

**Knowledge Organiser – Crime, Punishment and law enforcement in Medieval England**  
**Part 1 – How Anglo-Saxon Society affected crime and punishment**

1. England’s population in 1000 was between 1.7 million and 2 million, with 90% of people living in the countryside, in small hamlets (very small villages) and on farmsteads. They were very vulnerable to the effects of warfare, bad weather, poor harvests and diseases like the plague.
2. As Anglo-Saxon Kings gained more control and authority over the kingdom, it became increasingly accepted that the king would make and enforce laws (previously local communities made their own laws). Kings issued **codes of law**, and relied on advisers to help govern the country, but he held overall authority. One of the roles of the king was to keep ‘**The King’s Peace**’.
3. The king ruled in close connection with the **nobles**, who were at the top of the social structure of nobles, **freemen** and **serfs**. The nobles backed the king’s laws that protected their interests and got land in return for their support.
4. The role and authority of the Christian Church also increased during Anglo-Saxon times, and they played a big part in law enforcement and punishment.
5. Violent **crimes against people**, such as murder, rape and assault, made up only a small minority of cases. **Petty theft** was the most common crime, with other **crimes against property** also including poaching, counterfeiting coins and arson. **Crimes against authority**, such as treason, and betraying your lord, were considered the most serious.
6. Opportunities to commit crimes against the person and property increased as towns grew in importance. People were in close contact, and there were lots of valuable items to steal. It was also easier to get away with crimes in these larger, busy communities, as people did not know each other well. It was much easier to identify criminals in villages, as everyone knew each other.
7. Crimes could also be committed in Church communities, such as great **abbeys**, or smaller monasteries. The Church punished those who broke Church laws, such as stealing Church property, and were also responsible for stopping **moral crimes**.

**Key Events**

8.	c1000 – When our study of Anglo-Saxon England begins.
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**Key Words**

9.	<b>Codes of law</b>	Official statements of law issued by the king. New laws could be introduced, existing laws altered, or laws that were being ignored, strengthened.
10.	<b>King’s peace</b>	The belief that it was the King’s duty to take care of law and order, so people could go about their everyday lives knowing that the law would be upheld.
11.	<b>Nobles</b>	Wealthy and powerful advisers to the king. They appointed shire reeves, and were responsible for keeping the king’s peace in their local areas. They were given land by the king.
12.	<b>Freemen</b>	Rented or owned small pieces of land, but had no say in making the law.
13.	<b>Serfs</b>	Owned no land and worked for others for very low pay. They had no say in making the law.
14.	<b>Crimes against the person</b>	Crimes that cause physical harm to another person.
15.	<b>Petty theft</b>	Stealing small, low-value items.
16.	<b>Crimes against property</b>	Crimes that involve taking or damaging something that belongs to another person.
17.	<b>Crimes against authority</b>	Crimes that oppose or threaten the government or leaders.
18.	<b>Poaching</b>	Illegal hunting on land that belongs to someone else.
19.	<b>Counterfeiting coins</b>	Making fake money.
20.	<b>Abbeys</b>	Communities of monks and nuns.
21.	<b>Moral crimes</b>	Actions that didn’t match up to society’s views on decent behaviour, but did not physically harm anyone or their property.