

CRISIS

Henry VIII

Former King of England

Overview

Henry VII was a very controversial monarch who had an everlasting impact on England. To some, he was considered tyrannical and erratic, but to others, he was a liberator who allowed the common to exceed the higher classes. He is most known for changing the course of English history and the future of the Christian religion, all through his reformation of the English Church.

Political Tensions

Henry VIII was a king who did not operate on his lonesome, rather ruling over the people he promoted to uphold his country. Henry is no military tactician, but joined his Spanish father-in-law, Ferdinand II of Aragon, in the 1512 war against France, under possible threat to the Pope, to whom Henry had much respect.¹ The French had been at constant war with Italy ever since Henry VII's reign, who allied with Spain and the Holy Roman Empire against the repeated French invasions of Milan.² The French had allied themselves with the Scots, who diverted English forces from the war by attacking from the North, but ultimately lost in the Battle of Flodden.³ Thus, Henry found hope in the man who led this victory against the Scots, the soon-to-become 3rd Duke of Norfolk, Thomas Howard, who Henry appointed to his council.⁴

Against the French, Thomas Wolsey organized Henry's first campaign, which made him suitable for Henry to appoint him as one of his outstanding ministers. By 1515, he was archbishop of York, lord chancellor of England, and a cardinal of the church, which was far from his roots as a lowly butcher's son. Henry had befriended the priest, admiring his rise in the ranks, as opposed to the inherited status that many others on the King's council had boasted about.⁵

¹ Elton and Morrill. "Henry VIII | Biography, Wives, Religion, Death, & Facts," Britannica, Encyclopaedia Britannica, Oct 13, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Henry-VIII-king-of-England>.

² Skjelver, Danielle M. 2023. "Italian Wars | Summary, History, & Facts." Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Italian-Wars>.

³ Adams, Simon. "Battle of Flodden | Summary" Britannica, Encyclopaedia Britannica, Nov 20, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Battle-of-Flodden>.

⁴ "Thomas Howard, 3rd duke of Norfolk" Britannica, Encyclopaedia Britannica, Aug 21, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Thomas-Howard-3rd-duke-of-Norfolk>.

⁵ "Henry VIII | Biography, Wives, Religion, Death, & Facts," (Britannica)

In 1519, Charles V of Spain became emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, after the death of his grandfather, Emperor Maximilian I. As the leader of the now-united Habsburg nations, Charles had control over much of the European dynasties.⁶ This became an issue when he would go to war with France once again, in 1521.⁷ Wolsey had initially attempted to broker peace between Francis I (of France), Charles V, and Henry VIII but they would inevitably fail once the war broke out. Wolsey committed troops against France in 1523, raising taxes to fund this campaign. In 1528, Wolsey would side against Charles which would only last for a brief period as Charles and Francis would make peace in 1529. Thus, Wolsey has left England in an isolated position between itself and most of Europe, as he has shown a lack of loyalty to both Francis and Charles.⁸

A Need for an Heir

Henry VIII is obsessed with the idea of fathering a male heir. He, the second and only surviving son of his father, knows the importance of the security provided by having a child who will one day inherit the crown. Tudor blood has been mostly new to this level of royalty, with Henry VII being the first Tudor on the throne, even being under threat by House of York imposters like Perkin Warbeck. To Henry VIII, conceiving a boy child would (mostly) guarantee that his bloodline would continue to keep its place on the throne.⁹

When Henry VIII was crowned in 1509, he married Catherine of Aragon, daughter of Spain's Ferdinand II of Aragon and Isabella I of Castile. The two were initially engaged after Prince Arthur, Henry's brother, had passed but they were only to be wed after Henry assumed the throne due to Spanish-English tensions. In the following years of their marriage, Catherine birthed little that would satisfy Henry's desire for an heir. From 1510 to 1518, she had little success in birthing a child, aside from her daughter Mary.¹⁰

Following this line of failed attempts to birth an heir, Henry has become prone to more than the occasional affair. He eventually found favour with Anne Boleyn, the sister of one of his mistresses, who would promise an heir but refused to take action to conceive unless they were to be married. The issue for Henry, though, is that he would have to gain the approval of the Pope to divorce his current wife, Cathrine of Aragon, before remarrying.

⁶ de Ferdinandy, Michael, and Marcelle Vioux. 2023. "Charles V | Accomplishments, Reign, Abdication, & Facts." Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Charles-V-Holy-Roman-emperor>.

⁷ "Henry VIII | Biography, Wives, Religion, Death, & Facts," (Britannica)

⁸ "Thomas, Cardinal Wolsey" Britannica, Encyclopaedia Britannica, Oct 31, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Thomas-Cardinal-Wolsey>.

⁹ *Inside the Court of Henry VIII*, directed by Peter Chinn (2015; PBS Distribution, 2015), DVD.

¹⁰ "Catherine of Aragon" Britannica, Encyclopaedia Britannica, Sep 05, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Catherine-of-Aragon>.

