

Crimes, Ordeals, Constabulary & Courts in the late Medieval & early Renaissance periods

This summary aims to better detail, compare and contrast an oft-overlooked aspect of medieval novels, films and role-playing games; the laws of the land, forces of order and courts of justice. These tables aim to help GMs provide their players with colour and context. Repeated encounters with arrests, trials, ordeals and even executions will help players better appreciate the boundaries of the Old World.

Finally, while as historically-accurate as possible, this summary contains a few exceptions that were deliberately added to better mesh with the Old World as described in Games Workshop's Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay (WFRP) game. Ultimately these are just guidelines, so if you feel it more appropriate for a spy (convicted of high treason) to be gibbeted instead of drawn & quartered; then just do it!

Type of Crime

Common Crime

Military Crime

Aetherial Crime

Ecclesiastic Crime

Trespasses	A crime in a common law jurisdiction that can be proceeded against summarily, i.e. without the right to a jury trial and/or indictment, usually required for an indictable offence.		
Crime	Definition	Ordeal	Remarks
Public drunkenness	An obvious display of intoxicated incompetence or behaviour disruptive/obnoxious to public order.	Village lock-up > Drunkard's Cloak > Stocks	Probably the most common offence throughout the Empire, particularly the northern provinces.
Creating a disturbance at church	Talking in church during mass.	Fined	Most religions consider their temples to be houses of prayer and so they consider idle chatter to be a violation of its reverence and sanctity.
Virginity fraud	A woman marrying despite being a deflowered virgin.	Pilloried	Also known as "chastity fraud" or "virginity lie". Often resolved by a confirmation of virginity.
Sumptuary law	Regulations that attempted to regulate permitted consumption, i.e. "Laws made for the purpose of restraining luxury or extravagance, particularly against inordinate expenditures in the matter of apparel, food, furniture, etc."	Pilloried	They were numerous and varied with violations that included breaches of a strict dress codes, gluttony and alcoholism.
Being a common scold	A type of public nuisance where a scold (bad-tempered woman) broke the public peace by habitually arguing and quarrelling with her neighbours.	Fined > Pilloried > Ducking	In Classical, the accused is referred to as <i>communis rixatrix</i> .
Disturbing the peace	The unsettling of proper order in a public space through one's actions, e.g. starting a fight that didn't spill blood (victim's left with 4 Wounds or more), couples who argued violently in public, bearing of arms (not sidearms) within the town/city limits, etc.	Stocks > Fined > Pilloried	A common offence, especially at market days and religious festivals. The illegal carrying of arms also resulted in their confiscation.
Outraging public decency	Committing such immoral acts as mixed bathing, exhibitionism, a woman entertaining 3 men in her house after midnight, etc.	Fined > Pilloried	Also known as Lewdness. Conservative leaders often invoke this to protect their communities from moral decadence.
Inciting riotous behaviour	To punish Agitators, Gossips and Shrews who have assembled in a group of 3 or more persons.	Branked	"To curb women's tongues that talk too idle".
Conspiracy to defraud	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a baker purposely might not measure the bread ingredients properly (giving short measure) or a butcher's scales might be tampered with an ostler might put garlic in the horse's nose to make it appear "lively" (in a frantic state) but the buyer would soon realise he'd been cheated when the horse fell ill or died shortly after the sale simply a dice cogger (a cheat or deceiver at dice), i.e. an occupational risk for many Gamblers practicing a trade without having served a full apprenticeship, e.g. PCs selling ill-gotten gains 	Stocks > Fined > Pilloried	Enforced by clerks from local guild halls who patrol market stalls to check that they meet the agreed trading standards. They inspect the weights, measurements, and scales, to catch those trying to cheat the customers, and to check the quality of goods.
Assault	The <u>threat</u> of bodily harm that reasonably causes fear of harm in the victim. Actual <u>physical</u> impact on another person is considered <i>Affray</i> or even <i>Battery</i> (see Misdemeanours). This charge was an occupational hazard commonly accepted by all Bodyguards, most Footpads and many Beggars.	Fined > Pilloried	A petty crime but one that is very subjective and thus a charge that is easily levelled but rarely prosecuted (compared to today's courts).

