

ACTIVITY

Read Chart 9B.

- 1 Which motives for action seem to be most obvious from this chart:
 - a) Henry wanted to end a marriage that went against God's will
 - b) Henry wanted a male heir
 - c) Henry had fallen in love with Anne Boleyn?
- 2 Can you identify a turning point after which Henry was committed to:
 - a) annulling his marriage to Catherine
 - b) marrying Anne?

The origins of the break with Rome are to be found in the 1520s. By 1527 it had become clear that Henry wanted to annul his marriage to Catherine of Aragon. The key question is: why did he want to end a marriage that had already lasted for eighteen years? There are three possible answers:

- He wanted to end a marriage that he believed to be against God's will.
- He wanted a new wife who would provide him with a legitimate male heir.
- He had fallen in love with Anne Boleyn.

The timeline of events shown in Chart 9B was constructed by Eric Ives in his biography, *Anne Boleyn*. Although it is partly speculation, it does give us some clues about Henry's motives.

Historians have disagreed about whether Henry fell in love with Anne Boleyn and *then* grew tired of Catherine, or vice versa. The two leading historians in this debate are Eric Ives and J. J. Scarisbrick (see Sources 9.1 and 9.2).

■ 9B The deteriorating relationship of Henry and Catherine

Date	Event	Explanation
1524	Henry stopped sleeping with Catherine (now aged 39).	Catherine had had several miscarriages and two stillborn babies. There was thus little chance of the birth of a male heir. Her last pregnancy had been in 1518.
1525	Henry Fitzroy was made Duke of Richmond.	Evidence of Henry promoting his illegitimate son as his future heir. This decision was made in the wake of Charles V's rejection of a proposed marriage to Henry's daughter, Mary.
1526	Henry began to woo Anne Boleyn.	Henry had no plans for marriage at this stage.
1526–27	Henry decided on an annulment.	It is possible that Henry's conscience had been pricked by French enquiries as to the legitimacy of Henry's daughter Mary. Henry was trying to arrange Mary's marriage to Francis I, but the French questioning of Henry's marriage to Catherine may well have started a train of thought in Henry's own mind.
1527 Easter	Henry pressed Anne to become his mistress.	Henry did not want to marry Anne at this stage. He did seem happy to have her as his acknowledged mistress.
May	Secret proceedings started for the annulment.	Not even Catherine knew about this development.
May	Charles V sacked Rome.	Charles' mercenary troops went on the rampage in Rome. The Pope was taken prisoner, which severely limited his ability to negotiate a settlement with Henry, because Charles was Catherine's nephew.
June	Henry told Catherine of his plans.	All of these moves suggest that Henry saw no real problems in gaining his annulment.
July	Henry and Anne agreed to marry after the annulment was granted.	
September	Henry applied to the Pope for a dispensation to marry Anne.	
December	Negotiations in Rome for the annulment.	
1528 September	Anne was sent to Hever Castle.	This was done to get her out of the way.
October	Cardinal Campeggio arrived in England.	Campeggio was appointed by the Pope to act as judge (with Wolsey) in the hearing of Henry's case. He was originally a popular choice with Henry but this popularity was, however, soon to wane.
December	Anne returned to court.	This is evidence of her influence over Henry.
1529 May	Proceedings for hearing the case for Henry's annulment started at Blackfriars.	It has to be remembered that at this stage the Pope was under the complete control of Charles V after the latter's victory at the battle of Landriano (see page 161).
June	Catherine made her single appearance before the hearing.	
July	A summer recess was called and the case was recalled to Rome by the Pope.	

ACTIVITY

What is the key difference between the interpretations of Ives and Scarisbrick in sources 9.1 and 9.2?

Learning trouble spot

Changes in religious and domestic policy were often closely linked to foreign affairs. See pages 161 and 164 for a detailed explanation of how Henry's efforts to gain an annulment were hampered by events abroad.

SOURCE 9.1 Eric Ives, *Anne Boleyn*, 1986, p. 102

The probabilities are . . . in favour of a relationship which became serious only after the decision to divorce Katherine. In the first place it is clear that Wolsey . . . was not aware how committed Henry was to Anne Boleyn until the autumn of 1527. In the second, no hint of Anne's involvement with the King has been discovered in any records before that date – an unlikely thing if the affair was already two years old . . . The normally hawk-eyed Venetians did not become aware of Anne until February 1528.

