

Society: ‘Hierarchical’ with the king at the top and peasants at the bottom. Everyone knew their place in society

Food and famine: Farming was important for food and work - if the harvest failed there would be famine
1348 Black Death disrupted farming as millions died and the land was left unfarmed.

Life and leisure: Church calendar dictated way of life – Sundays were rest days, also Saints’ days.
fairs and sports on feast days and holidays.
people drank beer as water unsafe.
most people were illiterate

Landownership: Land was the basis of power – provided food and wealth. England divided into ‘counties’ or ‘shires’ – each shire ruled by a sheriff – shires divided into ‘hundreds’ - hundreds then divided into parishes. communities were small and everyone knew each other, strangers were easily spotted

Technology: Most work done by hand with tools such as axes, hammers and spades. Communication by word of mouth - priest could read and write so kept records. 1476 – England’s first printing press in London

War and rebellion: A peaceful society depended on each person or group showing loyalty to those above. Occasional rebellion from lords against king - 1381 Peasants’ Revolt and 1455-1487 Wars of Roses meant people were familiar with bloodshed and violence.

The church: Catholic country and many churches were richly decorated Church taught that God cared about his people on earth - God would forgive people their sins if they followed honest lives - sinners would be punished in hell - not all priests led holy lives.

Homes and possessions: Peasants’ houses were simple wooden structures with walls of hardened mud, no glass windows but wooden shutters - wealthier homes in the towns were similar - people had few belongings.

The majority of crimes in this period were non-violent, theft being the most common crime. 1315-1321 was the great famine, following a succession of bad harvests. The crime rate increased due to debt and hunger, this was reflected in the changing nature of crimes towards the end of the medieval period.

Serious Crime	Petty Crime
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Murder • Stealing expensive goods (12d.+) • Suicide – the church taught that only God could decide when a person’s life should end 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stealing goods worth less than 12d • Getting into debt • Limited harm to person or property

Treason Crime of plotting against your monarch or country was defined, included a woman killing her husband. Counterfeiting coins.

Vagrancy When people wandered from place to place in search of work.

Scolding Using offensive or abusive speech in public - 1350 onwards became a crime applied mainly to women.

Outlaw gangs Gangs of robbers were most feared, as travellers were ambushed, houses robbed and villages threatened with burning if valuables not given
Gang members were often outlaws, on the run after being accused of committing crimes in own villages.

Heresy Spreading beliefs not allowed by the church became a crime.

Immoral behaviour and beliefs Laws passed against dice, football and other games, church believed they encouraged idleness. Moral crimes included shaving beards on Sundays and committing acts of homosexuality.



King: in overall charge – kept the ‘king’s peace’

Sheriff: King’s chief law enforcer in each county. Had an armed posse to help him. Often took a share of property of convicted.

Chief constable of the hundred: Supervised law and order in their area. Made sure every free man aged 15-60 was ready to take up arms to support the king.

Parish constable: Ensured his parish could supply armed men when needed. Powers to arrest suspicious strangers.

People/Hue and cry: Adult men were grouped into ‘tithings.’ If one broke the law the others had to bring him to court. Victims of crime called the ‘hue and cry’ – all those within earshot had to stop what they were doing and help.

Towns: Watchmen patrolled the town streets at night - suspicious individuals were arrested and handed over to constables, it was an unpopular job

Royal Courts: Heard the most serious criminal cases - overseen by a judge - jurors were drawn from criminal’s own area

Justices of the Peace (JPs): Existed from 1361 and an important change as took over the hundred courts (courts run by the county sheriff) - appointed by the king (2 or 3 in each county) - 1388 onwards quarter sessions were held every 3 months (4 times a year)

Manor Courts: From 1250, took over work of the hundred courts - dealt with most crimes in England – petty crimes, thefts, land disputes, fights and debts - run by the lord or his steward and wealthy villagers made up the jury - each manor had their own local laws - began to lose influence 1500 onwards

Church Courts: Dealt with crimes that were considered un-Christian – immoral priests, homosexuality, swearing, gambling and failure to attend church - priests heard the evidence and passed judgement- no juries

Medieval Juries: Selected from the same parish or hundred - used prior knowledge of accused to reach their verdict - judge followed juries’ verdicts - trials usually lasted about 20 minutes

Verdicts: ‘Guilty’ or ‘Not Guilty’ - many juries were lenient - often let the accused go free, especially women

Serious Crimes

Hanging	Rope placed around the neck and criminal slowly strangled Punishment for murder, rape, theft of goods 12d.+, burglary and robbery
Hanging, drawing and quartering	Criminal hanged then taken down whilst still alive - intestines cut out and/or genitals - quartered – body cut into pieces Punishment for high treason (plotting to kill the king) and counterfeiting
Burning	Criminal usually tied to a wooden post surrounded by wood - bonfire then lit Punishment for petty treason (wife killing husband or servant their master) and heresy

Petty Crimes

Fines	Payment of money - those who oversaw each level of court kept the financial proceeds
Public humiliation	Cucking stool –forced to sit on a wooden seat in public Stocks (sitting) and pillories (standing) – criminals would have rotten fruit and vegetables thrown at them
Imprisonment	Those awaiting trial would be imprisoned - used to punish debtors and forgers

Avoiding punishment

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| 1. Run away | 6. Buy a pardon from the king |
| 2. Seek sanctuary in a church | 7. Join the king’s army |
| 3. Powerful friends | 8. Be pregnant (women) |
| 4. Refuse to plead | 9. Claim benefit of clergy |
| 5. Hope for a friendly jury | 10. Become a king’s approver |