Misdemeanours	Comprised every species of crime which occasioned at common law the violation of lands or goods		
Crime	Definition	Ordeal	Remarks
Loitering	The act of remaining in a particular public place for a protracted time without any apparent lawful purpose. An occupational risk commonly accepted by most Footpads.	Fined or Stocks > Pilloried > Incarceration	While petty, this crime is <u>very</u> subjective and so a charge easily levelled against undesirables (PCs?).
Malicious mischief	The wanton or reckless damage, defacement or destruction of property (aka “breaking up his walls or doors”). Those who pillaged and plundered. More commonly known today as “Vandalism”.	Stocks > Fined > Pilloried	The penalties delivered depended on the severity of the damage inflicted on the victim.
Being a common nightwalker	Being out in the streets at night (9pm until sunrise) without legitimate business. Considered an occupational risk by many a Bawd and feared by most.	Stocks > Fined > Pilloried	Night watchmen patrolled the streets and were expected to examine all suspicious characters.
Slander*	An <u>oral</u> form of defamation, consisting of false statements about a person which would damage that person’s reputation. An occupational risk commonly accepted by many an Agitator and Demagogue.	Fined > <u>Branked</u> > Pilloried	Calling a person “a fox” incurred <i>a stiff fine</i> . While calling someone “a harlot” incurred <i>a fair fine</i> .
Affray	Starting a fight that left the victim <i>bloodied</i> but not <i>grievously wounded</i> (see <i>Battery</i>). This was an occupational risk for all Bodyguards but commonly accepted by most. Moreover, any convictions were seen by most as practically a badge of honour.	Fined or Stocks > Pilloried > Branding with “F”	The mark of “F” signified Fraymaker. Where slightly bloodied describes <i>heavily wounded</i> (2-3W) & badly bloodied equals <i>severely wounded</i> (0-1W).
Petty larceny*	Stealing items less than 12 pence (a shilling), e.g. a loaf of bread, a bird’s egg, an apple, etc.	Pilloried > Branding with “T”	The mark of “T” signified Thief.
Blasphemy	Act of insulting or showing contempt or lack of reverence to a deity. Essentially it is a form of verbal sacrilege, e.g. <u>swearing without legitimate justification</u> , i.e. “taking a god’s name in vain”	Fined > Penance > Branding with a “B”	The mark of “B” signified Blasphemer.
Prostitution	Attitudes vary considerably from one province to another; from banned (whores), to tolerated (strumpets) and even licensed (ladies of negotiable virtue) in the more progressive counties.	Pilloried > Branding with a “P” > Impaling	“P” signified Prostitute. Repeat offenders risked a slow and painful death via the Judas Cradle.
Fornication	The practices of sex outside of marriage.	Pilloried & Penance	Repeat offenders risked castration.
Vagrancy	Those vagabonds, idle and suspect persons living suspiciously, i.e. “a person who has no land, no master and no legitimate trade or source of income so who wanders from place to place, often in poverty”. Probably the greatest fear for most Beggars.	Stocks > Pilloried > Branding > Conscripted	Beggars who are old and incapable of working receive a beggar’s licence, i.e. anyone else caught begging was convicted of being a vagrant.
Libel*	The malicious defamation of any person in <u>print</u> , <u>writing</u> , <u>signs</u> or <u>pictures</u> designed to expose that person to public hatred or to provoke wrath in the victim. A regular risk for Agitators & Demagogues.	Fined > Ears nailed to Pilloried > Cropping	Traditionally rare but increasingly common with the rise of the printing press & cheap pamphlets.
Conductus	The felon has bought, been given or acquired stolen goods.	Fined > Stocks > Pilloried	Historical equivalent of “receiving stolen goods”.
Poaching	The illegal hunting within royal parks. Usually undertaken by impoverished peasants for subsistence purposes, i.e. to supplement their meagre diets. Often their prey was hare or rabbit.	Fined > Cropping > Blinding	Rarely poachers risked being sewn into a deerskin and then hunted down by ferocious dogs!
Debt evasion	The failure to repay a debt.	Incarceration	Incarceration in a debtor’s jail which was often a single, large cell until their families paid their debt. Debt prisoners often died of diseases contracted from other debt prisoners. Conditions included starvation and abuse from other prisoners. If the father of a family was imprisoned for debt, the family business often suffered while the mother and children fell into poverty. Unable to pay the debt, the father often remained in debtors’ prison for many years. Some debt prisoners were released to become serfs or indentured servants (debt bondage) until they paid off their debt in labour.
Battery*	Starting a fight that left the victim <i>grievously wounded</i> . Simply threatening to harm a victim is considered to be <i>Assault</i> (see <i>Trespases</i>). Practically a badge of honour for many Bodyguards.	Fined > Pilloried > Incarceration	<i>Grievously wounded</i> = 0 Wounds or less (a critical)
Trespass	Entering a property without the owner’s consent.	Fined + Incarceration	If unable to pay the fine, then incarceration longer.
Negligence	Performing a duty negligently, Negligently wounding a horse or Negligently supplying rotten victuals.	Fair Flogging	A dozen lashes. Justice delivered in front of the troops to install discipline and boost morale.
Gross Magical Misconduct	Any serious or repeated infringement of the Articles of Magic or his Order’s own constitution, e.g. reckless spellcraft, unsanctioned spellcraft, resale of spell ingredients, aetherial negligence, etc.	Fair Flogging > Banishment	Considered to be a form of minor malpractice. Although harsh it was preferable to Pacification.
Extortion	Obtaining money, property or services from a person, entity or institution through coercion. Usually a tribute is paid in return for immunity from raids and other harassment. An occupational risk commonly accepted by every Racketeer.	Fined > Restitution > Incarceration > <u>Hanging</u>	Also known as “blackmail” or “protection racket”. Restitution is a form of financial compensation that is paid by the convict to their victim.
Desecration	The illicit removal of <u>corpses</u> from graves or morgues constituted a violation of consecrated ground and thus was a physical sacrilege. Such Grave Robbers were also known as “resurrectionists”.	Fined + Incarceration > <u>Hanging</u>	Also known as <i>sepuchrum violatum</i> in Classical or more commonly known as “Body Snatching”.
Abduction*	The unlawful taking away or transportation of a man against that person’s will, usually to hold the person unlawfully, by persuasion, by fraud, or by open force or violence.	Incarceration + Restitution > Banishment > <u>Hanging</u>	This crime was usually committed for ransom or in furtherance of another crime. Also known as “kidnapping”.

