

Cricklade Court Leet.

The Manor Court checked that the villagers were paying the lord and doing the work they owed him. It also punished villagers who had not followed the village's rules or customs. The Manor Court also settled arguments and kept law and order in the village. They dealt with local problems.

Villagers who were found guilty were fined or if they could not afford this an animal, tool or household item was taken instead.

The Tithing System.

The word '**Leet**' means 'the right to hold Court.' This was introduced in Saxon times and applied to all men over 12 years of age. Every freeman had to join a group of ten men, this Ten or **Tithing** had a leader who was responsible for the behaviour of the other nine people in the group. If one person committed a crime, the other members of the tithing had to bring him to justice or pay a fine. The Manorial Court Leet had to check everyone was a member of a Tithing. If you were not you were fined and had to pay money to the lord of the manor.

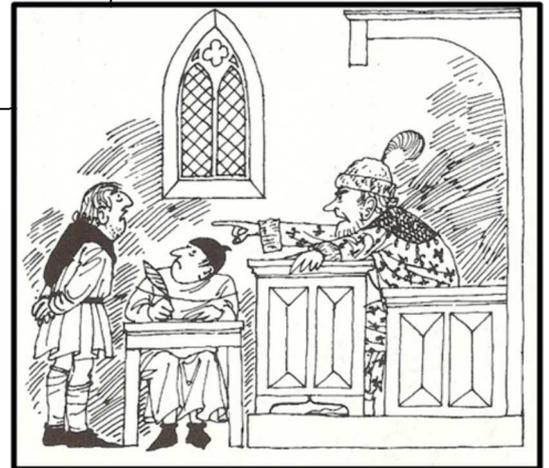
1. Write down a definition for the words 'Leet' and 'Tithing.'
2. What were the advantages and disadvantages of having a Tithing system in Medieval England?

Keywords:

- Leet
- Tithing
- Justice
- Customs
- Elected
- Trial
- Verdict
- Innocent
- Guilty

The Hue and Cry.

If a villager saw a crime taking place they would shout for help and everyone would help track down the guilty person. If the villagers did not come and help they would be fined.



The Constable.

A constable was elected by the people each year and this was not a popular job because it was unpaid. He was in charge of order during the day.

Punishments.

Sometimes a village would have a small lock-up (in Cricklade this was known as The Blind House) but people were generally fined or punished in public. This warned people about wrong doing. Someone might be placed in the stocks or pillory. They would be made fun of and they might have rotten food or mud thrown at them. Many punishments fitted the crime, for example a butcher selling rotten meat might have it burnt under his nose. All of these methods were used for minor crimes or stealing goods worth less than 6 pence.

Most local crimes were punished with fines. At the Manor Court the lord of the manor was represented by his steward who knew about the laws and acted on the lord's behalf.

The earliest known meeting of county justices in Cricklade was 1177-8.

The Manor Court vs the King's Courts.

The manor court dealt with more local problems to do with the business of the lord of the manor, whereas more serious cases were dealt with in the King's courts.

One way of reaching a verdict or decision in the King's courts was to ask God's judgement. This was called 'trial by ordeal.' Women were usually asked to pick up a hot iron. If after three days her burns had healed, it was a sign she was innocent. Men were usually tied up and thrown into water, this was called 'trial by water.' If the man floated on the surface he was guilty and had one foot and his right hand chopped off. Later in medieval times they used 'trial by battle or combat'. If you won you were innocent. Gradually these methods were replaced by trial by jury. This was where a group of men decided whether the prisoner was innocent or guilty.

Punishments.

Serious crimes like plotting against the King of the country were punished with people losing their lives and being hung, drawn and quartered. Murder and stealing anything worth more than 5p also resulted in you losing your life, men were usually hung and women burnt to death.

3. What was the difference between a Manor Court and the King's Court?

4. Explain what punishments the following people would receive:

- A man who had tried to kill the King.
- A women who had killed her husband.
- Someone who had been caught selling stale bread.

5. How would you describe justice and punishments in the Middle Ages? (fair, harsh, too lenient?)

6. Look back at the 'Keywords' and check you know what they mean. Create a glossary for them in your exercise book.



Bibliography: -Cricklade Court Leet website

-Chris Jordan & Tim Wood, 'England in the Middle Ages,' (John Murray, 1984)

-Peter Moss, 'History Scene 2,' (Hart-Davis Educational, 1979)

-Colin Shephard, Chris Hinton, John Hite & Tim Lomas, 'Societies in Change,' (John Murray, 1992)

-Martyn Whittock, 'Life in the Middle Ages,' (Robinson, 2009)

All illustrations by kind permission of Ray Fishwick