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**GCSE (9-1) HISTORY**

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# CHANGES IN CRIME AND PUNISHMENT IN BRITAIN

c.500 to the present day

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# 1 Causes of crime

This chapter focuses on the key question: **What have been the main causes of crime over time?**

Crime has always been present in society and there is continuity in the causes of common crimes, such as theft and murder. Petty theft, such as the stealing of clothing, food or small sums of money, has remained the most common type of crime across the period of our study – c.500 to the present day – and a common cause of petty theft is poverty. However, at certain times in Britain there has been a sudden increase in particular types of crime, mostly due to the introduction of new laws. During the sixteenth century, changes in the official religion resulted in an increase in crimes such as **heresy** and **treason**, while in the eighteenth century the introduction of high taxes on imported goods resulted in an increase in the crime of **smuggling**. Throughout this chapter, consider which causes of crime have remained the same across all the centuries, and which causes are specific to a certain century or time period. Think about whether they were the result of specific changes of policy or are due to political, social and economic factors.

## FOCUS TASK

As you work through this chapter you need to collect information so you can record examples of continuity and change in the causes of crime across the period c.500 to the present day. Use a table like the one below. At the end of this chapter you can use this information to make a judgement on the extent of continuity and change, and provide reasons why certain periods of time saw the emergence of new types of crime, and which crimes grew rapidly across all time periods. You must have a grasp of developments across the three historical eras and consider the factors that encourage or restrain change within and across the eras. You must consider trends and turning points which make for change and you must recognise that change can coexist with long periods of continuity, especially during the first two eras.

Time period	Crimes common to all these periods	Causes of these crimes	Crimes that are specific to certain time periods	Causes of these crimes
The medieval period				
Sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (early modern)				
Eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (early modern/modern)				
Twentieth century (modern)				
Twenty-first century (modern)				

## Problems in the medieval era

Most people in medieval times lived in poverty. Poverty often led to theft of property but also, under particular circumstances, other less common crimes such as revolts and rebellions.

### Poverty, famine and warfare

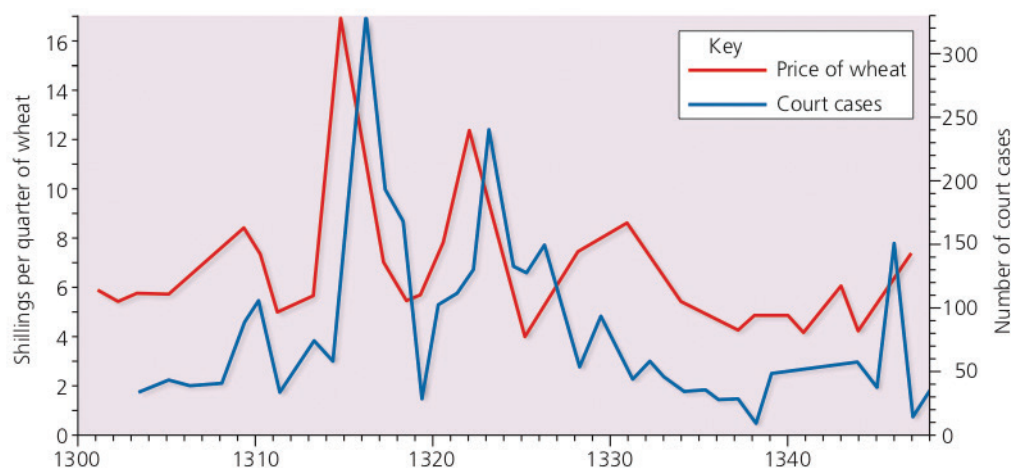
People's lives were often made worse by:

- **famine** – for example, the Great Famine of 1315–17, which followed a series of poor harvests and killed 10 per cent of the population of England. It left the growing population without enough food to eat and desperate enough to commit crimes to survive
- **disease** – such as the Black Death of the 1340s, which left villages deserted and land unfarmed, leading to more hunger and poverty, and more opportunities for theft and robbery
- **high taxation** – such as the **poll tax** of the late 1370s, which led to the 1381 Peasants' Revolt
- **warfare**, with demands to pay for wars and the destruction of towns and farmland caused by them – for example, the Norman Conquest after 1066 and the Wars of the Roses from 1455 to 1485; marauding armies would also feed themselves by stealing food and property from the places where they camped.

These causes of poverty were constant throughout the medieval period up to the early nineteenth century.

As more trade and business began to develop later in this period, merchants and traders used the roads and tracks more often and this encouraged the growth of highway robbery. Some villages, such as Gainsthorpe in Lincolnshire, which had been deserted during the Black Death, became bases where robbers gathered in order to attack merchants travelling along important roads

Violent crime was also very common because people had easy access to dangerous weapons and farming tools: hammers, axes, sickles and spades. Twenty per cent of all crimes in the period 1300–48 were murder or manslaughter.



▲ **Figure 1.1** Graph showing the relationship between court cases and the price of wheat

#### Think

- 1 According to Figure 1.1 there is a possible connection between the number of court cases and the price of wheat. What do you think might be the reason for this?
- 2 Explain why poverty was an important cause of crime in the medieval period.



# Causes of crime during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw the continuation of traditional crimes such as theft and murder. This period also witnessed a sudden increase in specific crimes. Changes in economic conditions caused a sharp increase in poverty and unemployment, which in turn resulted in an increase in crimes associated with **vagrancy**. Changes in the official religion caused some people to commit the crimes of heresy and treason, which became quite common during this period.

## The growth of economic pressures in the sixteenth century

During the sixteenth century, and especially during the reign of Elizabeth I (1558–1603), there was a sharp rise in poverty and the number of people classified as poor. This was brought on by a number of economic changes and pressures. For some of these people, the only way they could survive was by resorting to crime.

### Who were the poor?

Society has always had people who were poor and in need of help and support from others. Throughout the medieval period the Church had played a key role in

looking after the poor and destitute, providing shelter and relief in **alms houses** or in the monasteries. The rich and better off also made donations to help relieve the poor.

Tudor governments came to classify the poor and destitute into one of two categories:

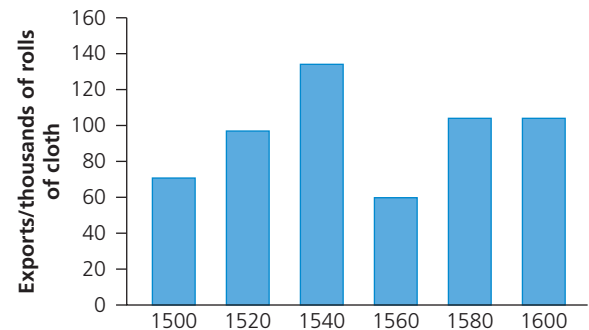
- The impotent poor – those who were genuinely unable to work due to age, hardship or some other ailment. It was recognised that these individuals were in need of **poor relief**.
- The able-bodied poor – those considered capable of work but who were either unable or unwilling to find employment. It was thought that these individuals needed to be encouraged or even forced to find work in order to prevent them from resorting to begging.