Felonies		A crime that is characterised by offences against the person.	
Crime	Definition	Ordeal	Remarks
Minor transgression	A momentary lapse or accidental violation of divine principles by a priest of that faith, e.g. a Verenan priest's failure to speak <u>whole</u> the truth, stop injustice or prevent the obliteration of knowledge or an Ulrican priest's failure to help a fallen comrade, suffer a defeat, lose their blade, slay a dog, etc.	Minor Penance > Great Penance	Minor penances included menial duties, fasting, vows of silence, short pilgrimages, donation of alms and even mortification (wearing hair shirt).
Ravishment*	Sexual violation of a victim, known today as "rape". It also includes attempted rape as little distinction was made during this period. This is a surprisingly moderate offence compared to modern values.	Incarceration + Restitution > Castration > Burning	The difference between restitution and a fine is that restitution is paid to the victim whereas fines are paid to the state.
Insubordination	The act of a soldier wilfully disobeying his superior. If a military officer were to disobey the lawful orders of his or her civilian superiors, this would also count.	Stout Flogging > Hanging	2-dozen lashes. Justice delivered in front of the troops to install discipline and boost morale. This was based on the idea being that soldiers should fear their officers more than they fear the enemy.
Grand larceny *	The theft of items valued at more than 1 shilling. Since most purses contained several pieces of silver, most Cut-Purses (Pickpockets) were charged with this crime. Due to their looting of valuables, Tomb Robbers (known as Night Hawks) were equally liable but they were also often charged with Trespass. Finally, though Embezzlers were also liable for this crime, their guilt was often much harder to prove.	Branding with "T" > Mutilation: hand cut-off > Hanging	The mark of "T" signified Thief. The crime was also known as "Grand theft". To avoid this charge, Grave Robbers were often careful not to steal anything such as jewellery or clothes.
Livestock theft	The theft of domesticated animals where Sheep were the most common, Cattle more valuable and Horses the most prized.	Pilloried > Branding with "T" > Galley slave	The mark of "T" signified Thief. In the severest of cases the felon's left cheek was branded with "H" and his right with "T" to signify "Horse Thief".
Burglary	Breaking and entering the house of another in the night time (½ hour after sunset & ½ hour before sunrise) with intent to commit a felony therein.	Mutilation: hand cut-off > Hanging	A practice also known as "Rustling" or "Duffing".
Smuggling	The illegal transportation of objects, information or people. When calculating fines Excisemen would consider the following maxim "to pay an amount of money equal to four times the value of the goods themselves".	Fined + Hard Labour > Fined + Incarceration	While often non-violent, this crime was classed a felony as state coffers grew ever more dependent on tariffs (high rates of duty varied from 20-60%).
Perjury	The intentional act of swearing a false oath or of falsifying an affirmation to tell the truth, whether spoken or in writing, concerning matters material to an official proceeding.	Mutilation: hand cut-off + Penance > Hanging	Oaths would be sworn on relics (religious artefacts). Also known as "forswearing".
Aiding and abetting	Those who are party to a crime, i.e. those helping criminals.	Incarceration	Occasionally animals thought to be familiars were charged with this crime.
Harbouring an outlaw, fugitive serf or criminal	The providing of shelter for those "on the run" from the long arm of the law. Only exceptions were churches & monasteries that had the privilege of sheltering fugitives in sanctuary for 42 days but thereafter...	Incarceration + further penalty	Incarceration lasted "until those they receive is captured at which they are liable to same penalty as fugitive".
Manslaughter* (Death by misadventure)	An unlawful killing without premeditation or malice. These occurred in the course of fights or during legitimate activities, e.g. physically disciplining one's wife or servant or plying one's trade (Bodyguard Coachman, Labourer, etc.). It was also the charge brought against duellists but any suspicions of foul play and/or vengeful families were often sufficient for the judge to raise the charge to murder.	Fined > Fined & Branding with "M" > Incarceration (6-12 months)	The mark of "M" signified Manslaughterer. This crime was charged far more commonly than of Murder.
Voyeurism	The practice of spying on people engaged in intimate behaviours, such as undressing, sexual activity, or other actions usually considered to be of a private nature.	Blinded (Mutilation: both eyes put-out)	Voyeurs were also known as a "Peeping Tom".
Desertion	"Any soldier, man of arms or archer which, having mustered, departeth from his captain within his term without repaying the King's wages"	Severe Flogging > Branding with "D" & Transportation	3-dozen lashes. Justice delivered in front of the troops to install discipline and boost morale. The mark of "D" signified Deserter.
Defaming the Good Orders of the Colleges	Any Imperial Magisters that has brought the reputation of the Colleges and his Order into disrepute through fault of his behaviour, utterances or spellcraft, i.e. gross malpractice	Pacification > Banishment	Magisters were so terrified of Pacification that some were known to hand themselves over to Witch Hunters claiming to be unsanctioned mage.
Major transgression	A deliberate and/or repeated violation of divine principles by a priest of that faith, e.g. a Verenan priest's perjury, attempt to perverse the course of justice, condoning injustice or an Ulrican priest's use of a firearm, fleeing combat, abandoning comrades, allowing the Eternal Flame to extinguish, etc.	Great Penance > Defrocking > Excommunication	Great penances included public confessions, long pilgrimages, recovery of relics, temporary demotions, becoming a templar & self-flagellation, where most stop at first blood (3W) but many flagellants go much further... (each critical = +1IP)

