

crime and punishment

Over the centuries attitudes to crime and the treatment of those who break the law have changed greatly. Violent crimes, like murder and rape, have always been judged the most serious, however, in the past people received severe penalties for crimes which today are thought less serious, such as poaching, petty theft and damaging property.

Punishments ranged from a time in the stocks, whipping, branding, hanging, and from 1678 transportation to the West Indies or American colonies. Offences like swearing, immorality and vagrancy were dealt with in a similar way to burglary and assault.



*"The poacher's family plead his pardon before the squire"
(1817).*

Taking away a person's freedom as a punishment is quite modern. Until the late eighteenth century prisons were used to hold people awaiting trial, punishment or execution, and until 1869, debtors who could not pay. Imprisonment as a punishment was championed by Jeremy Bentham and John Howard and by the late nineteenth century, with a decline in the use of the death penalty and the abolition of transportation, "penal servitude" became the punishment for most serious crimes.

crime detection

Until the mid-nineteenth century each parish appointed its own unpaid constable. His powers were limited: he could only detain a suspect if the victim reported the crime to a local magistrate. In the 1820s there was one constable for every 3,000 people living in London. In 1829 Sir Robert Peel formed the Metropolitan Police. The first professional police force were known as "bobbies" or "peelers."

The County Police Act of 1839 allowed magistrates outside London to appoint chief constables. Provincial forces, based on the Metropolitan Police model, were set up and crime detection and solving became more orderly.

**When a felon's not engaged in his employment,
Or maturing his little felon plans,
His capacity for innocent enjoyment,
Is just as great as any honest man's
Our feelings with difficulty we smother,
When constabulary duties to be done,
Ah, take one consideration with another,
A policeman's lot is not a happy one...**

**When constabulary duties to be done,
A policeman's lot is not a happy one, happy one...**

(Pirates of Penzance: W.S. Gilbert and Sir Arthur Sullivan.)



photography and fingerprints

Photography

The invention of photography gave the new forces a way of keeping picture records of criminals. In the 1850s the first "mug-shots" were taken by professional photographers, but the police soon acquired their own cameras and extensive picture records began to be kept. Offender photographs and descriptions (including scars and other distinguishing marks) were published in the "Police Gazette" and circulated between forces

John Price

Dartmoor Prison.

John Price. Reg. N o. 9697.

Liberated 18th Nov r1868, Wrexham.

Committed 3rd Mar 1869, Ruthin Ass. for Robbery with violence.

Sentenced 7 years Penal Servitude.

Complexion Sallow.

Hair: Black, Eyes: Light grey. Height 5^{ft}. 9 1/2 inches.

Marks, scars, upper lip, left [temple] left eye brow, left thumb and forefinger.

Right knee & lower part of back.

Boil mark: back of neck.

Lost 2 upper teeth, nose crooked.

Mole on left breast and on back. 2nd toes on both feet bent.

Destination: Wrexham.



(Denbighshire Record Office.)

Thomas Bill

Central Police Office Liverpool" £5 Reward.

Embezzling £100, from employer.

Thomas Bill, absconded on Thursday the 1st August 1867.

28~30 years of age, 5 feet 7 1/2 inches.

high, dark complexion, dark brown hair, moustache, and whiskers which are sheared off the chin., very high forehead, medium stance, slow gait and bending his back when walking ; generally dressed in black clothes and billy-cock hat .



(Denbighshire Record Office.)

His parents reside at 66, High Street, Mold, Flintshire.

Fingerprints

Fingerprinting was introduced at Scotland Yard in 1901. Originally fingerprints were used as a way of making the criminal record of an offender available. However, as no two people have the same prints copies were soon taken from known criminals and used to identify them at the scene of later crimes.