### Reasons for the growth in poverty

This rise in the number of poor people was the result of a combination of factors resulting from changes within society, a sharp rise in population and the pressures this brought, and the effects of increasing economic hardship.

**Interpretation 1:** Historian Chris Culpin, from his book, *Crime and Punishment through Time* (1997)

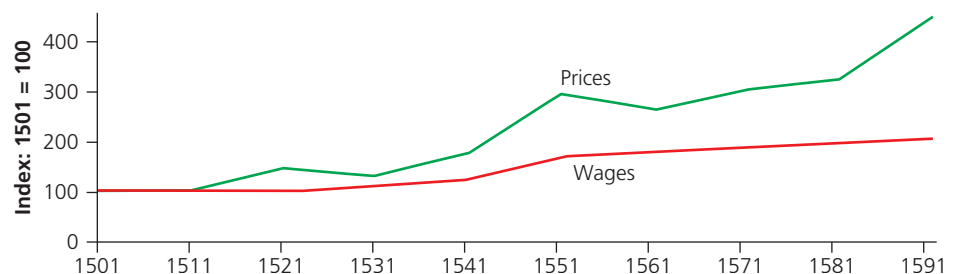
*Social tension was bitter in Norfolk. The richest six per cent of the population owned 60 per cent of the land. This meant they were able to get richer while the poor grew poorer. In particular, they used their right to graze huge flocks of sheep and cattle on the commons, then bought the land and enclosed it.*



▲ Figure 1.2 Wool exports between 1500 and 1600

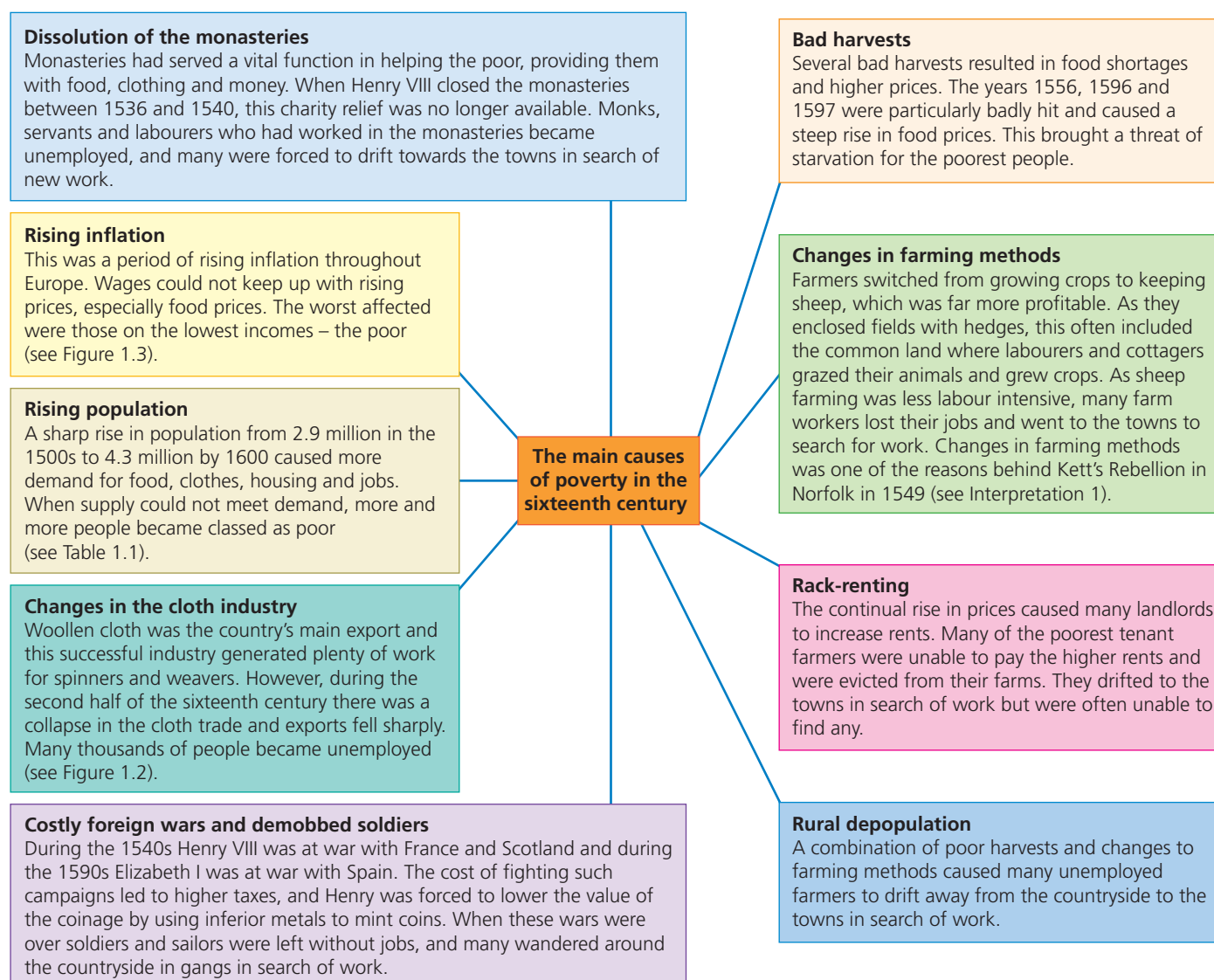
Year	England and Wales	Wales
1500	2.9 million	225,000
1550	3.2 million	250,000
1600	4.3 million	300,000

▲ Table 1.1 Population figures for England and Wales during the sixteenth century



▲ Figure 1.3 Relative increase in wages and prices, 1501–91





▲ **Figure 1.4** The main causes of poverty in the sixteenth century

### Think

- 1 Explain the difference between the impotent poor and the able-bodied poor.
- 2 Study the nine boxes in Figure 1.4, which shows the causes of poverty. Use this information and your own knowledge to complete the table below. The first key cause has been done for you.

Key cause/factor	How it contributed to the increase in poverty in the sixteenth century
Growing population	This put added pressure on limited food supplies and a shrinking jobs market. More and more people were classed as being poor.

- 3 Study the table you have completed in Question 2.
  - a) Identify three factors that you consider to be the most important reasons for an increase in poverty during the sixteenth century. Justify your choices.
  - b) How do your choices compare with those of the student sitting next to you? Note the differences.



## The impact of religious change in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries

Many of the major crimes of this period were linked to the problems associated with religious change and the change of monarch. (All four monarchs in the Tudor period can be seen in Source A.) The majority of people living in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were very religious, attended church regularly and followed the advice of their parish priest in the belief that this would ensure their ascension to heaven when they died. In 1500, most people in England and Wales were Catholic, but some were paying attention to the calls for a reform of some of the bad practices and abuses within the Catholic Church made by a German monk, Martin Luther. This resulted in the emergence of the **Protestant Reformation**, a movement that made its initial impact in England during the reign of Henry VIII. Disputes over religion were to dominate the reigns of all the Tudors, as the official religion switched between the Catholic and Protestant faiths with each new monarch. This period saw a growth in the crime of heresy – religious opinions or views that contradict the official religion of the country.