Capital Offences	Execution could be avoided by petitioning for a royal pardon but these remained rare, with scarcely a hundred issued per year. Plaintiffs were more likely to have their capital sentence commuted to a more clement Ordeal, e.g. Immurement.		
Crime	Definition	Ordeal	Remarks
Dereliction of duties	The failure to attend court (ignoring a summons), flight from arrest (when charged with a crime), custody or jumping bail. More commonly known as “Fleeing justice”.	Outlawry > Bounty†	Inevitably, felons were convicted <i>in absentia</i> .
Forgery*	The fraudulent making or altering of a written document to the detriment of another man’s right.	Mutilation > Hanging	Deeds, writs, seals, warrants & promissory notes.
Murder	Premeditated, deliberate killing. Many people tried for this offence, notably duellists, were convicted of the lesser offence of manslaughter. An occupational hazard for most Footpads and every Assassin.	Wergild > Hanging	Women convicted of murder were strangled and then burnt.
Resisting arrest	The threatening, struggling against or striking a keeper of the peace while being arrested.	Hanging	Making it lawful to destroy felons who resist.
Mutiny	A criminal conspiracy among soldiers or sailors to openly oppose, change or overthrow their superior officer(s).	Hanging	Justice delivered in front of the troops to install discipline and boost morale.
Infanticide	Deliberately killing one’s own new-born child. Most cases infanticide involved unmarried mothers. The mother was presumed guilty unless she could prove that the baby was born dead.	Repeated Ducking	More recently, mothers across the Old World prefer to abandon their unwanted children at the door of a temple, in the hope that the clergy will care for their upbringing. Shallyans seem the most popular and have founded the first orphanages.
Suicide	The act of intentionally taking one’s own life or “who laid violent hands upon themselves” and proven to be of sound mind at the time of death.	posthumously Excommunicated & denied a proper burial	Often carried in despair, sometimes due to a mental disorder, alcoholism and/or stress factors such as debt, hostile relationships and bullying.
Adultery	A couple engaged in sexual intercourse outside of their respective marriages.	Buried alive	Traditionally, many provinces, particularly Ulrican ones, maintained double standards regarding male and female adultery, with the latter being considered a more serious violation.
Robbery	Considered to be “violent taking of any money or goods from the person of another, putting him in fear, be the value thereof above or under 1 shilling”. The gravest occupational risk for every Footpad and a charge feared greatly by most.	Gibbeting	Highway robbery occurred when a robber (often on horseback) stole from a traveller, i.e. the victim was outside town/city walls and so on a highway.
Piracy	Robbery or criminal violence on the high seas. The gravest occupational risk for every Pirate and greatly feared by most.	Gibbeting	Privateering uses similar methods but the captain acts under orders of the state authorizing the capture of merchant ships belonging to an enemy nation (Letter of Marque), making it a legitimate form of war-like activity by non-state actors.
Incest	The sexual activity between family members or close relatives.	Impaling	Although this remains a stereotype in certain rural communities, nobles are equally if not guiltier of such practices.
Sodomy	Buggery of humans or beasts.	Dismemberment	Oddly popular among certain rural folk & clergy.
Counterfeiting	The fraudulent minting of coins, including the possession moulds and the clipping of coins.	Boiling	Kislevites pour molten lead down their throats.
Heresy	<u>Opinion of doctrine at variance with the orthodox or accepted doctrine of a church or religious system.</u>	Torture > Burning	Usually reserved for members of the clergy.
Arson	The malicious and wilful burning of a house or outhouse of another man.	Burning	Often the convict was condemned inside a replica of the building they were accused of burning.
Traitorous Aetherial Acts	Any Imperial Magister who becomes a threat to the Emperor or the Empire at large, i.e. used to prosecute Magisters whose Magick remains pure but whose loyalties have become poisoned...	Pacification > Decapitation	As one of the broadest of aetherial laws, this is often brandished but rarely charged...
Chaos Worship	Anyone caught worshipping proscribed cults (Dark Gods) or consorting with mutants.	Torture > Burning	The commonest crime for most Witch Hunters.
Sedition	An intention to bring into hatred or contempt, or to excite disaffection against the person of His Imperial Majesty, his heirs or successors. Considered the ultimate risk by every Agitator and Demagogue.	Breaking wheel	This was the gravest form of “Inciting riotous behaviour”.
Sorcery	Imperial Magisters who rejected their Order & embraced the Dark Arts (Necromancy & Daemonology).	Pacification & Burning	These renegades were known as Black Magisters.
Witchcraft	Any person practicing spellcraft outside of the Colleges of Magic and their Orders, i.e. without a licence.	Burning	Warlocks often learnt sorcery by books of power.
High treason	Plotting against the monarchy or state (whereas petty treason is treason against a lawful superior).	Drawing & quartering	An everyday risk for many a Spy.

