

## HENRY VIII

### 1. HENRY before his ACCESSION

#### A Childhood

Henry was born in June 1491, the second son and third child of Henry VII and Elizabeth of York.

He was loaded with prestigious but nominal offices, while still a baby, such as Earl Marshall of England and lieutenant of Ireland.

He became a knight of the Bath at the age of three, was proclaimed Duke of York the next day, and received the Garter on 17<sup>th</sup> May 1495..

**He was not, however, heir to the throne, his brother Arthur having been born in 1486. He became heir on Arthur's death in 1502, when he was eleven.**

Not very much is known about his early life beyond the name of his nurse, Anne Luke, to whom he later gave a pension, but he was given a very thorough education in the humanist mode.

His first recorded tutor was the poet John Skelton, but he was later taught by others who remain shadowy or unknown.

This academic training was new among members of the English royal family, although it had been normal in Italy for some time.

Henry emerged as a good Latinist, with a fair knowledge of theology and history.

He also spoke fluent French and was an accomplished musician, both of which things he must have owed to his early training.

He was close to his mother, and was much affected by her death in 1502, when he was eleven.

His grandmother, Margaret Beaufort, is reputed to have had great influence over his education.

The relevant appointments would have been made by the king, but he listened to his mother.

#### B Youth

Although he became Prince of Wales and Duke of Cornwall after Arthur's death, in 1502, the king kept him out of the political arena.

All his various offices were discharged by deputies or agents.

He inherited his brother's wife, because Henry VII was anxious to maintain his links with Spain. A special dispensation was obtained to enable them to marry, but then the king changed his mind.

It is difficult to discover who the prince's officers and servants were at this time, let alone his friends, so when he came to the throne he had no established 'affinity', or other political baggage.

In spite of being protected 'like a young girl' according to the Spanish ambassador, Henry was very well taught in many exercises like jousting and the handling of weapons.

He did not, however, participate in public tournaments until after his accession.

He was coached in [real] tennis by a Spanish professional, and became an accomplished player.

Having caused him to be betrothed to Catharine when he was eleven, the king also caused him to repudiate the commitment on the eve of his fourteenth birthday, because the politics of Henry's relationship with Ferdinand had changed.

As far as is known, neither of these actions had anything to do with Henry's wishes. Other negotiations for his marriage remained tentative and abortive.

**Henry was still a few weeks short of his eighteenth birthday when his father died.**

**Technically there should have been a brief minority, but this was ignored.**

## 2. HENRY before WOLSEY

**Everyone agreed that Henry was a magnificent looking young man.**

He stood head and shoulders taller than any of his courtiers.

He was also excellently educated and thoroughly trained in the arts and attitudes of chivalry. Humanist scholars expected patronage, and flattered him, especially Erasmus, who had exchanged letters with him while he was still a child and claimed to be much impressed.

**Politically he was an unknown quantity, but when he brushed aside all objections and insisted upon marrying Catharine, they got a taste of what was to come.**

**For the first two years his father's old councillors, particularly William Warham and Richard Fox, continued to govern.**

**This was partly common sense on Henry's part because he did not have his own men to promote.**

**It was also partly because he was far too interested in amusing himself to be bothered about the routine work of government**

**It was probably their enemies in the Council who insisted on destroying Sir Richard Empson and Edmund Dudley, who had become too closely identified with Henry VII's notorious 'rapacity'.**

However, the new king raised no objections when the advantages were pointed out to him

It would be good to distance himself from his father's most unpopular methods

**By 1511, Henry had decided that he wanted to renew the war with France.**

1. **The first reason** for this was the instinctive aggression of a young man enjoying power.
2. **The second** was a desire to emulate his hero, Henry V, in the most obvious and direct way.
3. **The third** was to support his father-in-law, Ferdinand of Aragon, who had been a rival of France for decades, thus pleasing his new bride.
4. **The fourth reason** (of which Henry may or may not have been aware) was the need to give his restless nobles a congenial occupation. They had chafed under the pacific and restrictive policies of his father for years, and needed room to flex their muscles.
5. Thanks to his father's tough fiscal policies, he had enough in the treasury, at least to make a start.

**Because he was the king, and because he had noble support, he was able to drag his council (which was clergy dominated), into the war. But their reluctance persuaded him that he would have to find his own servants.**

### 3. HENRY and his SERVANTS

Pre-Wolsey [see above]

#### Thomas Wolsey

1. **Wolsey, who had been born about 1472, was nearly 40 when Henry came to the throne. He was therefore a 'father figure' to the young king.**
2. He was a priest, and one of Henry VII's household chaplains, so Henry could have known him reasonably well.
3. He was appointed king's almoner, a confidential position, but not until the autumn of 1509, suggesting that he was not close to the king from the beginning.
4. He was ambitious, a good communicator, and had an immense appetite for hard work - all qualities which Henry recognised and appreciated.
5. Wolsey was given extensive logistical responsibilities during the French war, beginning in 1512. These tasks were well suited to bring out his best qualities.

**Wolsey succeeded beyond all expectation**, and Henry was hugely impressed, not least by the speed with which Wolsey mastered the details of his various briefs.

He had originally **been a political protégé of Bishop Fox**, but by the end of 1513 had outstripped both Fox and Warham in influence with the King.

**Being a priest, he could be rewarded with ecclesiastical preferments at no cost to the king.**

**In 1513 he was promoted to the see of the newly captured town of Tournai, and early in 1514 he became bishop of Lincoln.**

In September the same year he **was translated to the archbishopric of York on the death of Cardinal Bainbridge.**

**The king pressed Leo X to make him a Cardinal in succession to Bainbridge, which he did in 1515.**

**In December 1515, Wolsey became Lord Chancellor in succession to William Warham.**

**In 1518 he became legate *a latere* , that is a resident papal ambassador, for life.**

**Thereafter his influence over the king remained paramount until 1529**, but it was never exclusive or unchallenged. **Henry continued to have his own friends**, notably Charles Brandon whom he created Duke of Suffolk, **and their relations with Wolsey were problematic.**

**Henry set the agenda, and Wolsey devised the ways and means.**

Wolsey had his own agenda, but the king's always took precedence.

Wolsey understood that.

**After the peace with France in 1514, he tried to avoid war, but when Henry insisted in 1522, he accepted the decision.**

It used to be thought that he followed the papal line, but that was not really true.

Contemporaries believed that he controlled the king's patronage, and that added to his power, but it was never entirely true.

He was a good advocate, but Henry promoted who he pleased.

**Wolsey became immensely unpopular, but as long as he retained the king's confidence, he was untouchable.**

**His most spectacular achievements were in foreign policy, particularly the Treaty of London of 1518.**

**His most productive work was in the equity court of Star Chamber, over which he presided as Chancellor.**

**By encouraging litigants to seek redress there, he increased the king's (and his own) reputation for good justice, and kept some of his fellow-councillors busy as judges.**

**The first crack in his position came in 1525, when he failed to get an adequate subsidy out of parliament, and then took the blame for the failure of the 'Amicable Grant' in 1525 with which the king attempted to replace it.**

That decision had been Henry's, but Wolsey had assured him it would work, and took the whole blame when it did not.

Henry never entirely trusted him thereafter.

**His second and fatal failure was over the king's divorce.**

**As a prince of the church and the king's servant, he should have been uniquely placed to bridge the gap between them.**

**However, confronted with the Imperial influence in Rome, he failed.**

**When this became clear in 1529, his many enemies persuaded Henry to abandon him.**