### The impact of religious change – heresy

#### *Henry VIII (1509–47)*

Henry VIII ruled as a Catholic monarch but when the Pope refused to grant him a divorce from his first wife, Catherine of Aragon, Henry broke away from the Roman Catholic Church and created the Church of England. Henry made himself head of this church and although it was still Catholic, the Pope no longer had any power over it. Henry tolerated some of the Protestant beliefs, but he did not embrace them.

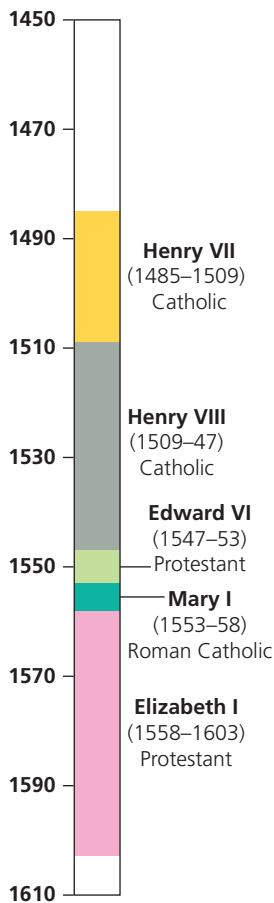
#### *Edward VI (1547–53)*

When Henry died in 1547, his son and heir, Edward, was only nine years old, so two of his uncles, the Earl of Northumberland and the Duke of Somerset, were appointed regents to rule in his name. These two men had embraced the new religion started by Luther and were strong Protestants. They persuaded Edward to introduce religious changes, making Protestantism the official religion of the land.

The population was forced to embrace these changes and those who refused and continued with the Catholic faith were accused of being heretics. Going against the official religion was considered treason and brought with it the death penalty.

#### *Mary I (1553–58)*

Edward died while still a teenager and he was succeeded as ruler by his elder sister, Mary, who was a devout Roman Catholic. Mary hated the Protestant beliefs and reversed all the religious changes that had been introduced during her brother's reign. She was determined to restore the Roman Catholic faith as the official religion of England and Wales. The religious pendulum had swung in the opposite direction and those who remained faithful to the Protestant religion during Mary's reign were accused of being heretics and were condemned to death.



▲ **Figure 1.5** Timeline showing religious change during the reigns of the Tudor monarchs



### Elizabeth I (1558–1603)

When Elizabeth became queen, the country was bitterly divided over religion. During the reigns of Edward and Mary, many ordinary people had been put to death as heretics because of their religious faith. Elizabeth therefore attempted to reach a compromise by adopting a middle road.

- She made herself Supreme Governor rather than Head of the Church of England.
- She made Protestantism the official religion.
- She brought back some of the changes introduced during Edward's reign.
- She tolerated Catholics to some degree – crosses and candles could be used in churches and priests could wear their official robes.
- However, Catholics were expected to attend the Church of England services and were fined for not doing so.

Any Catholics or Protestant extremists (Puritans) who refused to accept this settlement were treated as heretics and punished accordingly.



▲ **Source A** The family of Henry VIII, painted in c.1545. From left to right: Mary, Edward, Henry, Jane Seymour and Elizabeth

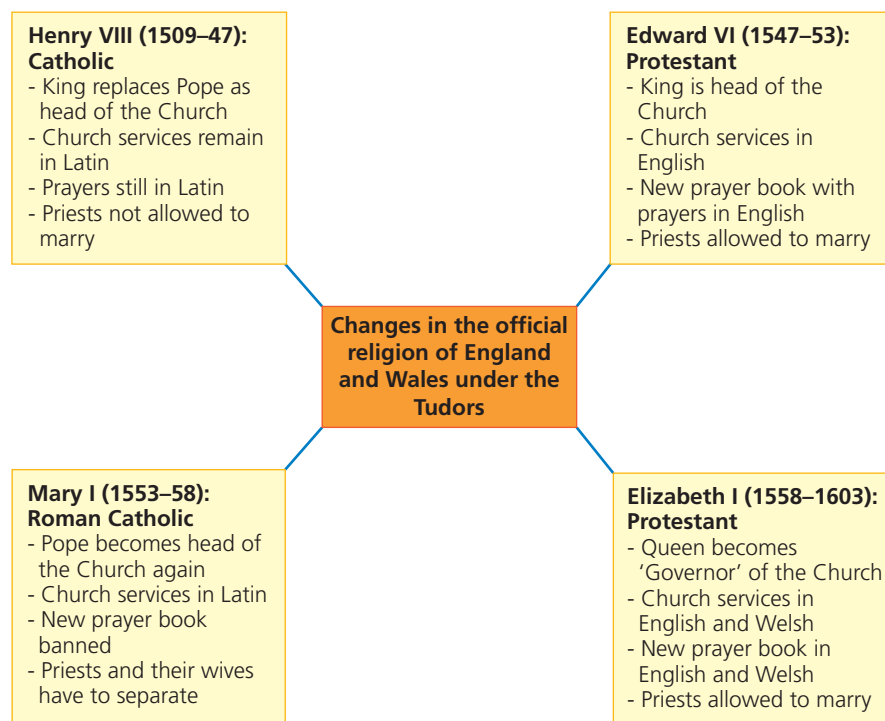
### The impact of religious change – treason

Religious change dominated people's lives, and the ruling monarch insisted on people worshipping in the way that he or she did. Economic hardship was causing a rise in the number of vagrants. As a result, outbreaks of riots and rebellions became quite common. When such riots, rebellions or planned plots attempting to betray or illegally overthrow a monarch or government occurred, those involved were said to have committed the crime of treason.

Following his break with Rome and his attempts to divorce his first wife, Catherine of Aragon, Henry VIII tried to silence his opposition by introducing a new set of treason laws. These stated that:

- Anyone who said or wrote things against the king, his wife and/or his heirs, or who displayed support for the Pope, was guilty of treason.
- Anyone who said that the beliefs of the king went against the teachings of the Church, or said that the king was using his power unjustly, was guilty of treason.
- Anyone who kept silent when questioned on what were the rights and authority of the king was guilty of treason.

This meant that political as well as religious opinions could now be classed as treason. The punishment for those found guilty of treason was death. In many instances this involved being **hung, drawn and quartered**.



▲ **Figure 1.6** Changes in the official religion of England and Wales under the Tudors

**Interpretation 2:** An explanation of why heresy became a serious crime during the sixteenth century. Taken from a school history website.

*In the reign of Mary, Protestants were executed for refusing to accept that the Pope was the head of the Church. Others were executed for reading the English Bible. However, the most common cause of heresy concerned something called transubstantiation. Catholics believed that the bread and wine used at communion became the body and blood of Jesus Christ. Protestants who refused to believe this miracle happened during communion were in danger of being executed.*

### Think

- 1 Use Interpretation 2 and your knowledge to explain why heresy became more widespread during the sixteenth century.
- 2 Why did treason emerge as a serious crime during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries?

### ACTIVITY

Copy out and complete the table below to show how the causes of religious crime changed during the Tudor period.

Tudor monarch	Official religion	Reasons why an individual could be accused of being a heretic during that reign	Was there a change of reason from the previous reign?