† Bounties were set according to the gravity crime (1-5 GC for misdemeanours, 10-50 GC for felonies & 50-500 GC for capital offences)

Ordeal	Description
Village lock-up	A small but dedicated building that was used for the temporary (usually overnight) detention of unruly (often drunk) people in rural parts. The lock-up was frequently built of stone with a single door and a narrow slit window. Usually the lock-up's door is sturdy (T5 3D6W) but the lock is often simple (lock rating of D4x10%).
Drunkard's Cloak	Criminal is required to wear a barrel (holes were cut into the sides for the person's hands and head, causing it to become like a heavy, awkward shirt) as he was led through the town so villagers might jeer at him and maybe pelt him with rotten vegetables/eggs/fruit, mud, excrement, stones or dead rats/cats, etc.
Stocks	A device which partially immobilises the criminal by clamping his feet with large, hinged, wooden boards. Not only is this physically painful (<i>minor improvised</i> missile = D2-1 damage) but it also offers a form of social humiliation (often setup at marketplaces or crossroads) and even entertainment to the public who often took the opportunity to pelt the criminal with rotten eggs/fruit, excrement, stones or dead rats/cats, i.e. pass WP test every few hours or gain 1 Insanity Point . Detention lasted from a few hours to a couple of days (3D10 hours).
Fined	The criminal must pay a fine or face being Pilloried and/or be Incarcerated.
Petty fine	3-8 shillings for petty trespasses. If the criminal could not or would not pay, he spent a night in the stocks.
Fair fine	12-30 shillings for gross or repeated trespasses and petty misdemeanours (e.g. loitering, night-stalker, affray) or half a dozen lashes (see <i>Flogging</i>).
Stiff fine	2-5 GC for gross misdemeanour (e.g. petty larceny, battery, blasphemy, poaching) or a dozen lashes (see <i>Flogging</i>).
Heavy fine	8-20 GC for repeated misdemeanours or petty felonies (e.g. battery, ravishment, grand larceny) or 2 dozen lashes (see <i>Flogging</i>).
Massive fine	25-100 GC for gross felony (e.g. burglary, smuggling, murder of a slave or serf) or 3 dozen lashes (see <i>Flogging</i>).
Wergild	The criminal is condemned to compensate the owner by paying a <i>heavy fine</i> if the victim was a slave and a <i>massive fine</i> if the victim was a serf. <i>Wergild</i> is Norscan term for blood money.
Pilloried (Flogging)	A device mounted on a post that partially immobilises the criminal by clamping his hands and head with large, hinged, wooden boards. The victim's back was then flogged before allowing the public a few hours to mock, taunt & abuse the criminal. Trespasses got a half dozen lashes (each lash inflicts 0.5 W to the back), repeat offenders got a <i>fair flogging</i> or a dozen lashes, misdemeanours got a <i>stout flogging</i> of 2 dozen lashes (death possible) & felonies got a <i>severe flogging</i> or 3 dozen lashes (death likely). Don't forget +1 IP per critical!
Branked (Scold's bridle)	The offender (usually a woman) had a cage-like contraption placed on her head for several (D10) hours. A metal strip on the "brank" fitted into the mouth and was either sharpened to a point or covered with spikes so that any movement of the tongue was certain to cause severe injuries to the mouth (pass WP test every hour or suffer D2 W to head).
Cropping	The removal of a criminal's ear with a blade (+1 critical to the head). It was also a secondary punishment to have the criminals' ears nailed to the pillory (with the intention that their body movements would tear them off). In 1538, Thomas Barrie, he spent a whole day with his ears nailed to the pillory in Newbury, England before having them cut off to release him.
Penance	A ritualised repentance to atone for one's sins (e.g. pilgrimage, vow of silence, join templars, etc.), where the greater the sin, the heavier the penance (pass WP test or gain D2-2D3 IPs ?)
Branding	The marking by burning his skin with a red-hot iron which combines extreme pain (Str 3 + 2D4 W), with mental anguish (pass WP test or gain D3 IPs) and public humiliation. Usually the breast was branded but sometimes under the left armpit or even the forehead. Any visible disfigurement results in a loss of 2D10 Fellowship as well as a constant stigma... A chair was attached to a large lever which stabilised the seat so that it would remain upright with the offender strapped in. The chair was then lowered into the water and submerged any number of times; T test each round to hold breath (see <i>Suffocation</i> rules) plus WP test or gain 1 IP . Occasionally the criminal was tied up and pushed into a river where, if they were washed up alive, the offender would be exiled. Rare still, they could be sewn into a sack with live animals, e.g. cats (2 A @ Str 1), dogs (2 A @ Str 2), snakes/rats (2D6 A @ Str 1).
Ducking	
Hard Labour	Condemned to several (2D6) months of forced work, quarrying (Middenheim Mining Colony & Penitentiary), building roads (chain gangs), city walls or labouring on the docks as <i>grinders</i> (men walking inside a crane). Each month the toil and malnutrition destroys the victim's body (test Toughness or lose -1 to all characteristics) and soul (WP test or gain 1 IP).
Incarceration	Imprisoned for a term befitting the crime, i.e. often 1-10 years but sometimes life. Every couple of months, test Toughness or lose -1 to all characteristics and test WP or gain D2 IP .
Mutilation	An appendage is cut from the criminal, ranging from a finger (+1 critical), to a hand or foot (+3 critical) depending on severity and nature of the crime (pass WP test or gain 2D3 IPs). Note that amputation was such a common punishment that people who had accidentally lost body parts would carry certified notes to assure people that they were not criminals.
Castration	This often involved the total removal of all the male genitalia. This incurred great danger of death due to bleeding or infection (+4 critical to the body) and, in some states, was seen as the same as a death sentence. Removal of only the testicles had much less risk (+1 critical to the body).
Defrocking / Laicisation	The removal of a priest's right to exercise their ordained duties due to criminal convictions, disciplinary problems or doctrinal disagreements. It becomes <i>Laicisation</i> when the priest requests his removal for personal reasons, e.g. running for civil office, taking over a family business, declining health or old age, desire to marry or an unresolved dispute.
Banishment	The criminal is banished from the city/province with orders never to return, upon fear of death. This ordeal was only served to local residents, i.e. re-roll for vagrants and travellers.
Pacification	A sort of Aethyric gelding, i.e. cutting away part of the soul capable of seeing & casting magic (lose D6 Magic Points & pass WP test or gain D6 IP ?). It can be repeated if required.
Conscription	In times of war, this constituted service in the Imperial army, in a penal battalion. These were mainly comprised of convicts but also soldiers with serious disciplinary problems. Although service was limited to 3 months, few survive that long due to meagre equipment, paltry rations, ruthless objectives and reckless leadership. During times of peace, conscripts were instead required to provide labour for other activities of the state (see <i>Hard Labour</i>).
Transportation	To a penal colony either in the Southlands (Leopoldheim or Sudenberg) or Lustria (Skeggi or Port Reaver). Malnutrition guaranteed, fleas likely and tropical diseases a real possibility.
Excommunication	An institutional act of religious censure used to deprive or suspend membership in a cult & to restrict certain rights within it, e.g. the receipt of blessings and the recital of prayers.
Outlawry	The accused is declared an outlaw. The "Writ of Outlawry" made the pronouncement <i>Caput gerat lupinum</i> ("Let his be a wolf's head" or literally "May he bear a wolfish head"). Outlaws were banished and forfeited all their legal rights, i.e. anyone could freely steal their property and could even kill them. In extreme cases, a bounty (10-500 GCs) was added.
Immurement	A form of incarceration, usually for life, in which a person is, for example, locked within an enclosed space and all possible exits turned into impassable walls. This includes instances where people have been enclosed in extremely tight confinement, such as within a coffin. Few survive past 3 days and those that do are usually driven mad.