SOURCE 9.2 J. J. Scarisbrick, *Henry VIII*, 1968, p. 149

By 1525–6 what had probably hitherto been a light dalliance with an 18- or 19-year-old girl had begun to grow into something deeper and more dangerous . . . Anne refused to become his [Henry's] mistress . . . and the more she resisted, the more, apparently, did Henry prize her . . . The King, then, had tired of his wife and fallen in love with one who would give herself entirely to him only if he would give himself entirely to her.

Date	Event	Explanation
29 October	Wolsey was accused of <i>praemunire</i> , forced to surrender the Great Seal and replaced as Lord Chancellor by Thomas More.	
November	The 'Reformation Parliament' was assembled.	
30 January	Anne's brother led a mission to the Pope and Charles V in Bologna to gain support for Henry's case. This failed.	This marked the moment when Henry was pushed into a more radical solution – the rejection of papal authority.
May	Cambridge and Oxford universities found in favour of Henry.	
September	Edward Foxe and Thomas Cranmer presented Henry with their book <i>Collectanea Satis Copiosa</i> ('The Sufficiently Abundant Collections').	
31 January	The Convocation of Canterbury recognised Henry as 'Supreme Head of the Church so far as the law of Christ allows'.	This brought Henry into direct opposition to the power of the Pope.
32 May	Submission of the Clergy – the clergy accepted the King and not the Pope as their lawmaker.	This confirmed the strength of Henry's power within the Church.
December	Anne became pregnant.	Anne's reluctance to have sex with Henry had evidently been overcome! The stakes for Henry could not now be any higher.
13 January	Henry and Anne married in secret.	The ceremony was carried out by Cranmer, who was then made Archbishop of Canterbury (in February).
April	Cranmer ruled that Henry's marriage to Catherine was invalid, whereas his marriage to Anne was legal.	
July	Anne was crowned as Queen of England.	

Catherine of Aragon

Catherine remained an important figure throughout her life because she was popular across the country and was supported by powerful nobles in England and by Charles V abroad. She always saw herself as subordinate to her husband, except in the case of the annulment where she took a determined and principled stance.

Henry left Catherine in 1551 and she never saw her husband or daughter again.



Catherine of Aragon, by an unknown artist, c. 1550

Matter of conscience

It seems clear that by the end of 1527 Henry was convinced of the need to annul his marriage to Catherine of Aragon. It is highly probable, however, that his decision to end the marriage did not necessarily mean that he would actually marry Anne Boleyn. Henry had had several mistresses previously and his willingness to legitimise his bastard son, Henry Fitzroy, is evidence enough of his lack of embarrassment. So, love for Anne Boleyn is not reason enough in itself to explain why Henry felt it necessary to end the marriage to Catherine. Clearly Henry wanted a male heir, but even this cannot completely explain his rejection of Catherine of Aragon – again, Henry Fitzroy seemed to fit the bill to Henry's satisfaction.

So what made such a difference? Most recently, Virginia Murphy has confirmed the work of L. B. Smith (in *Henry VIII: The Mask of Royalty*) in asserting Henry's growing obsession with the fact that his marriage to Catherine was, and always had been, against God's law (see Source 9.3). Central to her argument is Henry's insistence that the words of the Bible in Leviticus 20:21 represented God's own judgement on his marriage to Catherine of Aragon.

In Latin translation, Leviticus says 'If a man shall take his brother's wife, it is an unclean thing . . . they shall be without children.' Clearly, Henry had married the wife of Arthur, his brother. However, they did have one child, Mary, born in 1516. This did not follow Leviticus in the Latin translation, so Henry turned to the Hebrew original, which specified sons rather than children. It was clear to Henry that a male heir to carry forward the Tudor dynasty was hugely important. Even more important, however, was the fact that this heir should be the offspring of a legitimate marriage – a marriage that did not offend God.

ACTIVITY

Read Sources 9.3–9.6.

- 1 Summarise the arguments of these historians, using about 20 words for each.
- 2 Which historian is the odd one out? Explain how their interpretations agree/disagree.

