Anyone doing so could be burnt at the stake as a punishment.



Punishments in the later Middle Ages continued to rely on a mixture of fines, corporal punishment and execution. A new punishment was introduced for people plotting to kill or betray the king. They would be hung, drawn and quartered.



The later middle ages also saw the end of trial by ordeal as the Pope said they were wrong and said priests could not play any part in them. This was replaced by trial by jury. The jury was a group of twelve men who observed the trial and decided whether the accused was guilty or innocent at the end. This system is still used at many trials in the present day.

