

The King

The Hierarchy:

- The King rewarded nobles with land and wealth, and dominated them with his strong personality.
- The King's administrators wrote his laws, called '*writs*'.
- When Kings needed advice, they called a meeting known as the '*Witanagmot*' or '*Witan*'. (Anglo-Saxon word meaning '*meeting of wise men*'.)
- The Witan's most powerful role came if there was a doubt about who would be the next king. However, this was mostly decided by who had the most military support.

Punishment

In parts of Northumbria, some people still took part in a **blood feud**. If a relative was injured or killed, family members believed they had the right to take revenge, often through violence, rather than taking the criminal to court.

'*Wergild*': fine paid to the victims of crime, or their families, as compensation.

Treason against the King or betraying your Lord carried the death penalty. Prisons were rarely used as they were expensive, and were only used to hold criminals while waiting for their trial and punishment. There was no police because everyone trusted each other.

Tithing: 10 men responsible for each other's behaviour (collective responsibility for stopping crime).

If a crime was committed, a victim/witness should raise the '*hue and cry*'. Not many crimes occurred because of punishment.

Anglo-Saxons used 2 types of trials: Trial by **jury** and Trial by **ordeal**

The Legal System and Punishment

The king and his administrators made up the **central government**.

The officials who governed each local area made up the **local government**.

The top of the local government were **Earls**:

- most powerful landowners
- responsible for punishing crime

However, Earls owned such large areas of land that they were not able to collect every tax or punish every crime in their lands. So the King created a more detailed system of local government that was very effective- **Shires and Hundreds**:

- there were 40 shires
- Sheriffs were responsible for crime, taxes, fines and sometimes had to raise armies.
- hundreds were subdivisions of shires
- each hundred had its own '*reeve*' (Local senior official/chief magistrate)

