

KQ2: How has the nature of crime changed over time?

THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD : c. 1500s – 1700s

The Tudor period

Vagrancy was a major problem for Tudor monarchs. Economic changes created poverty. Homeless beggars, known as vagrants, travelled the country looking for work. Many joined large groups and gathered in towns, causing problems for the authorities. Some stole ('rufflers') and others pretended to be insane or sick to extort money ('Abraham men').

Ordinary people blamed vagrants for the rise in crime. The government responded with ever harsher punishments (whipping, branding with a V, even hanging), particularly for the able-bodied poor e.g., those fit to work. This shows how seriously monarchs of the time viewed the problem.

Heresy was the crime of **not following the religion of the monarch** and was punishable by death. Frequent religious changes meant that many people were executed for heresy during the 16th century. This was particularly true of **Mary Tudor** who burned 280 protestants during her five year reign in her "**holy bonfires**".

The early 18th century

The 18th century was the "Golden Age" of **smuggling** and **highway robbery**.

- As governments **increased import duties** on goods like tea and brandy, so **smuggling increased**. Highly organised smuggling gangs sold cheap imported goods on the black market. A labourer could earn 6 or 7 times his daily wage for a night's smuggling. With thousands of miles of coastline for "revenue men" to patrol, it was difficult to catch smugglers. Ordinary people did not see smuggling as a crime and would not report on smugglers.
- Highway robbery** became more widespread. As roads improved, so the wealthy began to travel more, carrying their valuables with them. The absence of police and long, open stretches of road made it easy to rob stagecoaches. Guns and horses were cheap and easily obtainable.

WELSH EXAMPLE :

Crimes like cattle theft were common in the Welsh Marches. Henry VIII was concerned that lawlessness would spread and sent Bishop Rowland Lee to restore order.

Wales also had its share of heretics. In 1555 the protestant Bishop Robert Ferrar was burned at the stake in Carmarthen, as was Rawlins White, a fisherman, in Cardiff. The Catholic teacher Richard Gwyn (in 1584) and the Protestant preacher John Penry (in 1593) were both executed during the reign of Elizabeth I.

INDUSTRIAL PERIOD : c. 1750s - 1800s

Industrialisation and urbanisation in the 18th and 19th centuries

Many of the crimes of this period reflect the harsh living and working conditions. As **industrial towns increased** in size, crime became more widespread, particularly during periods of unemployment.

- Theft** and **pickpocketing** were common. The crowded narrow streets of towns were ideal places for pickpockets, particularly when large crowds gathered e.g. for public executions. Many pickpockets were children. Criminals concentrated in areas known as **rookeries** e.g. St Giles in London and "China" in Merthyr, where a maze of narrow streets and alleyways made it easy for thieves to hide.
- In times of unemployment people who were normally law-abiding might **steal money, food and clothes** to survive. In many towns people had to pay for clean water from pipes and taps, so **water theft** was a problem. Poverty also led many women into **prostitution** to earn a living.
- Working conditions** also had an impact on the nature of crime. **New technology** put many people out of work, and some of the newly-unemployed responded violently. For example, between 1811 and 1813 workers known as **Luddites** smashed the weaving machinery that had cost them their jobs. The end of the Napoleonic War in 1815 saw even greater hardship as the economy struggled to get back to normal after the war.
- Political unrest** was ever present, as workers turned to politics to improve their lives. However, their protests sometimes turned violent: for example, the Spa Fields Riots in London 1816 and the Chartist riots of the late 1830.

Crime in **rural areas** was also linked to poverty e.g. poaching to feed a family. In the **Swing Riots** of the early 1830s, farm labourers in the south of England destroyed the machinery that was putting them out of work. Nineteen were hanged and 481 were transported to Australia.

WELSH EXAMPLE :

There were many examples of disorder in Wales in the early 19th century. In the early 1830s the South Wales valleys saw the violence of the Scotch Cattle as they tried to end the Truck system and win higher wages. Other protests were more political: for instance the Merthyr Rising in 1831, which took place during an industrial slump. The disturbances at Llanidloes and Newport in 1839 were both linked to the Chartist Movement, which wanted the vote for all men over 21. From 1839 to 1843 rural areas witnessed the Rebecca Riots against the tollgates.

MODERN PERIOD : c.1900s-present day

The early 20th century

The early 20th century was in many ways similar to the 19th century. Poverty remained a cause of crime, and some economically-deprived urban areas eg. London's East End had a reputation for criminality. Some crimes were motivated by a desire for political rights, e.g. Suffragettes bombing and setting fire to churches in the 1910s, while others were related to working conditions eg. the Tonypandy Riots in 1920.

The post-war years

The crime rate increased in the 20th century, particularly after the 1960s. Many new types of crime emerged due to **economic, social and technological changes**. Many crimes can now be committed or influenced by people living outside the country e.g. cyber crime or terrorism. This was not the case during earlier periods of history.

Car crime is now the **most common crime** in Britain. This can be linked to the huge increase in car ownership. Most crimes are committed by car owners e.g. speeding, drink driving, not wearing a seat belt etc, but cars are also stolen by thieves or are used in other crimes e.g. ram-raiding.

Computer related crime has also seen a huge increase. Many traditional crimes (fraud, harassment, child abuse) can now be carried out by computer. New digital crimes have also emerged, such as hacking and phishing. Criminal gangs have hacked into computers of companies and governments and demanded ransom payments.

Drug related crime has also been a feature of the 20th century. Drug trafficking is an international problem, and some drugs are produced in the UK. The sale of drugs is illegal and many drug users have turned to crime eg. theft to feed their addiction.

Terrorism has become a problem. In the 1960s the IRA began its campaign in Northern Ireland. In the 1970s and 80s IRA bombing and assassination occurred on the British mainland. More recently Islamist groups have launched and inspired attacks eg. the London bombings of July 7 2005.

WELSH EXAMPLE :

Wales has experienced periods of industrial unrest during the 20th century, often centred on the coal industry eg. the Tonypandy Riots of 1910 and the Miners' Strike of 1984-5.

Wales has also seen protests in support of the Welsh language and culture. In the 1960s Mudiad Amddiffyn Cymru planted bombs eg. to disrupt the water supply to Liverpool. In the 1980s and 1990s, members of Meibion Glyndŵr burned second homes in Wales.