

Knowledge Organiser – Crime, Punishment and law enforcement in Medieval England

Part 3 – How Norman Society affected crime and punishment

Key Events

8.	c1066 – William of Normandy defeats the Saxons at the Battle of Hastings.
9.	1069 – The Harrying of the North. 100,000 people died from starvation after William ordered crops and animals to be destroyed. After rebellions in York and Durham.

Key Words

10.	Feudal System	The way that Norman society was structured.
11.	Nobles	Below the king in the feudal system. Given land by the king in return for supplying him with soldiers for the army. They gave land to the knights. Anglo-Saxon nobles were replaced with Norman ones.
12.	Knights	Below the Nobles in the feudal system. They lived on small areas of land and fought for the nobles and the king.
13.	Serfs	At the bottom of the feudal system. They owned no land and had to work for the nobles or knights for very low pay.
14.	Murdrum Fine	If a Norman was murdered by an Anglo-Saxon and the murderer was not captured and executed, the hundred where the body was found would pay a large sum to the government and king.
15.	Forest Laws	Large areas of countryside became 'royal forests' which William used for hunting. Peasants no longer had the right to graze animals, take firewood, or catch rabbits on common land, and only those who could afford to pay for hunting rights were allowed to hunt there.
16.	Poaching	Illegal hunting on land that belongs to someone else.
17.	Social crime	Actions that are technically against the law but which most people in society do not disapprove of.
18.	Foresters	Men who were hired to enforce the Forest Laws and catch poachers.
19.	Outlaw	Any man aged 14 or over who tried to avoid trial and punishment by running away. They lost the protection of the law.
20.	Waived woman	A female outlaw.
21.	Folville gang	A gang of 50 outlaws led by Eustace Folville, who carried out serious crimes including kidnaps, robberies, attacks, rapes and extortion of money.

1. William was determined to establish his royal authority over England, and show his power was without limits, as he was unpopular and faced rebellion. Therefore, a more centralised approach to crime and punishment emerged, with the influence of the king increasing.
2. There was an increased use of harsh punishments, including execution, to boost the visible power and authority of the king, and brutal means were used to force people to submit E.G. **The Harrying of the North**.
3. William started a massive castle building programme in every part of the kingdom. Built by peasants, they were designed to look intimidating and keep a careful watch on communities. The Norman lords who lived in them would control the local population under Norman law.
4. Norman society was organised around the **feudal system**, where **nobles** and **knights** were given land, in return for providing a service to the class above them. Anglo-Saxon **serfs** (or villeins) at the bottom were legally bound to work for their lord and were not allowed to leave their village without permission. Running away was a new crime, and if anyone tried they would be hunted down and severely punished.

New Laws :

5. The **murdrum fine**, which was introduced to stop the increase in revenge murders after the Norman invasion, and protect their authority. It showed continuity with the Anglo-Saxon ideas of collective responsibility and the wergild.
6. The **Forest Laws**, which led to it being illegal for peasants to carry hunting weapons or even take a fallen branch. Hunting wild animals for food was now a crime = '**poaching**'. The Forest laws were seen as unjust and unfair as they took away ordinary people's freedoms, and led to '**social crimes**'. The king hired **foresters**, and anyone caught faced punishments, including hanging and corporal punishments such as castration and blinding. The punishments were deliberately harsh and intended to deter others.
7. **Outlaws** had strong links with the forest, although real outlaw gangs, such as the **Folville gang**, were far more brutal than the stories of Robin Hood and his 'merry men'.