

Tudor Crime and Punishment

In Tudor times, there were no police. Crime – mainly stealing – was widespread, as many poor people could not afford to pay for increasingly expensive food. However, punishments were harsh, in the belief that it would stop others from committing the same crime. New punishments were created to be even more terrifying than before.



Because most people did not travel far in Tudor England, anyone who did was often treated with suspicion. Travelling actors had to have a license, otherwise they were breaking the law.

Tudor London experienced some of the worst crime. It attracted many vagrants (people without a home) and people looking for work. The Tudor rich and Tudor poor lived apart, and a poor person in a wealthy area was often thought to be a criminal.



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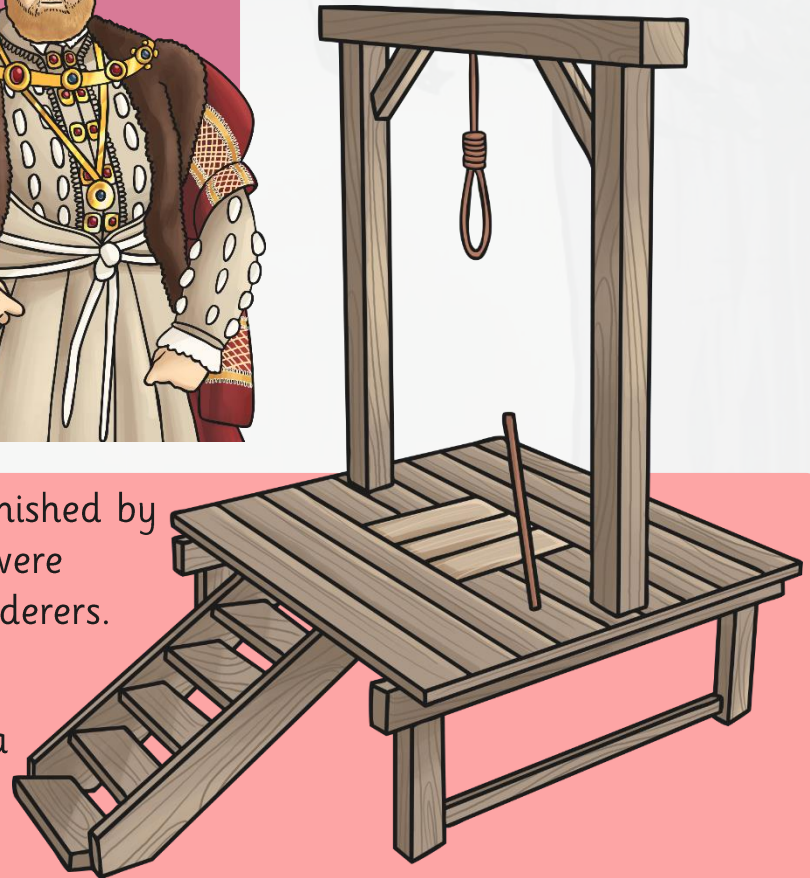
Public executions were extremely popular and people would wait for hours to watch them, often taking their children with them!

Some historians have estimated that about 70,000 people were executed during the reign of Henry VIII.



Vagrancy (being homeless) was a crime and punished by being whipped, or even hanged. Many people were afraid that all vagrants were criminals and murderers.

Stealing was considered a serious Tudor crime, and people could be punished for just stealing a bird's egg. Stealing even a small amount of money could mean the death penalty.



Guess the Tudor Object!



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Tudor Crimes: Vagrancy



This is a woodcut from around 1536 depicting a vagrant being punished in the streets in Tudor England.

1. What can you see happening in this picture?
2. Why do you think the rich Tudor people wanted to punish people who were begging?

Tudor Crimes: Treason



The Tudor monarchs were very worried about people trying to take the crown from them. The act of attempting to overthrow or kill the king or government in charge is called treason.



The Star Chamber (a type of court) was set up to hear cases of treason. It became feared, as being on trial here meant no jury, witnesses or possibility of appealing.

The punishment for treason would be death, usually by a very gruesome method to scare anyone else from thinking about it!

Fascinating Fact!

By the late 18th century, punishment for treason became very rare, but the official punishment for treason remained death until 1998!

