

## Methods of punishment

The way we punish people has changed an awful, awful lot over the years.

500 years ago, punishments were excruciatingly gruesome and humiliating. But as the centuries progressed, attitudes softened, and things like deportation, imprisonment and rehabilitation replaced public humiliation, torture and execution.

But let's start with the Tudors, whose punishments were designed to be as gory, painful, vengeful and humiliating as possible. And they were often carried out in public, for maximum shame.

If you were accused of something minor, like being a vagabond, you could be put in the stocks, whipped, or branded with a 'V'.

These were all types of corporal punishment - deliberately causing physical pain or discomfort.

But for more serious crimes, you could get capital punishment - the death penalty - using methods like burning alive, beheading and hanging. Not much changed for a good century and a half, until attitudes started to shift in the 1700s.

Some judges thought that the death penalty was too severe for crimes such as pickpocketing and poaching and started transporting criminals overseas instead.

It was cheap, still pretty harsh, and helped secure Britain's control abroad. But transportation soon became unpopular. People already living in the British colonies obviously weren't thrilled about a load of crims turning up.

And people back home didn't think it was fair that inmates were basically getting a free ticket to a better life. So banishment ground to a halt, and all the criminals got sent to prison instead.

Early British prisons were pretty awful - disease-ridden, violent and overcrowded, and jailers were often corrupt.

And when they were full the government shoved prisoners in decommissioned warships called hulks instead.

In Wales, the ritual humiliation of **Ceffyl Pren** was popular, in which offenders would be tied to a wooden frame and paraded around town.

In 1800s Britain, the government trialled different types of punishment in prison, like the silent and separate systems, but they only increased the suicide rate.

But by the 19th century, Christian ideas of forgiveness and reform started to lighten attitudes to punishments.

The public gruesomeness of capital punishment now seemed barbaric, and Sir Robert Peel systematically abolished the death penalty on over 180 crimes. By 1861, there were just five crimes you could be executed for.

Of course, people still took the law into their own hands, like the so-called 'Scotch Cattle', who were gangs of coalminers that would attack fellow miners if they refused to take part in strike action.

By the 20th century, prisoners were being treated better, with rehabilitation training and improved prison food. Wishful thinking mate, not that much better.

With the introduction of borstal, young offenders were treated less harshly, and probation periods meant prisoners were allowed out from time to time. In 1948, corporal punishment ended. And finally, in 1969, the death penalty in Britain was abolished completely.

These days the law dictates that loss of liberty, fines and community service are harsh enough punishments and deterrents. Quite an improvement on the cruel chastisements of the Tudor times.