

7.2 How did types of crime and their causes change, 1700–1900?

Crime during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries

Continuity Minor crime remained the most common (74% of all crime) and violent crime continued (10%)

Change The appearance of specific crimes associated with smuggling, highway robbery and the impact of industrialisation

The 'golden age' of smuggling

Revised

As society changed, the government was forced to introduce new laws and categorise new criminal offences which had not existed before, such as **smuggling**. The eighteenth century has been called the 'golden age' of smuggling.

Key term

Smuggling – the secret trade of goods in a deliberate attempt to avoid paying customs duties

Reasons for the increase in smuggling during the eighteenth century

Revised

- **The cost of war:** to pay the expense of fighting costly foreign wars against France, the government had to increase taxes, especially customs and excise duties.
- **Excise duty:** traditionally this covered chocolate, tea, beer, cider and spirits, but after 1688 it was widened to include salt, leather and soap.
- **Customs duty:** customs duties kept on rising and were bitterly resented.
- **Black market:** with a 70 per cent tax on goods like tea, people were more than willing to buy cheaper smuggled goods.
- **Insufficient policing:** there were not enough customs officers to patrol the thousands of miles of British coastline.
- **Investors and venturers:** there were many venturers willing to invest money to finance smuggling in the hope of rich profits.
- **Social crime:** many people did not view smuggling as a 'real' crime.

Key terms

Excise duty – a tax imposed on goods made and consumed within a country

Customs duty – a tax imposed on exported or imported goods

Black market – when goods are sold and bought illegally, often avoiding paying tax

Venturer – Someone who risks investing money in the smuggling of goods

The organisation of smuggling

Revised

Smuggling made criminals considerable amounts of money. Large gangs like the Hawkhurst and Hadleigh gangs, which operated along the south coast of England, dealt with several cargo loads of smuggled goods each week. Each gang employed between 50 and 100 individuals, each performing a specific task: venturer (the investor); spotsman (responsible for directing the ship to shore); lander (arranged the unloading of the smuggled cargo); tubsman (carried the goods); and batsman (protected the tubsman).

The role of the customs and excise men

Revised

Despite laws designed to limit smuggling (such as the Hovering Act 1718 and the Act of Indemnity 1736), it was difficult to control the illegal trade.

- **Preventative Officers** who were part of the Customs and Excise Service were responsible for preventing smuggling activity and capturing those engaged in it.
- The coastline of England and Wales was divided into 33 areas with teams of Preventative Officers being spaced at regular distances.
- With so many people involved in smuggling, and with too few Preventative Officers, it was impossible to prevent all incidents.
- Even when smugglers were caught it was difficult to secure a conviction; witnesses were too scared to come forward and the smuggling gangs used threats and intimidation to protect themselves.

Key term

Preventative Officers – men employed by the Customs and Excise Department to police the smuggling trade

The decline of smuggling in the early nineteenth century

Revised

Changes in the law, rather than successful policing, caused an eventual decline in smuggling.

- In 1784 the duty on tea was cut from 119 per cent to 12.5 per cent, making tea an unprofitable cargo for smugglers.
- Reductions in duties on other items in the early nineteenth century helped reduce smuggling.
- The Napoleonic Wars (1804–15) led to the building of watchtowers along the south-east coast of England, which made it harder for smuggling gangs to operate.
- The establishment of the Coast Guard in the 1820s added a further hindrance.

Revision task

Copy out the table and use the information in this section to complete it.

| The 'golden age' of smuggling | | | |
|---|--|---|--|
| Reasons for the rise in smuggling during the 18th century | Key people involved in the organisation of smuggling gangs | Key people involved in the policing of smuggling activity | Reasons for the decline in smuggling during the 19th century |
| | | | |

The rise and fall of highway robbery

Reasons for the growth in highway robbery

Revised

Highway **robbery** took place in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries but became more common in the eighteenth century. There were several reasons for this:

- Unpoliced roads offered opportunities for robbers to strike.
- Handguns became easier to obtain and use.
- Improved roads enabled more people to travel by **stagecoach**.
- The building of more coaching inns encouraged travel.

Key terms

Robbery – stealing using violence or the threat of it

Stagecoach – a four-wheeled horse-drawn carriage used to carry passengers

- People were becoming wealthier and carried more money and jewellery.
- Limited banking facilities meant people had to carry cash.

Highway robbery – what it involved

Revised

- **Footpads** tended to rob pedestrian travellers; their attacks were often quite brutal.
- **Highway robbers** tended to attack stagecoaches and travellers on horses; such robberies often involved the use of firearms.
- Most highwaymen operated in pairs or small groups.
- The roads leading in and out of London, which lacked any means of law enforcement, were common venues for such robberies, e.g. near Hounslow Heath and Finchley Common.

