Big Question: How has crime and punishment changed over the last 1000 years?

① How were criminals punished 800 years ago? How do we know?

⇒ Communities policed themselves and worked together to decide the law and punish those who broke it. Royal judges toured towns to make judgements.

⇒ Most common crimes were theft of property although violent crimes were quite common.

⇒ Most likely punishments were physical including the use of the stocks or public hanging.

② How did crime and punishment change between 1500 and 1750?

⇒ Local communities were still largely responsible for enforcing the law. There was still no police force.

⇒ Highway robbery became more significant during this time. Famous Highwaymen included Dick Turpin.

⇒ Law-makes became much more worried about crimes such a vagrancy and witchcraft.

⇒ Smuggling and black marketeering became more common as a result of new taxes on luxury goods.

③ Why did punishments become so bloody in the 1700s?

⇒ The attitudes of law-makers (rich people) became much tougher in the 1700's and 1800's. They saw criminals as lazy or sinful, and a threat to their wealth and success.

⇒ The number of offences you could be hung for increased from 50 in 1688, to 215 by 1815. You could be hung for taking a live rabbit from it warren, or stealing objects worth more than 5 shillings (£30 today)

⇒ In the 1800's a new punishment was introduced: transportation. Rather than hanging people they were sent away to work camps in America or Australia.

④ Why was there so much change in the 19th century?

⇒ There was a large shift in society. Large towns and villages, built around factories, began to attract people away from rural areas into urban ones.

⇒ Crime-causing problems like overcrowding and poverty created new crimes. With so many people it was also easier for people to hide their crimes.

⇒ New punishments were devised, mainly in the form of unpleasant and dirty prisons. Forced labour was common. A police force of sorts was created by Sir Robert Peel in 1829.

⑤ How has the way we catch and solve crime changed in the last 100 years?

⇒ New technologies such as DNA, fingerprinting, CCTV and forensic science have made proving crimes easier.

⇒ The types of crimes have changed: car crime, cyber crime and hate crime have become more common.

⇒ The standards of prisons have improved: they focus on reforming rather than just punishing the prisoner.

⇒ In 1948, hard labour and flogging were banned in the UK. The death penalty was almost totally abolished in 1969.

⇒ The Police force has grown, and become more and more professional.

Core Vocabulary/Terminology

Term	Definition
Hue and cry	An agreement between villagers to help each other catch people who had broken a law.
Capital Punishment	Also known as the 'death penalty', capital punishment is the use of death to punish crimes. Its use was meant to deter people from committing crimes.
Outlaw	A person who lives outside the law. Not always criminals themselves, they were not protected by the laws. Many resorted to crime to survive.
Public Humiliation	Many punishments in the middle ages involved being made to look silly in public. Being locked in a wooden frame called the stocks, while people threw rotten fruit at you, was a common form of public humiliation.
Highwayman	Common from 1700 onwards, Highwaymen were thieves who would steal from people travelling between towns and cities.
Smuggling	To avoid paying taxes, smugglers would secretly bring goods into the country. This was often considered as stealing from the King as the taxes went to the King.
Poaching	The killing and stealing of animals that don't belong to you. Common during times of great poverty where food was scarce.
Vagrancy	Vagrancy, no longer a crime. covered a range of crimes including begging, sleeping rough and trespass.
Witchcraft	Traditionally, people believed that some people could summon and use evil powers. These people were called witches and could be burnt at the stake, or drowned.
Black market	An illegal form of buying and selling, often of illicit or illegal goods.
Cyber crime	Any crime that involves the use of computer technology.
Transportation	A punishment devised in the 1800's in which offenders were sent to work camps in Australia or America.
Forced Labour	A punishment where the offended is forced to do an unpleasant or physically demanding job,
Forensic Science	A range of scientific techniques used to find evidence of a crime. Includes DNA analysis, finger printing etc.

History Knowledge Organiser – Crime and Punishment

Dick Turpin

1705-1739

Famous criminal who was known for violent burglary, murder, highway robbery and horse theft.

He was hung in 1739 for some of his many crimes. He paid actors to attend his hanging and pretend to mourn him.

Turpin is an interesting case for historians because most of what people think they know about him is a fictional tale, written many years after his death.

Robin Hood

Like Dick Turpin, the real Robin Hood is nothing like what we see in the stories about him. Some people don't think he ever existed, but instead was a series of people who claimed to commit crimes for the good of others.

The legend of Robin Hood shows a man who robs the rich and powerful to care for the poor and downtrodden.

It is helpful to historians because it shows how the society of the time was structured: a few wealthy people living in relative comfort, with a lot of poverty-stricken people who lived outside the law (outlaws).

1066 AD – William of Normandy defeats King Harold at the Battle of Hastings and becomes King of England.

1348 AD – The Black Death arrives in England and kills almost half of the population.

1534 AD – Henry VIII forms the Church of England and makes himself Head of the Church.

1707 AD – The Act of Union joins England and Scotland into one country.

1800 AD – The Acts of Union join Ireland with England and Scotland.

1939–1945 AD – The Second World War occurs.

MEDIEVAL BRITAIN 1066 –1485 AD

TUDOR BRITAIN 1485-1603 AD

STUART BRITAIN 1603-1714 AD

GEORGIAN BRITAIN 1714-1837 AD

VICTORIAN BRITAIN 1837-1901 AD

20TH CENTURY BRITAIN 1901-2000 AD

1000 AD | 1100 AD | 1200 AD | 1300 AD | 1400 AD | 1500 AD | 1600 AD | 1700 AD | 1800 AD | 1900 AD | 2000 AD

1453 AD – The Hundred Years War ends.

1588 AD – The English defeat the Spanish Armada.

1776 AD – The American colonies declare independence from Britain during the War of Independence.

1914–1918 AD – The First World War occurs.

1086 AD – The Domesday Book is compiled to record what people in Britain owned and calculate how much tax they owed.

1337 AD – King Edward III invades France and the Hundred Years War begins.

1845 AD – The Great Irish Potato Famine begins. Millions of people die or migrate to other countries.

daydream