

# UNIT 2 *The reign of Henry VIII, 1509–47*

## KEY QUESTIONS

- (1) How far did Henry VIII continue the work of his father, 1509–14?
- (2) How successful was Wolsey's management of the government, 1515–29?
- (3) How effectively did Wolsey administer the Church, 1515–29?
- (4) Who controlled English foreign affairs, 1515–29?
- (5) Why did Wolsey stay in power so long, but fall in 1529?
- (6) How significant was the work of Thomas Cromwell in the 1530s?
- (7) How far did factions at court threaten the stability of the throne, 1529–47?
- (8) What was the impact of foreign relations on domestic affairs, 1529–47?

## 1 How far did Henry VIII continue the work of his father, 1509–14?

### 1.1 The character of the king

Henry VIII's childhood and upbringing were quite different from his father's. Educated in a climate of Renaissance culture, he developed an interest in music, dance, painting, sport and theology, which stayed with him for the rest of his life. Whereas Henry VII had devoted his reign to accumulating money, Henry VIII enjoyed spending it. Unlike his father, the young king also took a keen interest in women and warfare. As soon as he had attended his father's funeral the 17-year-old king married Catherine of Aragon and prepared for war against France.

### 1.2 Changes

Between 1509 and 1514 Henry continued to be advised by clergymen like Archbishop Morton and Bishop Fox and by nobles such as Lord Darcy and the Earls of Surrey and Shrewsbury. Henry also instigated several changes in policy and personnel:

- Two of Henry VII's most loyal servants, Empson and Dudley, were executed.
- The Council Learned in the Law, where Empson and Dudley had worked, was abolished, as was the **Court of General Surveyors**.
- The Court of Exchequer began to handle more royal revenue since Henry showed less interest in overseeing chamber finances.
- Hundreds of bonds and recognisances were abolished; and investigations into the non-payment of crown rents and dues were cancelled.
- The **Gentlemen of the Privy Chamber** acquired greater prominence at court.
- Measures were taken to increase the size of the navy, develop new artillery and refortify Calais Castle.
- In 1511 Henry joined the Holy League against France and prepared for war.

### 1.3 War with France and Scotland

#### Motives

Henry went to war with France and its ally Scotland for a number of reasons:

- Henry was keen to make a mark in Europe as a new king.
- He wished to emulate Henry V, who had conquered much of western France.
- Louis XII of France had stopped paying the annual pension to England.

- The council and nobles at court supported war as a way of gaining lands, titles and royal patronage.
- Henry had sufficient finances to begin military preparations.
- Pope Julius II and Ferdinand of Spain, Henry's father-in-law, encouraged him.

### Preparations

Between 1510 and 1512 Henry VII's legacy was spent, and a new way of raising money — the subsidy — was introduced. For the first time taxpayers were assessed on the value of their lands and goods rather than on where they lived. As a result, £170,000 was collected. The idea probably came from Thomas Wolsey, who had become a royal councillor in 1510. He also organised the transport of men and supplies, and escorted the king on the 1513 expedition to France.

### Events

- 1512** A fleet attacked Brest and an army invaded Aquitaine in western France but inflicted little damage and returned home.
- 1513** Henry and 30,000 troops invaded Normandy and Picardy, defeated a small French cavalry at the Battle of the Spurs and captured Tournai and Therouanne. Unwisely, King James IV of Scotland declared war. An English army, led by Surrey, won the Battle of Flodden, killing 10,000 Scots, including the king.
- 1514** Henry heard that his Spanish and German allies had made a truce with France, which left England alone and at war. With debts mounting (war costs were over £1 million), Henry ordered Wolsey to negotiate a treaty. Accordingly Henry retained Tournai, Henry's sister Mary married Louis XII, and the Scots agreed to a ceasefire.

## 1.4 Wolsey's rise to power

Wolsey was born in Ipswich in 1473, the son of a butcher. His rise to power was meteoric. Having gained a theology degree at Oxford he became a client of Richard Fox, the Lord Privy Seal, and served Henry VII as an **almoner**, before entering the new king's council in 1510. War gave him his chance. His willingness to work hard, to solve the king's financial difficulties and to organise the French expedition successfully brought rewards from Henry and the Pope. Wolsey became Bishop of Lincoln (1513), Bishop of Tournai (1513) and Archbishop of York (1514). Finally, Henry made him Lord Chancellor and the Pope made him a cardinal in 1515.

#### GLOSSARY

- almoner:** a chaplain who said prayers for the king and handed out charity to the poor.
- Court of General Surveyors:** a council founded by Henry VII to manage crown lands.
- Gentlemen of the Privy Chamber:** some 45 drinking and riding companions of Henry VIII who had access to the king's private rooms and consequently enjoyed privileged status at court.

#### EXAMINER'S TIP

This subject appears at AS for Edexcel and OCR, and at A2 for AQA (Alternative N). At AS you will need to understand the legacy of Henry VII and explain why his son introduced changes in domestic and foreign affairs. A typical question is: 'How successful a king was Henry VIII during the period 1509–14?' At A2 you may have to assess how far the changes in these years can be attributed to the new king's character.