# The pressures of industrialisation and urbanisation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were times of great change due to the **Agricultural** and **Industrial Revolutions**. The increasing use of new methods and machinery on farms led to a fall in demand for agricultural labourers, many of whom were forced to leave the countryside and migrate to the rapidly expanding industrial towns like Manchester in the north of England. Here they found work in the factories, mines and ironworks.

As more and more people moved away from the countryside, the towns grew rapidly and some, such as Liverpool, Manchester, Leeds and Birmingham, became cities during the early nineteenth century. This process of industrialisation and **urbanisation** dramatically changed the way people lived and worked. The increased population in towns and cities led to a rise in the levels of crime and, in some instances, resulted in the emergence of new types of crime.

## Development of large towns

Historians have identified a range of 'push and pull' factors to explain the dramatic increase in the size of towns and cities during the nineteenth century. The push factors were those that drove people to leave the countryside, while the attractions of working in the new industrial towns acted as the pull factors.

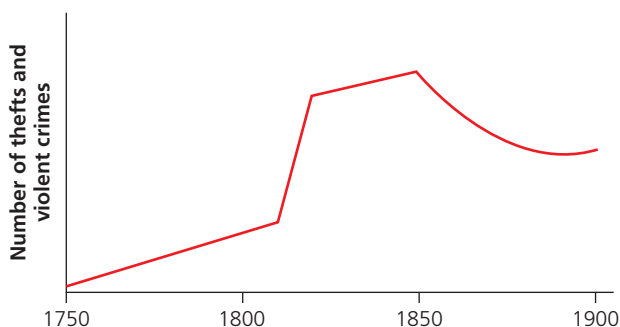
- Due to the introduction of new methods of farming and farm machinery, it was becoming increasingly difficult to get work in the countryside.
- The wage of an agricultural labourer was considerably less than that of an industrial worker.
- After bad harvests many poorer people living in the countryside were near starvation.

City	1750	1801	1851
Liverpool	35,000	82,000	376,000
Birmingham	30,000	71,000	233,000
Manchester	45,000	75,000	303,000
Leeds	14,000	53,000	172,000
Merthyr Tydfil	400	7,705	46,378

▲ **Table 1.2** The dramatic increase in population size of the new industrial towns and cities

- The rural population was growing and there were not enough farming jobs to go around.
- The development of the railways made transport easier and cheaper.
- Factories, mines and ironworks were labour intensive, requiring large numbers of workers who needed to live close by.
- Industrialists built houses for their workers next to their factories, mines and ironworks.
- Industrial jobs offered employment throughout the year, unlike agriculture, which was seasonal.
- Industrial jobs offered jobs to the whole family – men, women and children.
- The multiplier effect meant once one member of a family had migrated to the towns and found employment, this often attracted other family members to do the same.
- Young people in towns married earlier than they would have in the country and they tended to have larger families.

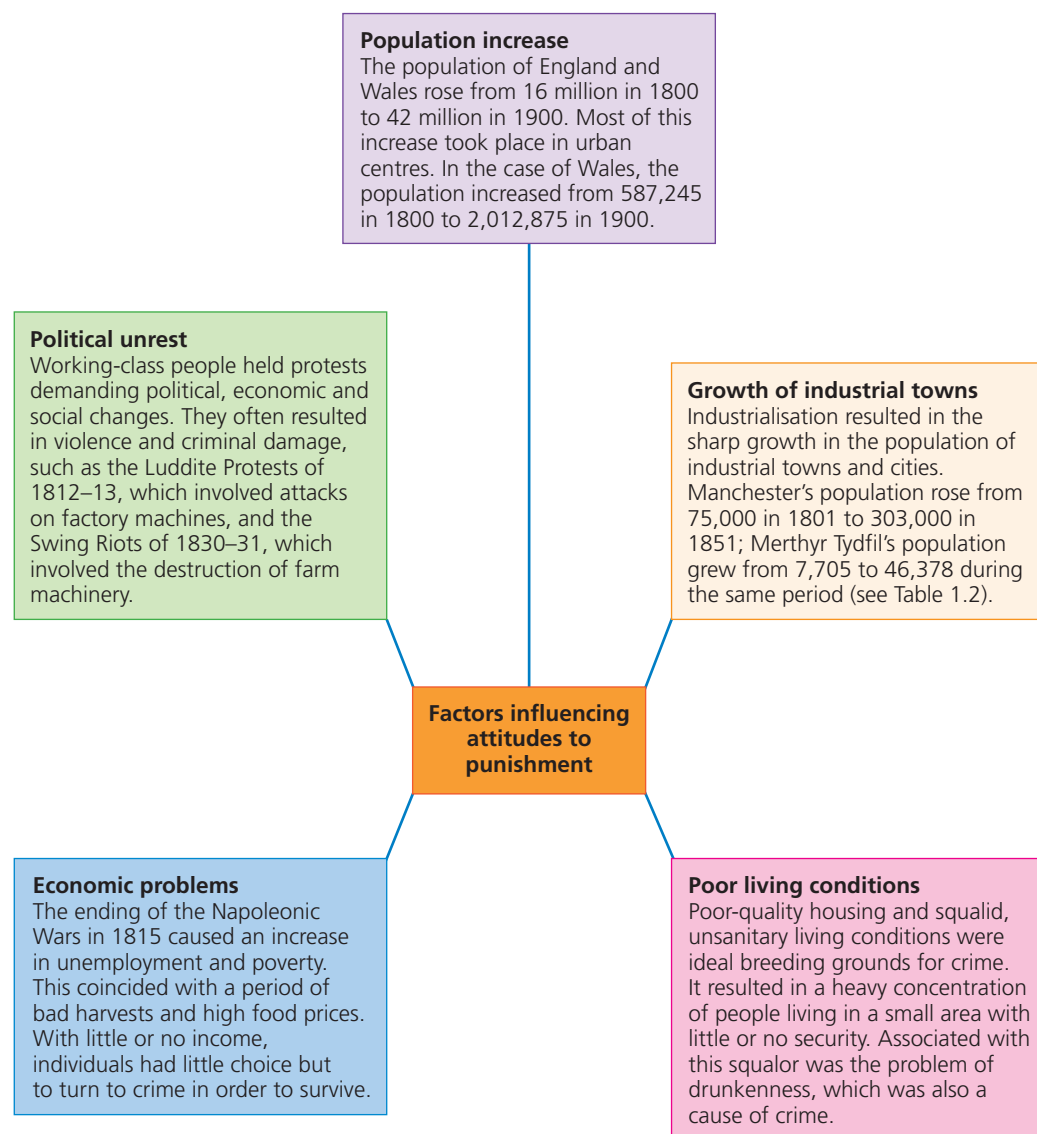
An important factor contributing to the rise in crime during this period was the social and economic change linked to the dramatic growth of industrial towns and cities. London experienced the biggest growth, with its population increasing from 675,000 in 1750 to 2.3 million in 1851. This resulted in overcrowding and squalid living conditions, particularly in the East End. Life in these areas was very hard and crime became an increasing problem. Criminals liked to live in places that were full of narrow, twisting, crowded alleys that enabled them to slip away quickly from any pursuer.