Henry sent out Wolsey to convince the current Pope, Clement VII. Pope Clement VII is hesitant to approve the divorce and remarriage of Henry, due to the fears of Charles V, who is the nephew of Catherine and has been betrayed by Charles V in the past during the Italian Wars. Furthermore, Clement desires to not void the church's former decree that allowed Henry to marry his brother's widow in the first place.¹¹

Infighting

The lack of Tudors as royalty within modern history has led to some disdain towards the King from council members who had other royal blood and nobility. In 1521, Edward Stafford, 3rd Duke of Buckingham, was arrested and executed under the charge of treason, though many still suspect Edward was only executed because he descended from Edward III, which imposed risk on Henry's throne.¹²

Henry's Privy Council was full of the King's confidants who had worked their way up to nobility rather than born into it. He would often promote people from lower positions who had developed an understanding with the King through their loyalty and servitude. This has created a divide in the council. The nobles, often led by Thomas Howard, the 3rd Duke of Norfolk, tended to be at odds with men like Thomas Wolsey, who were only in high such places because of their personal relationships with the King.¹³

Religious Disputes

In the early 16th century, the Catholic Church was under much scrutiny within Europe. Though Catholicism was the main religion in the area, many new resentments were starting to grow as Martin Luther began to speak out against the main Catholic Church. He spoke of much corruption and abandonment of true Christian values, specifically calling out the indulgence system, in which the rich would be able to pay to avoid the punishments required for their sins to be absolved. Luther attempted to fix these issues by breaking away from the Church and starting his Christian movement, which would grow to become Protestantism and denounced the authority of the Pope and his Catholic Church. The movement swept through Europe and eventually made its way into England.¹⁴

¹¹ "Henry VIII | Biography, Wives, Religion, Death, & Facts," (Britannica)

¹² "Edward Stafford, 3rd duke of Buckingham" Britannica, Encyclopaedia Britannica, Sep 26, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Edward-Stafford-3rd-Duke-of-Buckingham>.

¹³ *Inside the Court of Henry VIII*, (DVD).

¹⁴ "Reofrmation" Britannica, Encyclopaedia Britannica, Nov 15, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Reformation>.

Henry was initially against the opposition to Christianity in England. He thought that to deny the Catholic way would be to attack the God that gave him and his family a place on the throne.¹⁵ Henry had also been found to be in favour of Catholicism in the past as he had sided against the French, who have often found themselves fighting those in favour of the Catholic ways in many circumstances. Henry had even gone so far as to write a response to Luther's arguments in a *Defence of the Seven Sacraments* with some degree of aid from Sir Thomas More, an English Catholic.

However, this changed in 1527. Henry has been convinced that his initial marriage was against the way of God and the Bible, only proven by Catherine's inability to produce a suitable heir. Henry has met Anne Boleyn, who not only provides a reason for divorce through her need to be wed by Henry but is also an advocate for the reformation of the English Church away from Catholicism.¹⁶ Better yet, the Protestant ways would allow Henry to approve his own divorce. Henry, finding all the solutions to his problems with his wife, his need to wed his desired lover, and complications with the Church, within the teachings of Protestant ideals, has started to consider the idea of reformation.

Yet, change requires many challenges to be overcome before being implemented. Thomas Cromwell, principal advisor of Henry who was also in favour of the reformist movement, will lead this reformation. He proposes ideas of using Parliament to apply pressure on the Pope, through a democratic vote and dissolving the Catholic monasteries to possibly allow the lower classes to purchase land and elevate their status.¹⁷

Many people are against the possibility of reform. Sir Thomas More, chancellor of England, has stated his views against Protestantism in many published works, even so far as to disagree with the King's claim that his marriage is void.¹⁸ Thomas Howard is also against the shift from Catholicism, often butting heads with Thomas Cromwell, though he approves of Henry's marriage to Anne Boleyn.¹⁹ Most importantly, the people of England are protesting this change, many of whom are being labelled as traitors and are called for execution on account of treason. The King continues to attempt to quiet this down through the efforts of his council, but the people's opposition only grows.

¹⁵ *Inside the Court of Henry VIII*, (DVD).

¹⁶ "Henry VIII | Biography, Wives, Religion, Death, & Facts," (Britannica)

¹⁷ Cartwright, Mark "Thomas Cromwell" World History, World History Encyclopedia, May 22, 2020, https://www.worldhistory.org/Thomas_Cromwell/.

¹⁸ Marc'hadour, Germain P. "Thomas More" Britannica, Encyclopaedia Britannica, Oct 19, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Thomas-More-English-humanist-and-statesman>.

¹⁹ "Thomas Howard, 3rd duke of Norfolk" (Britannica).

Call to Action

It is late 1529 and His Majesty King Henry VIII is summoning his council to handle his annulment and its connection to the Catholic Church. As members and influential figures connected to the King's Privy Council, you will deliberate on whether His Majesty should reform the Church of England into a new Anglican Church, one that will take up many of the practices of the ever so popular but controversial Protestant movement. You will discuss and deal with the many changes, challenges, and conflicts that will arise from the consequences of your choices, such as the English public's reaction or the logistics of bringing the country away from Catholicism. You will also tend to alliances and national relations outside of England, such as with the Holy Roman Empire and France, and gauge how the shift in the religious core of our kingdom will affect these tensions. Most importantly, you will manage this while working under the eyes of His Majesty King Henry VIII who watches over you, ready to quiet any of the voices he disagrees with and quell any actions that prove to be disloyal.

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