



THE CRIMINAL COURTS

Poteshkina Polina

Danilova Oxana

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MAGISTRATES COURTS

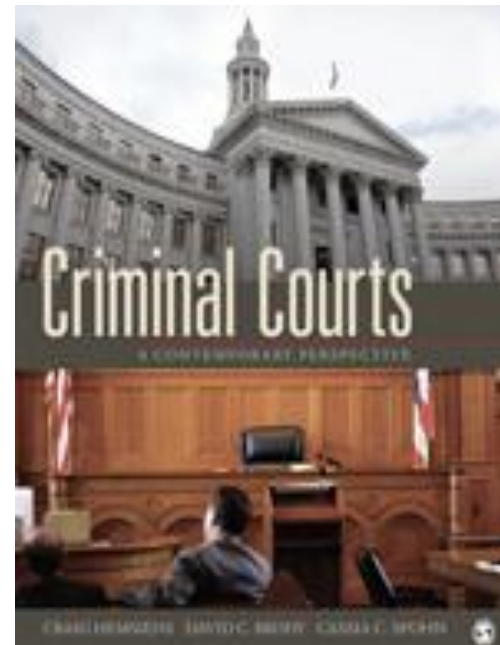
- Magistrates courts fulfil a vital role within the criminal justice system. They deal with about two million cases a year which includes apporoximately 97 % of all criminal cases and some civil cases.



- Magistrates' courts deal with criminal and some civil cases, and cases are dealt with either by justices of the peace, who are unqualified and who are paid only expenses, by District Judges (Magistrates' Courts) who receive some payment. Magistrates' courts usually only deal with cases which arise in their own area. In Northern Ireland, in exceptional cases, they can deal with offences that occur in a number of areas, for example, where several burglaries have been committed across a number of areas.

CRIMINAL CASES IN THE MAGISTRATES' COURT

- All criminal cases start in the magistrates' court.
- Some cases begin in the magistrates' court and then automatically go to the Crown Court for trial by jury.



- Magistrates also deal with offences where the defendant can choose trial by jury but decides to have their case heard in the magistrates' court. If the defendant chooses trial by jury, the case will be passed on to the Crown Court.



CROWN COURT

- In England and Wales, and Northern Ireland, processes serious (indictable) criminal offences. Also, hears appeals from Magistrates' Courts (see box above).



CROWN COURT

- In the Crown Court, the case is tried before a Recorder (part time judge), Circuit Judge or a High Court judge, and a jury. The seniority of the judge depends on the seriousness and complexity of the case. The jury is involved only if the defendant enters a plea of "not guilty".



THE CROWN COURT DEALS WITH THE FOLLOWING TYPES OF CASES:-

- ◉ more serious criminal offences which will be tried by judge and jury
- ◉ appeals from the magistrates court - which are dealt with by a judge and at least two magistrates
- ◉ convictions in the magistrates' court that are referred to the Crown Court for sentencing.
- ◉ Imprisonment and fines in the Crown Court are more severe than in the magistrates' court.

THE COURT OF APPEAL

- The Court of Appeal deals with civil and criminal appeals in England and Wales
- Criminal appeals include appeals against convictions in the Crown Court, and points of law referred by the Attorney General following acquittal in the Crown Court or where the sentence imposed was unduly lenient.



THE CENTRAL CRIMINAL COURT THE SPECIAL CRIMINAL COURT

- ◉ deals with more serious crimes like rape and murder, and sits with judge and jury.
- ◉ deals with terrorism and offences against the State.



TO SUM UP:

- ◉ A truly unique feature within Magistrates Courts is administration of justice by non-professional, unpaid and part-time lay Magistrates .