▲ **Figure 1.7** The trends in crime, 1750–1900

### Think

Compare and contrast Table 1.2 and Figure 1.7. What information can be obtained from this data to explain the trend in crime levels between 1750 and 1850?



▲ **Figure 1.8** Factors that contributed to the increase in crime during the nineteenth century

## ACTIVITY

Use the information from this section to identify the reasons for the development of large towns and cities during the nineteenth century. Copy out and complete the table below, dividing your reasons into 'push' and 'pull' factors.

Push factors	Pull factors



## Twentieth-century pressures

Many of the crimes that had occurred in previous centuries, such as theft, robbery, assault and murder, continued into the twentieth century and, in many instances, the causes of these traditional crimes remained the same. However, changes in society, particularly those relating to developments in technology, also provided criminals with new opportunities for crime. The development of the motor car gave rise to a wide range of transport crimes (see Chapter 2), while the growth in computer technology has given birth to cybercrime.

### Increased crime



▲ **Figure 1.9** Suggested reasons for the apparent rise in crime during the twentieth century

#### ACTIVITY

Study Figure 1.9. Working in pairs, copy and complete the table below by dividing the causes of crime into these two categories.

Causes of crime common to all centuries	Causes of crime unique to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries

## New causes of crime

### Motoring offences

As car ownership has increased there has been more opportunity for people to commit motoring crimes. By 1939, 60 per cent of all cases presented before magistrates involved motoring offences. In 1996, there were over 1.3 million recorded motoring offences, including the theft of over half a million cars.

As a result of increased car ownership, motoring offences have grown into one of the biggest categories of offending, involving people from across all social classes. A range of crimes specific to motoring has emerged, such as joyriding and carjacking (see Chapter 2 for more details on this.)

### Rise of computer crime

The dramatic increase in the use of computer technology in the late twentieth century provided criminals with new opportunities for crime. As business is now dependent on the use of information technology, computer crimes have become common. As with motoring, the development of computers has resulted in the emergence of new crimes such as hacking, phishing scams and cyberterrorism. In May 2017, the NHS was seriously affected by a global ransomware cyberattack which caused many hospital computer systems to be shut down for several days. This is covered in more detail in Chapter 2.

### Football hooliganism

Hooligans are often members of gangs and being a member of a gang is like belonging to a community. Violence is often associated with gang culture. Football hooliganism is not a new threat to society but it became a particular problem from the 1970s onwards. There are a number of reasons for this:

- It often involved gangs of supporters from rival football teams, often under the influence of alcohol, fighting each other or attacking property.
- Membership of such gangs was like belonging to a community and violence was accepted as the norm.
- Many of these gangs were well organised and run by middle-class men aged between 18 and 25, who had the money and the knowledge to outwit police attempts to contain them.

## Drug-related crime

Drug-related crime is not new but it became much more prominent during the second half of the twentieth century. Throughout history, the smuggling of banned or highly taxed goods has encouraged criminals to break the law in the hope of making a profit. In the past, goods like tobacco, rum, brandy and tea have been smuggled.

In more recent times, the ban on particular drugs, such as cocaine, has resulted in increased instances of smuggling. Drug smuggling has become an international business with well-organised international drug dealers using sophisticated methods to smuggle drugs into the UK. Gangs use planes, drones, boats, trucks and people to smuggle drugs across the Channel into the country.

At the other end of the operation, drug users have caused an increase in crime. Drug addiction has resulted in higher instances of certain crimes, particularly burglary, mugging and robbery. Addicts need a constant supply of money to feed their drug habit and if they cannot obtain this by holding down a steady job they are often forced to turn to crime to obtain money.

## Gun and knife crime

Closely associated with the increase in drug-related crime has been the growth of gun and knife crime, which is often linked to juvenile gangs. The rise in gang culture from inner city areas to the countryside has provided young people, mainly young men, with a sense of belonging. Members of the gang carry knives, or even guns, for protection. The result has been a huge increase in gun and knife crime. In areas dominated by gang culture, gangs are being used to settle scores between rivals as well as **turf wars** between rival drug dealers.

Several reasons have been suggested to account for the increase in juvenile gang culture:

- poverty
- lack of opportunity
- 'must have now' culture
- the growing divide between rich and poor
- breakdown of family values and discipline.





▲ **Figure 1.10** Knife Angel by Alfie Bradley, a statue made from knives surrendered to the police in a campaign against knife crime, displayed in Birmingham City Centre

### Think

Study Source B. What does this source tell you about the changing nature of crime in Britain during the late twentieth century?

**Source B** A report on youth gangs and the associated knife and gun crime, produced by the British Library in 2009

*More than 70 youngsters died at the hands of gangs in Britain in 2008. In London, 26 were stabbed to death. More than 170 gangs, with members as young as ten, have been identified by police in London alone. Many are loose affiliations of friends from the same area intent on controlling a 'turf' or territory, often defined by a postcode. The penalty for straying into the wrong area is to be robbed, beaten or stabbed. Many teenagers now routinely carry a knife out of fear, in order to defend themselves if attacked.*

### ACTIVITY

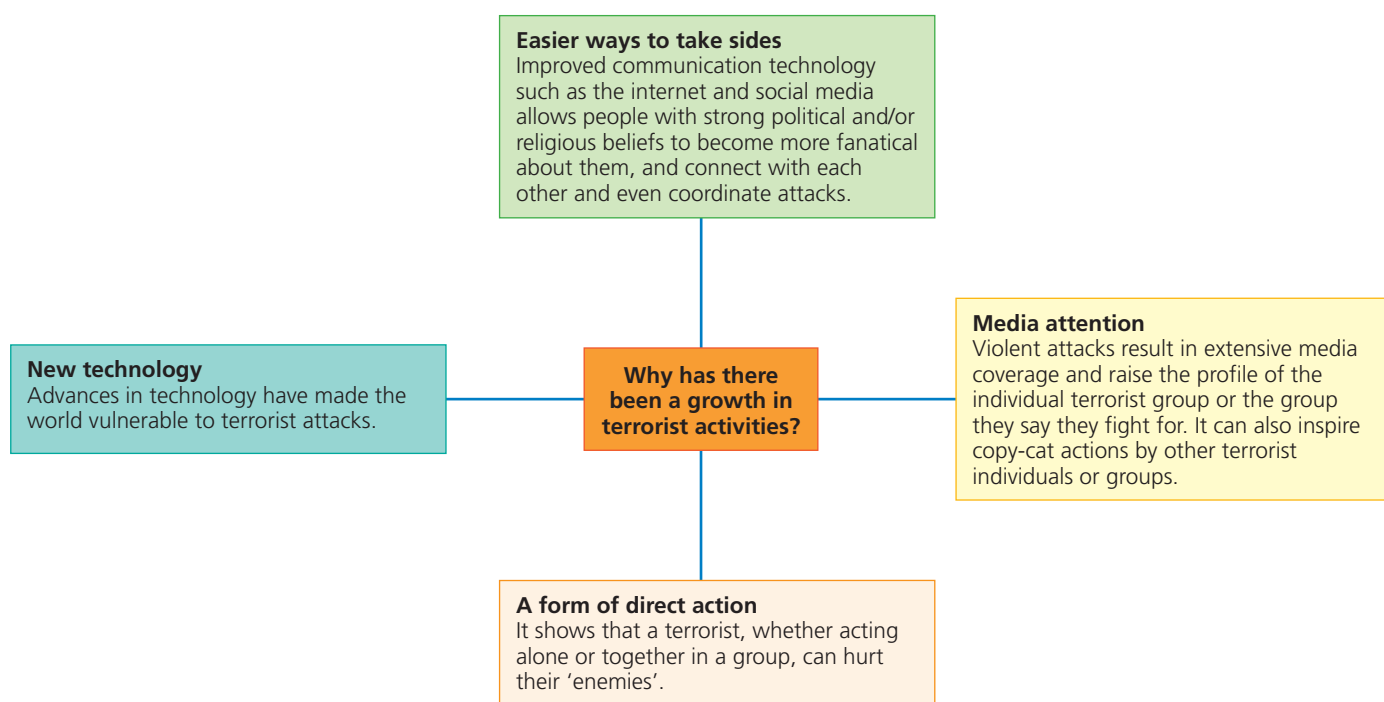
Use the information in this section to identify the chief causes of new crime in the twentieth century. Copy out and complete the following table.