SOURCE 9.3 V. Murphy 'The literature and propaganda of Henry VIII's first divorce', in D. MacCulloch (ed.), *The Reign of Henry VIII: Politics, Policy and Piety*, 1995, p. 139

By substituting the Hebrew for the Latin, Leviticus was thus cleverly made to fit Henry's situation exactly; he had married in contravention of Leviticus and as a result had incurred the punishment threatened there, as the loss of all his sons proved. This narrow understanding of Leviticus is important for it allowed Henry to reconcile Leviticus with his own circumstances. How deeply Henry believed the views expressed in the address, especially the rewording of Leviticus, is impossible to say, although it is probable that they reflected a genuine and strongly held conviction. Certainly the connection between the king's failure to have produced a surviving son and Leviticus would become a central theme of the treatises produced in his name.

SOURCE 9.4 E. Ives, *Anne Boleyn*, 1986, p. 101

God had spoken directly to his condition; Henry had no option as a devout Christian but to obey, to contract a legal (indeed his first) marriage, and a son would be the reward. Post-Freudian scepticism may smile, but the vital historical point is that Henry believed. Armed with his certainty he consulted Wolsey and his lawyers, and on 17 May 1527 took the first and secret steps to divorce his wife.

SOURCE 9.5 L. B. Smith, *Henry VIII: The Mask of Royalty*, 1971, p. 111

If there is anything approaching a complete explanation of Henry's actions it lies in an amalgam of his compulsive need to wall out doubt by keeping conscience clear and placing blame on others and his absolute conviction that events are determined by a bargain struck between God and man . . . Ultimately the King rested his case on 'the discharge of our conscience'.

SOURCE 9.6 P. Gwyn, *The King's Cardinal: The Rise and Fall of Thomas Wolsey*, 1990, pp. 512–13

The one argument for the divorce that Henry never made in public was that he had fallen in love with Anne, for to have done so would have been tactically foolish. Yet in February 1529 Campeggio was to say that Henry's love was 'something amazing, and in fact he sees nothing and thinks nothing but Anne. He cannot stay away from her for an hour; it is really quite pitiable, and on it depends his life, and indeed the destruction or survival of this kingdom.' Surely Campeggio had got to the heart of the matter, for without the intensity of that love, or perhaps it should be called infatuation, it is difficult to see how Henry could have sustained the campaign for the five and a half years that were needed, or that he would have jeopardized so much in order to do so . . . What was at stake was not a 'scruple' but lust, and lust was not something that the Vicar of Christ should encourage, especially when the legal arguments for doing so were not very strong.

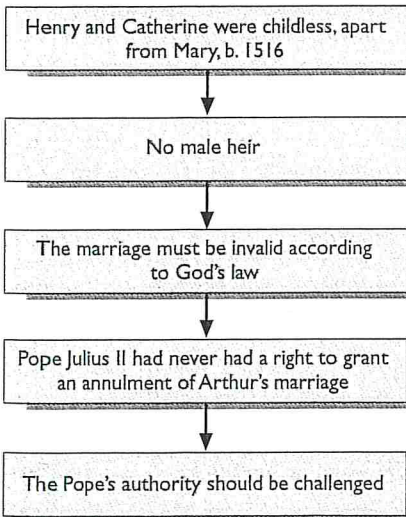
The role of Anne Boleyn

Although Henry had found that his marriage to Catherine of Aragon offended his own conscience and God's law, there is no doubt that lurking in the background lay a more earthly temptation, Anne Boleyn. Her tantalising presence at court gave Henry a greater desire to bring an end to his marriage to Catherine of Aragon. The big question, however, is whether Henry's desire for Anne Boleyn pushed him into a separation that would not otherwise have happened.

At the age of 36 and despite hating writing letters, Henry wrote Anne a series of passionate love letters. The letters are fascinating evidence, in that they give us a sense of Henry's growing infatuation with Anne Boleyn at exactly the time that he had decided on annulling his marriage to Catherine of Aragon. Three stages can be identified in Henry's correspondence, as shown in Sources 9.7–9.9 on page 110.

9C Henry's motives

Most recent research suggests that Henry was brought into conflict with the Pope at an early stage in the 1520s. The logic of Henry's thinking went as follows:



This points to the fact that *from the outset* Henry questioned the Pope's authority to rule over his marriage to Catherine. It supports the argument that Henry's actions were motivated by a genuine sense of conscience, which led him to reject his first marriage and, ultimately, papal authority itself.