Key terms

Footpad – a criminal who carried out highway robbery on foot

Highway robber – a criminal who carried out highway robbery mounted on a horse

Famous highway robbers

| | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Richard ('Dick') Turpin (1706–39) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● During the mid-1730s he operated with his partner Tom King on the Cambridge Road. ● In May 1737 Turpin accidentally shot King during an attack. ● He fled to Yorkshire, and in 1739 he was arrested for horse stealing and hanged at York. |
| William Page (1730–58) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● He operated on several roads radiating from London. ● He was eventually captured in 1758 and hanged in Maidstone. |
| John Rann (1750–74) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● He operated on the Hounslow Road. ● He was arrested six times for highway robbery but each court case against him collapsed. ● He robbed a chaplain near Brentford in 1774 and was hanged soon after at Tyburn. |

Reasons for the decline in highway robbery

Revised

By the early nineteenth century, attacks on the highway had become much less common and they had virtually ceased by the 1830s. Several factors contributed to this decline:

- The rapid growth of London filled in open spaces like Hounslow Heath, making ambushes more difficult.
- John Fielding set up the Bow Street Horse Patrol in 1763 to experiment with policing the roads of London; in 1805 a new patrol of 54 officers policed the roads leaving the capital.
- The spread of **tollgates** made it more difficult for highwaymen to make a quick getaway.
- JPs refused to license taverns which were the known haunts of highwaymen.

Revision task

Use the information in this section to complete the following.

1. Explain why highway robbery was a problem during the eighteenth century.
2. Name a famous highway robber and outline his criminal career.

The impact of industrialisation on crime

Revised

During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, industrial development caused people to migrate from the countryside to the rapidly expanding towns, looking for work in the new factories and mines. This process of **industrialisation** and **urbanisation** brought dramatic changes in how people lived and worked.

Key terms

Tollgate – a gate across a toll road at which travellers must stop and pay a fee to use the road

Industrialisation – the development of industry on a large scale

Urbanisation – the rapid growth of, and migration to, towns and cities

Factors which contributed to the growth of industrial towns

Revised

- **Changes in agriculture:** the introduction of new machinery resulted in less demand for rural labour.
- **Development of the factory system:** factories were **labour-intensive**; workers had to live close by.
- **Stable employment:** unlike agriculture, factory work was not seasonal; it offered employment to the whole family; wages were higher than those of agricultural labourers.
- **Improved transport:** development of the railways made travelling easier and cheaper.
- **Multiplier effect:** once one member of a family had migrated and found work, others soon followed.

Reasons for the sharp increase in crime in the nineteenth century

Revised

- **Population increase:** the UK population rose from 16 million in 1800 to 42 million in 1900.
- **Growth in the size of industrial towns and cities:** Manchester's population rose from 75,000 in 1801 to 303,000 in 1851; Merthyr Tydfil's population grew from 7705 to 46,378 during the same period.
- **Living and working conditions:** poor quality housing and squalid, unsanitary living conditions were ideal breeding grounds for crime to develop; there was a heavy concentration of people living in a small area and no security.
- **Economic problems:** the ending of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 caused an increase in unemployment and poverty, which coincided with a period of bad harvests and high food prices.
- **Political unrest:** working-class individuals held protests demanding political, economic and social changes.

Development of the Victorian 'criminal class'

Revised

The nineteenth-century writer Henry Mayhew identified a 'criminal class' of people who survived through criminal activities. They tended to live in **rookeries** such as St Giles in London and they acquired nicknames depending on the crimes they specialised in:

- **Thimble-screwers:** they stole pocket-watches from their chains.
- **Prop-nailers:** they stole pins and brooches from women.
- **Drag-sneaks:** they stole goods or luggage from carts and coaches.

Key terms

Labour-intensive – industries that need a lot of workers

Rookery – overcrowded slum housing occupied by poor people, and often by criminals and prostitutes

Popular protest and crime during the nineteenth century

Revised

Between 1790 and 1840, economic and social hardship, combined with demands for political reform, resulted in a real threat of revolution. At times, the anger of protesters resulted in outbreaks of violence and criminal activity:

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| Luddism | 1812–13 | Attacks on factory machines in northern England, with handloom weavers protesting over new factory-based machine-woven cloth |
| Swing Riots | 1830–31 | Attacks by agricultural labourers on the property of rich farmers across south-eastern England; they set fire to haystacks and smashed machines; they were angry about their poverty and the introduction of farm machinery |
| Rebecca Riots | 1839–43 | Gangs of poor farmers disguised as women to hide their identity attacked tollgates in south-west Wales; they were angry about increased rents, tithe payments and tolls |

Key terms

Luddism – the beliefs of textile workers who opposed the introduction of machines in new factories and took part in riots to smash up the machinery

Tithe – a tax paid by farmers of one-tenth of their produce/income

Revision task

Explain how each of the following factors contributed to the growth of crime during the nineteenth century:

Industrialisation

Poor living conditions

Development of a criminal class

Protests and riots

Exam practice

How important was the growth of large industrial towns in causing new types of crimes in the early nineteenth century? **[8 marks]**

Answers online

Exam tip

In the 'how important' questions you need to identify two to three key reasons for why something was important, using specific detail to back up your comments. In this instance you should refer to the sudden increase in population in the new towns, the overcrowded slum housing, the squalor and poor living standards; and even the resentment against the new factories, which caused attacks on the new machines.