Type of crime	Reasons for the growth of this type of crime during the twentieth century	To what extent is this a new crime, or a traditional crime which has been given a new name? Think: continuity/change
Motoring offences		
Computer crime		
Football hooliganism		
Drug-related crime		
Gun and knife crime		

## The growth of terrorism in the twenty-first century

Modern crimes such as motoring offences and computer crime have continued to grow in the twenty-first century and, in the case of the latter, become international in scope. Terrorism, both domestic and international, has also grown during the twenty-first century.

Between 1969 and 2005 the Irish Republican Army (IRA) was engaged in terrorist activities in Northern Ireland in an attempt to break away from the United Kingdom and join with the Republic of Ireland. In Wales the Welsh nationalist group Meibion Glyndŵr (Sons of Glyndŵr) carried out arson attacks on English property in Wales between 1979 and 1994.



▲ **Figure 1.11** Reasons for the growth in terrorist activities in the twenty-first century

### Think

- 1 Explain why there has been a growth in terrorism since the 1970s.
- 2 Use Figure 1.11 and your knowledge to explain why terrorists carry out such violent crimes.

### ACTIVITY

What do you think has been the most common cause of crime between the medieval and modern periods? What evidence would you use to support your view?



**FOCUS TASK REVISITED**

As you have worked through this chapter you have completed a table of examples of the causes of crime across the period c.500 to the present day. Some of these causes have been common to all time periods, others have been specific to a particular period. Use your findings to answer the following questions:

- 1** What would you consider to be the three most consistent causes of crime across the years c.500 to the present day?
- 2** Identify three causes of crime that are specific to a particular time period and explain why this crime emerged at that time.
- 3** Which time periods saw the greatest increase in new causes of crime? Suggest reasons to support your answer.

**TOPIC SUMMARY**

- Crime has been present across all ages, the most common crimes being theft and murder.
- The causes of common crimes have been consistent across time and are often linked to poverty, changes in the law or social and economic influences.
- Important events in the medieval period like the Great Famine and the Black Death increased the number of people in poverty and distress, leading to an increase in crime.
- Economic pressure during the sixteenth century resulted in the rise of poverty, which in turn caused increased instances of crime connected to vagrancy.
- Religious change during the sixteenth century resulted in the rise of heresy as a common crime.
- The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw an increase in the crime of treason, as individuals refused to accept religious and/or political changes.
- Industrialisation and population increase resulted in the growth of large towns and cities, and these often-squalid urban settlements became the breeding grounds for increased opportunities for crime.
- Crime statistics appear to indicate that there was a sharp rise in crime during the twentieth century, but these figures are not as dramatic as they first appear and they can be explained in part due to the increased reporting and recording of crime.
- Technological changes during the twentieth century have resulted in the emergence of new types of crime such as computer crime.
- The twenty-first century has been plagued with increased instances of terrorism, some of it on an international scale and often linked to the growth of fundamentalism.

**Practice question**

Explain why crime rates increased during the eighteenth century. (For guidance, see page 143.)

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## 2 Nature of crimes

This chapter focuses on the key question: **How has the nature of criminal activity differed and changed over time?**

During the period c.500 to the present day there has been continuity in the types of crime committed, the most common throughout this long period being minor crimes such as petty theft together with less common but more violent crimes of robbery, assault and murder. However, it is also possible to identify the appearance of particular types of crime during specific time periods. During the sixteenth century, for example, changes in the official religion of the land resulted in an increase in crimes such as heresy and treason, while in the eighteenth century the introduction of high taxes on imported goods resulted in an increase in the crime of smuggling.

Changing methods of transport during the twentieth century have resulted in the dramatic growth in motoring crimes, while the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have witnessed the growth of more violent crime associated with terrorism and especially international terrorism. As you advance through this chapter consider which types of crime are common to all time periods and which types of crime have been associated with particular time periods and why this has been so.

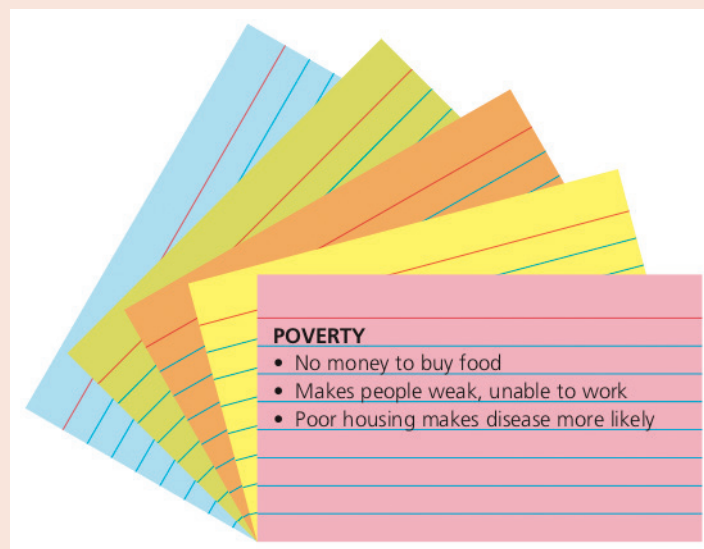
### FOCUS TASK



As you work through this chapter make a series of 'Crimes common to this period' cards – you will need a number of cards to cover the periods between 500 and the present day. On each card, make bullet points to record:

- common crimes during that century or period
- the nature of the crimes being committed
- which crimes are specific to that century or period.

A card has been started for you.



# Common crimes in the medieval era

After the Norman Conquest, a criminal was defined as someone who had ‘disturbed the king’s peace’. Norman laws highlighted offences against authority (Crown and Church) such as treason, revolt, sheltering criminals, blasphemy and heresy. The most common crime was theft. In 1275, King Edward I passed a law that said anyone stealing more than 12d worth of goods could be hanged for their crime.