Anne Boleyn

The daughter of Sir Thomas Boleyn, Anne had spent her formative years in France only to return to England in 1522. Here she attracted the attentions of several notable figures at court, including Sir Thomas Wyatt, the poet, and Henry Percy, son of the Earl of Northumberland. When Henry met her, however, he fell head over heels in love with her, ordering Wolsey to stamp on Percy's interest in her.

SOURCE 9.7 From 1526 until Easter 1527, Henry wanted Anne to be his mistress

Debating with myself the contents of your letter, I have put myself in great distress, not knowing how to interpret them . . . For of necessity I must assure me of this answer having been now above one whole year struck with the dart of love . . .

If it shall please you to do me the office of a true, loyal mistress . . . I promise you that not only shall the name be given you, but that also I will take you for my only mistress, rejecting from thought and affection all others save yourself, to serve you only.

SOURCE 9.8 From Easter to summer 1527, Henry complained of silence from Anne

Since I parted with you I have been advised that the opinion in which I left you is now altogether changed, and that you will not come to court . . . the which report being true I cannot enough marvel at, seeing that I am well assured I have never since that time committed fault.

What parallels might a historian make between Henry's love life and that of the British royal family at the turn of the twentieth century? Are such parallels part of the proper work of a historian?



SOURCE 9.9 In the summer of 1527, Henry wanted Anne to be his wife, not his mistress. When Anne sent Henry a trinket of a ship with a woman on board, he responded with the following letter

The proofs of your affection are such, the fine poesies of the letters so warmly couched, that they constrain me ever truly to honour, love and serve you, praying that you will continue in this same firm and constant purpose . . .

Henceforth, my heart shall be dedicate to you alone, greatly desirous that so my body could be as well, as God can bring to pass if it pleaseth Him, whom I entreat once each day for the accomplishment thereof . . .

Written with the hand of that secretary who in heart, body and will is

*Your loyal and most ensured servant
Henry aultre A B ne cherse R.
[Translation: Henry looks for no other]*

If Eric Ives' timeline of events (see Chart 9B on page 106–07) is accurate, Henry had already decided to end his marriage to Catherine of Aragon before being smitten by Anne Boleyn's 'dart of love'. This is not to say that Anne Boleyn played an insignificant role in the break with Rome. As we shall see, she and her followers had a significant impact on Henry's thinking (see page 115). We should, however, question the simplistic model that suggests that Henry fell in love with Anne, fell out of love with Catherine, therefore wanted a divorce and then broke with Rome as a result.

E Review: Divorce, doctrine or dosh? The reasons for the break with Rome and the origins of the Reformation

This section aims to bring together the main themes of the chapter and to answer the main question.

As we stated at the beginning of this chapter, historians have been unable to come to any real consensus over this issue. Interpretations have changed over time and have reflected the different approaches that historians have taken towards the study of history. Outlined below are the interpretations of the historians who have most influenced the arguments.

A. F. Pollard (1869–1948)

Context

Pollard wrote the biography *Henry VIII* in 1902. He attempted to develop a more scientific approach to the writing of history than his predecessors. His aim was to analyse the existing evidence as objectively as possible in order to explain how and why the Reformation occurred. This was a significant departure from previous historians, who had been primarily concerned with the morality of the Reformation – that is, whether it was a good or bad thing. This said, Pollard based much of his analysis on the printed *Letters and Papers of Henry VIII*, which inevitably emphasised official policy to the neglect of other factors.

Interpretation

For Pollard, there was no doubt as to the architect of the break with Rome and thus the Reformation – an all-powerful Henry VIII. The Reformation was an act of Henry's own will and, what is more, the English people were right behind him. They trusted him as a Tudor to bring peace and stability, for 'England in the sixteenth century put its trust in its princes far more than it did in its parliaments, it invested them with attributes almost divine.'

Pollard introduces his argument thus: "If a lion knew his strength," said Sir Thomas More of his master to Thomas Cromwell, "it were hard for any man to rule him." Henry VIII had the strength of a lion; it remains to be seen how soon he learnt it, and what use he made of that strength when he discovered the secret.' So, in Pollard's eyes, it was simply a question not of whether Henry would break with Rome, but of when and how. The key issue was one of power. The Church would not allow Henry to annul his marriage to Catherine of Aragon and this gave him the opportunity to rid himself of the Church's constraining influence: 'the divorce, in fact, was the occasion and not the cause of the Reformation.' The cause was Henry's determination to exercise supreme power in England. Ultimately, 'the wonder is, not that the breach took place when it did, but that it was deferred for so long.'

