

Causes and nature of crimes

Welcome to the dastardly domain of crime and punishment.

How has crime changed over the centuries? And how have things like attitudes, economics and technology affected it? Let's find out.

First up, the Tudors, who – let's be honest – weren't the best behaved bunch.

Back then, poor people didn't have much to do, so many wandered the country as homeless, jobless vagrants.

This was made worse by religious conflict.

Queen Mary I, also known as Bloody Mary, decreed that Protestants were committing crimes against God. And during her five year reign she burned 280 at the stake.

So you can start to see how ideology coupled with fanaticism has the power to dictate what's criminal.

From the swinging 1600s to the minging 1700s, where poverty continued to have a major impact on crime.

In the growing urban slums, where jobs were scarce and government taxes were increasing, people were driven to smuggling, petty thieving and mugging.

Changes in technology were also massively influential, as improved machinery was creating more roads, opening up a new criminal possibility: highway robbery.

By the industrial revolution, machinery was replacing skilled workers.

Angry communities started to protest across the UK, leading to violent clashes with authorities, who deemed their protests criminal. During the Luddite Riots of 1811 in Nottingham, unemployed textile workers smashed the machines that'd replaced them.

So just like the vagrants of the 1500s, and the petty criminals of 1600s, people in industrial Britain were forced into crime by poverty and displacement.

But things out in the countryside were just as bad.

Agrarian disorder pushed people out of their villages under serious economic strain and poverty. The Rebecca Riots in rural Wales demonstrate this unrest.

Bitesize

Although they began as attacks on toll gates, it is understood they stemmed from general poverty in the countryside.

By the 20th century, technology was changing the face of crime forever.

With improved communication, such as the phone, criminals could talk to each other and make speedy, cunning plans.

And with improved transport like trains and cars, criminals had new ways of getting around, and getting away from the law.

Cars in particular created new types of crime, like drink driving, theft, road accidents, and novelty car horns.

And so to the millennium and the present day, where technology has created criminal possibilities the Tudors could never have imagined.

Now, the online world has given rise to all sorts of shady dealings like illegal downloads, the Dark Web and identity fraud.

Smugglers have given up on rum and salt, in favour of things like data and pin numbers.

Today, technology intersects with attitudes, as religious and political groups with extreme beliefs, such as terrorist organisations; are able to organise and recruit online.

So we can see how, regardless of the century, human beings' criminality responds to the world around them.

Poverty, unemployment and religion, are all factors which push people to crime, while technologies such as transport and communication facilitate them.

And as crime has changed, so has crime-fighting. That's why the law enforcers of today have to be nimble and forward-looking to stay one step ahead.