There were some crimes that were particular to the medieval period:

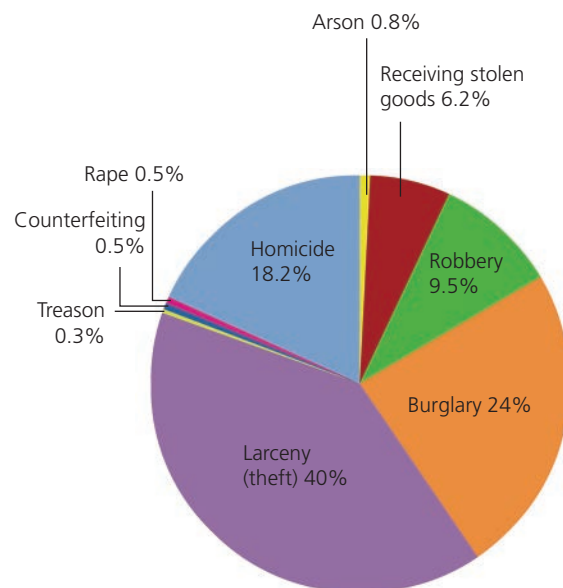
- The Forest Laws said that trees could no longer be cut down for fuel or for building and anyone caught hunting deer was punished.
- Scolding was the use of offensive and abusive speech in public.
- Vagrancy became a more common crime after the Black Death destroyed many towns and villages and left survivors wandering, looking for work and somewhere to live.
- Treason was defying authority, not just the king but also the husband who was head of the family – according to the 1351 Treason Act, a wife killing her husband, and authority figure within the family, would be considered to have committed treason.
- Outlaw gangs ambushed travellers and robbed houses. These groups were made up of criminals who were already on the run and were able to hide in thick forests or villages that had become deserted after the Black Death; examples include the Folville Gang, who committed their first robbery in 1326.
- Heresy was spreading false Christian beliefs. This crime was committed by groups such as the Lollards in the early fifteenth century who challenged the teachings of the Catholic Church and who wanted to be able to read the Bible in English.

There were several serious rebellions against royal authority during this period. For example:

- the Peasants’ Revolt in 1381 when the peasants rose up to protest against Richard II’s new poll tax
- Jack Cade’s Revolt in 1450 when men marched to London to protest against how badly they thought the country was being run during the Hundred Years’ War with France
- the Cornish Rebellion in 1497 which attempted to overthrow King Henry VII.

## Think

Study Figure 2.1. Using your knowledge from Chapter 1, why do you think larceny, burglary and robbery made up the majority of crimes in the medieval period?



▲ **Figure 2.1** Serious crimes that went to trial in the English counties, 1300–48



## Crime during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries

While minor crimes such as petty theft and some violent crime remained common, this period witnessed the growth of specific crimes associated with vagrancy and heresy.

### Vagrancy in the sixteenth century

Vagrancy became a significant problem during the sixteenth century, particularly during the reign of Elizabeth I and was generally associated with an increase in crime.

#### Growth in the number of vagrants

We have seen in Chapter 1 that the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries experienced rising levels of unemployment and economic hardship (see pages 10–11). This resulted in an increase in the number of homeless beggars touring the country in wandering bands or gathering in towns, causing problems for the authorities. Contemporaries referred to them as ‘sturdy beggars’ or vagabonds and sometimes as ‘rogues’, the latter being a person who survived through a life of crime.

In 1560, London’s Bridewell Prison dealt with 69 vagrants; by the 1570s this figure had increased to an average of 200 a year; and by 1600 it stood at over 550. Even a small town like Salisbury saw an increase from about 20 vagrants a year in the mid-1500s to 96 vagrants in 1598. As there was little in the way of poor relief, the vagrants were forced to beg for food and money. Many resorted to crime to keep themselves alive.



#### Types of vagrants

The Tudor clergyman William Harrison estimated that during the mid-sixteenth century there were about 10,000 vagabonds touring the countryside, causing problems in towns and villages, especially when they resorted to crime (see Sources A and B). In 1566 Thomas Harman published a study of vagabond life, which he called *A Caveat or Warning for Common Cursitors, vulgarly called vagabonds*, in which he identified 23 different categories of vagabonds and described them according to the methods they used to seek a living. The most common types were:

**Clapper dudgeon** (a) – tied arsenic on their skin to make it bleed, hoping to attract sympathy while begging.

**Doxy** (b) – a devious female beggar who would carry a large bag on her back and at the same time she would be knitting to make it look like what she was knitting was going into her bag, but what she was really doing was walking around and picking up anything that would be worth money, putting it into her bag and running off with it.

**Abraham man** (c) – pretended to be mad, hoping that his threatening behaviour would result in charity donations through pity.

These types of vagrants are illustrated on the left as well.

#### Think

Use Sources A and B, as well as your own knowledge, to describe the types of crime commonly associated with vagabonds.

**Source A** The case of Griffith Jones of Flint, which was recorded in the Caernarfon Court Records, 1624

*Griffith Jones of Flint, vagrant and beggar, is charged with the stealing of a cloak, belonging to David Lewis. He is also suspected of stealing various purses the same day which he strongly denied.*

**Source B** An account of the crimes of two vagabonds recorded in the town records of Warwick during the reign of Elizabeth I

*Two vagabonds from the north confess to stealing ducks, geese and pigs on their travels, which they either ate there and then or sold to buy somewhere to stay.*

**Source C** *From A Description of England* by William Harrison, a Catholic priest, written in 1577.

*They are all thieves and extortioners. They lick the sweat from the true labourer's brows and take from the godly poor what is due to them. It is not yet sixty years since this trade began but how it has prospered since that time is easy to judge for they are now supposed to amount to above 10,000 persons as I have heard reported. Moreover they have devised a language among themselves which they name canting such as none but themselves are able to understand.*

### Think

- 1 How useful is Source C to an historian studying the problem of vagrancy during Tudor times?
- 2 Why did people living during the second half of the sixteenth century grow to fear vagabonds?

## Heresy in the sixteenth century

We have seen in Chapter 1 that during the sixteenth century religion changed in accordance with the change of monarch (see pages 12–14). Freedom of religion did not exist at this time, especially during the middle decades of the sixteenth century. Individuals had to accept and follow the religion chosen by the ruler – the Protestant faith under Edward and the Catholic faith under Mary. Failure to accept the official religion was seen as treason, with individuals being accused of heresy and put on trial. During their trials, heretics were given the opportunity to **recant**. If they did this they would receive a prison sentence, but if they refused then they would be found guilty of heresy and sentenced to death. It was a crime that reached its height during the mid-sixteenth century (see Table 2.1).

It was believed that heretics had rebelled against God, so their bodies had to be destroyed by burning. An alternative belief held by some was that burning the body would free the soul and allow it to ascend to heaven.

▼ **Table 2.1** The number of people executed for heresy in England and Wales during the reign of the Tudor monarchs

Monarch	Reign	Heretics executed
Henry VII	1485–1509	24
Henry VIII	1509–1547	81
Edward VI	1547–1553	2
Mary I	1553–1558	283
Elizabeth I	1558–1603	4

During the short reign of ‘Bloody Mary’ (Mary I), 283 ordinary men and women were put to death because they refused to renounce their Protestant faith. Of these, the two best known were the bishops Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley, who were burned as Protestant heretics in 1555.