Execution	The criminal is executed in the nearest public square to the delight of the locals. A Fate Point may be used to evade death but not without adverse consequences for the condemned, e.g. becomes an outlaw, gains a sworn enemy, indebted to liberators, loss of prized possessions and/or wealth, etc.	
Penalty	Description	
Decapitation	The criminal's head is chopped off at the neck. This was the quickest form of execution (victim often died in seconds, rather than minutes, hours or even days) and so it was seen as the most honourable. Thus it was reserved for the nobility and gentry. Nobles were beheaded with a zweihander (2-h sword) and gentry with a bardiche (2-h axe). Nonetheless the condemned often paid the headsman a gold crown to ensure his blade was sharp and his strike true. For in certain cases, it took the headsman 10 blows to sever the victim's neck...	
Hanging	The criminal was hanged by the neck "till he be dead", then cut down and buried (contrary to <i>Gibbeting</i> where the corpse would rot for weeks for all to see).	
Gibbeting	<p>The criminal was hung alive in a metal cage, roped by the neck and left to die of thirst (usually takes 3 days):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worse ordeal by using a chain instead of a rope (chain does not tighten) • Extra punishment by burning a small pile of wood under the victim • Corpse left dangling for weeks till it rotted and as a warning to others • As the body was not buried, the criminal's soul was considered restless and so gibbets were often said to be haunted by ghosts of the condemned 	
Immurement	A form of incarceration, usually for life, in which a person is, for example, locked within an enclosed space and all possible exits turned into impassable walls. This includes instances where people have been enclosed in extremely tight confinement, such as within a coffin. The prisoner is simply left to die from starvation (46-73 days) or dehydration (40+6D6 hours).	
Impaling	This was performed with either a red-hot poker or a large stake being thrust through the rectum, sometimes coming out the criminal's mouth. Death would take several minutes, even hours. It was customary to leave them on public display. Equally the criminal could be lowered onto the Judas Cradle which was a tall thin stool topped with a large pyramidal spike.	
Burning	The condemned is bound to a large wooden stake atop a huge wood pile. The agonising pain lasted minute or two, before the victim was asphyxiated by the smoke.	
Boiling	The condemned was placed in a large cauldron and literally boiled alive in either water or oil. The pain was excruciating and could last several (1+D4) minutes.	
Buried alive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The two adulterers would be tied together • Hole in the earth is layered with thorny bushes • After the hole is closed, a stake would be driven in the earth and subsequently through the two adulterers (the victims usually died of asphyxiation within a few minutes) 	
Dismemberment	The condemned had his four limbs tied to four horses and then the horses were made to run in four different directions, resulting in the person being pulled apart.	
Breaking wheel	A torture device used for public execution by breaking the condemned's bones and then bludgeoning him to death. Rather than dying in minutes, the condemned agonised for hours or even days. Thus this form execution was reserved for the most heinous of crimes and its spectacular nature ensured that it was among the most popular with crowds.	
Drawing & quartering	<p>Hanged till half dead, dragged face downward through the streets by a horse's tail, drawn (disembowelled) & quartered (cut into 4 pieces) then buried in different parts of town:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Burning with red hot pliers 2) Peeling off the skin in strips 3) Painting hot tar on the soles of the feet 4) Quartering (or sometimes pulling out the guts) 5) Hanging of the four pieces at the gallows... 	

