

Crime and Punishment - the Anglo-Saxons

Fact Sheet

Learn about crimes, laws, trials and punishments in Anglo-Saxon times, between AD400 and AD1066.

The Court

Courts decided if someone was guilty. People swore oaths that they were innocent and had 'oath-helpers' to support them. Anglo-Saxons had no real prisons. Most crimes demanded a Weregild, a fine known as the **blood price** based on the type of crime. Condemned people could be sold into slavery, exiled, executed or submitted to a many other gruesome punishments. Sometimes people would take **Sanctuary** in a church to escape from pursuers. The church would protect them and nobody was allowed inside to cause them



Trial by ordeal

If there were not enough witnesses or evidence to find a person guilty the court could order a trial by ordeal: if the accused passed the test they were evidently protected by God and therefore innocent. If he failed he was guilty and would be executed.

Trial by fire:

walk a few paces while holding a red hot iron in your hand.

Pass: it begins to heal in 3 days

Fail: the wound becomes infected

Trial by water:

you are dunked into a lake or river

Pass: you drown

Fail: you float