Even though Queen Elizabeth I attempted to steer a ‘middle course’ (adopting both Protestant and Catholic practices), her advisers were constantly vigilant against religious extremism. During her reign it was the turn of Catholics to be watched. For example, Richard Gwyn, a schoolteacher from Llanidloes, was executed at Wrexham in 1584 for spreading Catholic ideas. Extreme Protestants, known as Puritans, were also closely watched. In 1593 John Penry was found guilty of spreading Puritan ideas and was executed in London.

### Think

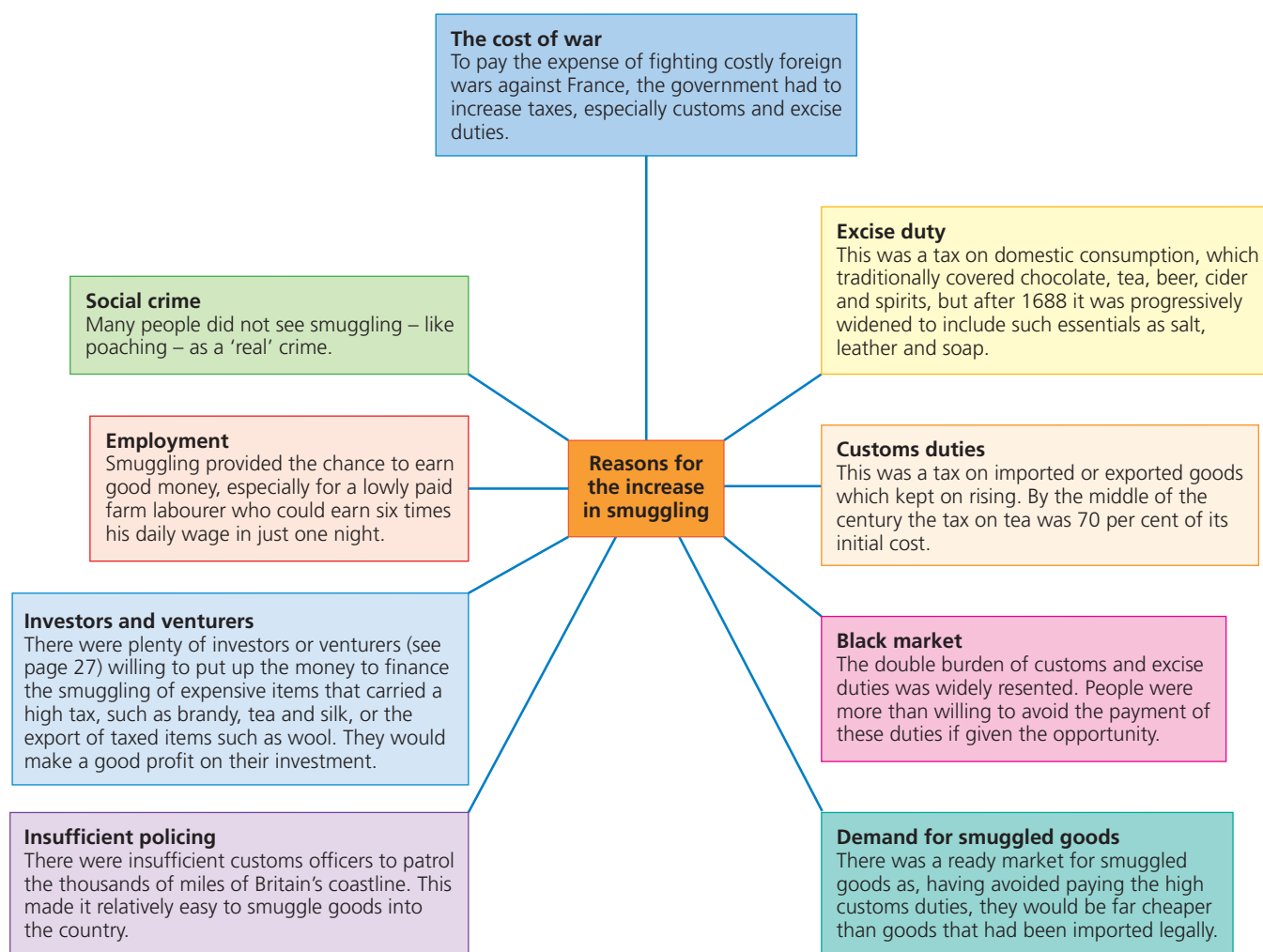
Study Table 2.1. What does it tell you about the crime of heresy during the sixteenth century?

# Crime during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries

Minor crime remained the most common of all crimes during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but this period also witnessed the appearance of specific crimes associated with smuggling and highway robbery.

## The growth of smuggling during the eighteenth century

Smuggling is the crime of secretly importing or exporting goods in order to avoid paying custom duties. In the eighteenth century, many people did not regard smuggling as a 'real' crime. They disliked the harsh import and export duties and saw smuggling as a lawful way of making a living and an acceptable means of avoiding unfair taxation. This period is often referred to as the 'golden age' of smuggling and a number of reasons have been put forward to explain why there was a dramatic increase in this specific crime.



▲ **Figure 2.2** The main reasons for the increase in smuggling

### Think

Study Figure 2.2. What do you think were the **FOUR** most important reasons for the increase in smuggling during the eighteenth century? In each case, give reasons for your choice.



## The organisation of smuggling

By the middle of the century, smuggling was big business. Large gangs like the Hawkhurst and Hadleigh gangs, who operated along the south coast of England, dealt with several cargo loads of smuggled goods every week. Each gang employed between 50 and 100 individuals, the bulk of the work being undertaken by farm labourers looking for a quicker way to make money. Smuggling had evolved into an organised operation, involving operators at every level:

### The venturer

The wealthy individual or group of individuals paid for the smuggling operation and were then paid again from the profits.

### The spotsman

The local expert who showed ships where to land smuggled goods without being caught.

### The lander

The lander organised small boats to get the smuggled goods to shore. They also organised the transport needed on land to carry the goods away.

### Tubmen

The men who did the lifting and carrying of smuggled goods.

### Batsmen

Batsmen protected the tubsman from customs officials.

**Source D** Comments on smuggling made by John Taylor, the keeper of Newgate Prison, in 1747

*The common people of England in general fancy there is nothing in the crime of smuggling ... the poor feel they have a right to shun [avoid] paying any duty on their goods.*

**Source E** An account of the activities of smugglers made in a 'Report to the Excise Commissioners' in 1734

*The smugglers pass and re-pass, to and from the seaside, 40 and 50 in a gang, in the daytime, loaded with tea and brandy. Above 200 mounted smugglers were seen one night upon the sea-beach there [Lydd, in Kent], waiting for the loading of six boats. They went in a body from the beach about four miles into the country and then separated into small parties.*



▲ **Source F** A painting by George Morland in 1792, depicting a group of smugglers landing their cargo at a bay

### Think

Describe how smuggling gangs were organised.

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