Sources

WFRP City (Middenheim), page 22-24 (*The Long Arm of the Law*)

Sigmar's Heirs, Chapter 6 (*Law, Justice & Criminals*)

WFRP Companion, Chapter 6 (*Advanced Trial Rules*)

Realms of Sorcery, pages 69-70 (*The Penalty of the Law*)

Marienburg Sold Down the River

<http://www.tomecek.com/jay/CrimeandPunishment.html>

http://home.arcor.de/mustangace/sca_class_punishment.htm

<http://www.livescience.com/927-medieval-justice-medieval.html>

http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/medieval_law_and_order.htm

<http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/punishment.htm>

<http://www.englandsmedievalfestival.com/medieval/Visitors-info/history/crimes->

<http://www.buzzle.com/articles/crime-and-punishment-in-the-middle-ages.html>

<https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/static/Crimes.jsp>

[BBC News: A ghoulish tour of medieval punishments](#)

* Trial by Combat/Judicial Duel/Wager of Battle

- Basis: a legal procedure for settling accusations in the absence of witnesses or a confession
- Eligible crimes: Insult, Battery, Larceny, Abduction, Ravishment, Manslaughter and Fraud (Forgery)
- Conditions: the election of arms (gauntlets < cudgel < sword < mace < rapier < flail < zweihander) and armour (leathers < shield < buckler < net < main-gauche) was dictated by the nature and severity of the crime
- Exceptions: a Wager of Battle cannot be invoked:
 - If the defendant was taken in the *mainour* (in the act of committing his crime)
 - If the defendant attempted to escape from prison
 - If the evidence against the defendant is so strong that there could be no effective denial of guilt
 - If the plaintiff is a woman, above 60 years of age, a minor or if he is lame/blind (in such cases the plaintiff can decline the challenge and the case will be determined by a jury)
 - Priests, nobles and citizens of Nuln can also decline the battle if challenged
- Process: the two parties in dispute fight in single combat; the winner of the fight is proclaimed to be right:
 - A gentry, clergy or noble defendant is allowed to hire a Judicial Champion to fight on his behalf
 - The duel takes place in a judicial list (60-feet square), before noon and concluded before sunset
 - Both contestants take oaths against Witchcraft & Sorcery with possessions searched for enchantments
 - A herald reads the accusation out loud and the defendant is granted a last chance to confess. If the latter did not do so, the duel begins
 - If the defendant is defeated but still alive, either by crying the word "Craven" (I am vanquished), being incapacitated or knocked unconscious, he is then hanged on the spot
 - If the defendant defeats the plaintiff or fends him off from sunrise to sunset, he can go free
 - If the plaintiff cries "Craven", he is liable for damages to his victor & punished with **Outlawry**
 - If the defendant fails to appear after being summoned three times, the plaintiff can execute two cuts and two stabs against the wind and his matter is treated as if he had won the fight

The Bill: The Constabulary of the Old World

Every settlement in the Old World from the smallest village to the largest town maintains some form of law enforcement. For not only are watchmen responsible for maintaining law and order but they are also empowered to make arrests. In times of need, they even double as fire fighters. Here are a few points of interest:

- Each watch lasts 12 hours (from dawn to dusk and vice-versa)
- Each watchman is usually acquitted with a hand weapon, a sidearm and some form of armour (see below)
- In town and cities, the watch is grouped into patrols of about 6 men, i.e. patrol size = 1D4+3 and 1D4+5 at night
- Patrols are led by a Constable (Watch Serjeant) who is more experienced and better equipped (see below)

Lawman	Armour	Weapon	Sidearm	At night
Watchman	Jerkin	Club	Dagger	Lantern on a pole
Constable	Hauberk	Arming sword	Dagger	Lantern & Bell

Historically, a well-run medieval city maintained 1 law officer (guardsman, watchman, etc.) for every 150 citizens. Slack cities will have half this number. A few rare cities will have more. To put this in perspective here is a comparative table:

Settlement	Population	Hides ¹	Tithing ²	Hundreds	Shire	Watchman	Constable	Reeve/Sheriff
Village	100	27	3	0	0	1	0	0
Town	1 000	269	27	3	0	7	2	0
City	10 000	2 688	269	27	3	67	22	3
Capital	100 000	26 882	2 688	269	27	667	222	32

For example, [Altdorf's population is apparently 105,000 citizens](#):

- So, if we apply the rule described above, this suggests that Altdorf boasts about 700 watchmen
- Given that the city has 21 bezirk (districts) and 3 huge gates, this would suggest 24 watch stations
- If there are 700 watchmen distributed among 24 watch stations, this suggests about 29 per watch station
- Given that each watch lasts 12 hours, this suggest about 15 watchmen on duty per watch
- This implies 1 patrol would guard the watch station, while 2 patrols are out "on the beat" in that bezirk

Finally, given that most watchmen are only paid 8/- per day and constables only 10/- for an occupation which leaves them open to constant abuse, daily threats, occasional injury and possible maiming or death, it is hardly surprising that many watchmen are "on the take", i.e. they occasionally supplement their income by accepting bribes from concerned citizens... And when such leniency slides into excess, locals often start to refer to their greedy watchmen as "pigs".