The success of Henry's mission was, for Pollard, confirmed by a rising tide of nationalism felt by the English people and voiced by Parliament. The allegiance owed to the Pope could no longer be accepted. The Church *in* England had to become the Church *of* England. The lion was truly master of his own jungle.

G. R. Elton (1921–94)

Context

Elton started to develop his work in the late 1940s and early 1950s. He based his interpretation on a very close study of the documents of central government and administration. His research is characterised by a desire to examine the detail of government policy. He was keen to shed new light on the reign of Henry VIII and, in particular, to highlight the role of Thomas Cromwell. Most famously, his interpretations are found in *The Tudor Revolution in Government* (first published in 1955) and *England under the Tudors* (first published in 1955).

FOCUS ROUTE

Look back to Chart 9A on page 105 to remind yourself of the key factors behind the break with Rome. Write a short report to explain which factors were the most important and why.

Interpretation

Elton challenges Pollard's proposition that Henry was in complete control of the break with Rome. Elton's Henry VIII is 'a nimble opportunist', keen to leave the detail of government to his councillors: 'in the day to day business of governing England, Henry VIII was not so much incapable as uninterested and feckless'. This analysis leads Elton to conclude that the changes in policies throughout Henry's reign are explained not by the King, but by his advisers. 'Each section of the reign differed from the rest in a manner which can only rationally derive from changes in the men who directed affairs . . . The King was always there . . . the differences lay in the men he employed.'

Elton argues that 'it is doubtful if he [Henry] was the architect of anything, least of all the English Reformation'. So, if not Henry, then who? Clearly Elton's architect or puppet master was Thomas Cromwell. It was Cromwell who gave Henry a solution to the problem of being unable to gain an annulment of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon. This solution came in the form of the Act in Restraint of Appeals to Rome, crafted by Cromwell and signalling the break with Rome. '[Cromwell] offered to make a reality out of Henry's vague claims to supremacy by evicting the pope from England. To the king this meant a chance of getting his divorce, and a chance of wealth; to Cromwell it meant the chance of reconstructing the body politic.'

According to Elton, Cromwell had his own agenda. His was not a religious but rather a political motivation. His aim was to set up a limited constitutional monarchy in which King and Parliament acted together. Even though Elton recognised Cromwell's dislike of Catholicism, he still saw the Reformation as a political act. 'It was Cromwell's purpose to remake and renew the body politic of England, a purpose which because of the comprehensiveness of his intentions amounted to a revolution.'

A. G. Dickens (b. 1910)

Context

Dickens wrote his masterpiece *The English Reformation* in 1964 (and revised and updated it in 1989). He aimed to bring religion to the forefront of his interpretation of the period. Both Pollard and Elton had analysed events from an almost exclusively political perspective. For the first time Dickens looked to get 'behind the scenes' – in other words, he attempted to understand the motivations of 'the people'. In particular, he was interested in people's religious motivation, a previously, and rather curiously, neglected aspect of the Reformation.

Interpretation

For Dickens, the Church as it was in 1530 could not possibly have remained unreformed. The state of the Catholic Church in England was so bad that Henry would have been unable to leave it unreformed. Reformist ideas from a range of sources, emphasising the corruption of the Church, were thus vital in pushing Henry towards a reformed Church. Dickens follows Elton in promoting the role of Thomas Cromwell. It was the latter who pushed Henry into far deeper religious waters than he had ever envisaged. Cromwell's solution to Henry's divorce dilemma marked the point of no return: 'From this stage we cannot understand Crown policy if we continue to envisage Thomas Cromwell as merely a smart lawyer who made his fortune by solving the king's matrimonial problem. For good or ill, he is a figure of far greater significance in our history.'

