

Answer Key--Trial by Ordeal

Read the article “Trial by ordeal: When fire and water determined guilt”
<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-45799443> and “How did Medieval justice work?”
<https://www.abdn.ac.uk/sll/disciplines/english/lion/justice.shtml>

Use the information to complete the chart below:

Type of trial	How it worked	Role attributed to God	Role of the community
Trial by Fire	Accused had to carry a red-hot bar of iron and walk 3m. If the wound healed within three days, they were innocent. But if it became infected, they were guilty.	Believed that God could heal so if the wound healed quickly, it showed God found them innocent.	Decided how well the wound had healed. Involved judgement which could be influenced by knowledge of the individual involved and awareness of the circumstances of the case.
Trial by Water	Accused was thrown into water on a rope with a knot. If they sank to the depth of knot, they were innocent and would be pulled out before they drowned. If they floated, they were guilty.	Believed that if they sank this meant that the water accepted them (like baptism) which showed God found them innocent.	Had to decide how deep a person sank which could be open to interpretation if the person was thrashing and the rope was moving around. (Their opinion of the person and the case would affect judgement.)
Trial by Combat	Accused had to fight their accuser. Either side could pay a champion to fight in their place.	Believed God would give strength to the person/side who was right.	

Why did the Church stop supporting trials by ordeal in 1215?



The Pope decreed that it was not right to ask God to intervene in a trial because it was like asking for a miracle. Because priests were no longer allowed to oversee the ordeal, bless the water and iron, and ensure the validity of the result, this made ordeals impossible.

What role did King Henry III play in replacing trial by ordeal with trial by jury in England?

Because England had to find another method of proof of guilt or innocence, he issued an edict in 1219 that encouraged trial by judge and jury. The jurors were twelve worthy, local citizens who used common sense and knowledge of people and events involved to determine guilt or innocence.