Here are some of the most common requests:

Bribe ³	Indulgence
2-12 shillings	Overlook a trespass (summary offence)
1-5 GCs	Reveal information on a victim or prisoner
6-24 GCs	Overlook a misdemeanour / Improve a prisoner's conditions for a week
25-40 GCs	Grant access to prisoner / Improve a prisoner's conditions for a fortnight
50-90 GCs	Abet the escape of a prisoner convicted of a misdemeanour
100+ GCs	Abet the escape of a felon (criminal convicted of a felony)



¹ A hide is an area containing enough farmable land to support 1 cavalier. This is usually interpreted to be a typical family. [The average size of a medieval family is commonly estimated to be 3,72.](#)

² A sort of neighbourhood watch, which is governed by a system of collective responsibility called *frankpledge*.

³ Size is based on [the bribery guidelines outlined in page 67 of the WFRP1 rulebook](#).

The Courts of the Old World

Once a suspect has been arrested he will be incarcerated until judged by the relevant court. The only exceptions to this rule are summary offences which are proceeded against summarily by a local judge.

Court name	Court type	Jurisdiction	Remarks
Manorial (Local) Court	Civil (Commoners)	Misdemeanours & Felonies (petty crimes)	Held at various intervals during the year and all villagers had to attend or pay a fine. All men were placed in groups of ten called a tithing. Each tithing had to ensure that no member of their group broke the law. If a member of a tithing broke a law, then the other members had to make sure that he went to court. The Lord's steward was in charge of the court. A jury of twelve men was chosen by the villagers. The jury had to collect evidence and decide whether the accused was guilty or not guilty and, if found guilty, what the punishment should. Presided by a high-ranking local priest (Old World equivalent of a bishop) and the sheriff (the Reeve of that Shire), exercising both ecclesiastical and civil jurisdiction. All Capital Offences are referred to the County Court.
County (Provincial) Court	Civil (Commoners)	Misdemeanours, Felonies & Capital Offences	The majority of legal cases are presided over by a tribunal of three magistrates, though there are cases of misdemeanour where one magistrate is often enough to render judgement. In circumstances where the proper jurisdiction is in question in other parts of the province, the court case will be referred to the County Court. Imperial justice is said to be final and only in extreme situations will an appeal of a ruling from this courthouse be accepted by the Imperial Courts. As with the Imperial Courts, many a criminal found guilty will end their days in either one of the Empire's prisons or at the business end of a gallows.
Kaiserlicher Gerichshof (Imperial Courts of Justice)	Civil (Nobility)	Misdemeanours, Felonies & Capital Offences	The court here is usually the site for cases involving the Nobility where the accused is judged by a jury of their noble peers. Should a noble be convicted of a capital offence they may appeal for <i>Trial by Combat</i> . In such cases the noble may attempt to defend their honour by force of arms. Due to increasing use of Judicial Champions, this right is increasingly refused in favour of Decapitation which is considered to be the only honourable form of execution. On rare occasions (especially fair ladies) this might be commuted to banishment. Trials that concern commoners and their petty grievances against a noble are first tried at the County Court (see above) where many are dismissed for lack of "proper" evidence.
Court Martial (Military tribunal)	Military	Negligence, Insubordination, Desertion & Mutiny	Watchmen are judged by the Sheriff in his capacity as Captain of the Watch. Soldiers are equally judged by their Captains. Likewise, sailors are judged by their Sea Captains. All officers are judged by their Commander or Admiral and are entitled to the right of <i>Trial by Combat</i> . Trials are either held in the barracks or admiralty of the accused or aboard ship when distances do not allow this. In all cases, even if acquitted, the stain of dishonour is likely to ruin their military career.
College of Magic	Aetherial	Gross Magical Misconduct, Traitorous Aetherial Acts & Defaming the Good Orders of the Colleges of Magic	While Witch Hunters often try to investigate and arrest Magisters for infringing the Articles of Magic, it is the sole responsibility of the Colleges of Magic. However, the exact make-up and process of the judgement is open to wild speculation, particularly among apprentices and young Magisters for it is shrouded in secrecy and legend. Indeed, since their establishment 2 centuries ago, the Colleges have condemned only 6 Magisters to Pacification. Finally, all Magisters are considered liable for the behaviour of their apprentices, past and present. So if a Magister strays from the path, their old mentor (if alive) will also be examined and punished with anything from exile to execution for his former protégé's crimes, unless an explanation can be given.
Star Chamber	Ecclesiastic	Blasphemy, Heresy & Witchcraft	The accused are tried by a jury of catechists, the majority of which are Sigmarites. So while the Star Chamber is technically headed by the Supreme Law Lord (the Emperor's Counsel on Legal Affairs and traditionally a Verenan), justice in these courts is more influenced by Sigmarite dogma than Verenan enlightenment.

Saved by books and clergy

First-time offenders of felonies who could read (*Read/Write*) could petition for the "benefits of clergy" whereby they could receive the lesser punishment of branding, instead of execution. However this disposition was reserved exclusively to men, i.e. women who could read did not hope for similar clemency.

Thieves that are saved by their books and clergy for the first offence, if they have stolen nothing else but oxen, sheep, money, or such like, which be no open robberies, as by the highway side, or assailing of any man's house in the night, without putting him in fear of his life, or breaking up his walls or doors, are burned in the left hand, upon the brawn of the thumb, with a hot iron, so that, if they be apprehended again, that mark betrayeth them to have been arraigned of felony before, whereby they are sure at that time to have no mercy.