While Pollard and Elton gave centre stage to Henry and Cromwell, Dickens marked out new ground by looking at other factors. He studied the state of popular religion and how this affected a demand for change, emphasising, in particular, the role of the Lollards in preparing the way for the Reformation. First, Lollard ideas provoked a conservative and negative reaction from English bishops that 'helped to exclude the possibility of Catholic reforms' and thus made the chances of radical anti-Catholic reform more likely. Second, the Lollards 'provided a spring-board of critical dissent from which the Protestant Reformation could overleap the walls of orthodoxy. The Lollards were the allies

and in some measure the begetters of the anticlerical forces which made possible the Henrician revolution.' And third, the Lollards cultivated an atmosphere in certain parts of the country that made the reception of continental Protestant ideas possible.

For Dickens, therefore, it was forces from below – the Lollards, William Tyndale, people motivated by a passion for religious reform – who deserve the real credit for pushing Henry into his break with Rome and consequently for the Reformation.

J. J. Scarisbrick (b. 1928)

Context

Scarisbrick's authoritative biography *Henry VIII* (first published in 1968) was concerned to put the key political players back on centre stage. In something of a return to Pollard, we see Henry as the driving force behind policy.

Interpretation

Scarisbrick emphasises Henry's dominant role in government throughout his reign. If there was a sense of uncertainty about the process, it was precisely because the process was Henry's and Henry himself was full of uncertainties and contradictions. 'The Henrician Reformation was a movement of inexplicable halts and starts, sudden hesitation and zig-zagging . . . But this is not to deny the overall purposiveness of these years. They were as was Henry himself – belligerent and outwardly confident, yet nervous and uncertain; and they were thus precisely because he dominated them.'

In spite of Henry's contradictions, Scarisbrick is clear that the King worked consistently toward asserting Royal Supremacy. While gaining his divorce was an important part of the process, 'Henry never had . . . a one-track mind'. He claimed a pastoral role in the Church as early as 1529, claimed power over the national Church by 1531 and finally excluded the primacy of the Pope with his attack on clerical privileges in 1532.

What of Cromwell's role in all of this? Scarisbrick acknowledges the central role that Cromwell played. 'That the 1530s were a decisive decade in English history was due largely to his energy and vision. He was immediately responsible for the vast legislative programme of the later sessions of the Reformation Parliament.' However, Scarisbrick is at pains to point out that it was always Henry who handed Cromwell the blueprint of action required: 'as far as the central event of the 1530s is concerned, namely the establishment of the Royal Supremacy, he was the executant of the king's designs. He may have determined timing and sequence . . . But he neither worked alone nor was the true initiator of these royal undertakings.'

Christopher Haigh

Context

Christopher Haigh led a group of revisionist historians who looked to 'revise' interpretations of why the Reformation came about. In particular, he aimed to challenge Dickens' assertion that the Catholic Church was 'ripe for reform'. He has been supported in his work by historians such as J. J. Scarisbrick (*The Reformation and the English People*, 1984) and, more recently, Eamon Duffy (*The Stripping of the Altars*, 1992). Haigh's own views are put forward in *The English Reformation Revised* (1987) and *English Reformations: Religion, Politics and Society under the Tudors* (1993).

Interpretation

The title of Haigh's most recent work indicates how he sees religious change in England to have been a series of Reformations. This is a significant move away from the idea of the Reformation as a single event that happened in the reign of Henry VIII. 'The religious changes of sixteenth century England were far too complex to be bound together as "the Reformation", too complex even to be "a Reformation".' So, for Haigh, the study of religious change must be pursued beyond the reign of Henry VIII, with the changes that we know as the Reformation being in any way complete only half way through the reign of Elizabeth I.

ACTIVITY

- 1 Look at the cartoons below. Match them up to each of the historians' interpretations on pages 123–26.
- 2 Compare your own interpretation with those of the historians. To whom are you closest and why? Has reading their views changed your mind? Is it possible to 'mix and match' interpretations?

To complicate the picture further, Haigh outlines Reformations happening on two different levels: political and evangelical. In other words, what made people Protestant was a combination of legislation and preaching. What is vital for Haigh in all of this is that historians have to study Reformation 'as it actually happened' – *did* people really follow the diktats of their politicians? If this question is to be answered at all satisfactorily, local variations have to be taken into account. Historians must accept that some of their beloved generalisations may not always be accurate enough.

Thus Haigh concludes that 'England had blundering Reformations, which most did not understand, which few wanted, and which no one knew had come to stay.' He rejects the 'master-plan' approach to explaining Reformation, preferring to study each event as it happened and trying to gauge how people at the time would have experienced changes.

