



1. Why were enclosures seen as a problem in early Tudor England?

2. 'In reality, Wolsey had very little success as an economic reformer.' How far do you agree with this view?

Fifteenths and tenths: The most important tax voted by Parliament from the early 1300s. It was based on property – one-tenth for town and Crown lands, one-fifteenth for the remainder. By the 1500s the sums voted had become fixed and no longer gave much return in tax to the Crown.

Besides enclosures, Wolsey was at times active against what were seen as other social evils. As a leading churchman, the Cardinal was keen on maintaining the idea of the 'just price'. From time to time he attacked the evils of traders whom he accused of charging their customers excessive prices. For example, London butchers, provincial graziers (cattle farmers who fed their animals up ready to sell them at market) and grain dealers all felt the blast of Wolsey's disapproval. But little was done to follow up these condemnations. No doubt, given the increasing demands on him, time was unavailable.

How successful were Wolsey's attempts as a financial reformer and parliamentary manager?

It was in the area of tax reform that Wolsey has been regarded as having made an important contribution to Tudor finance. He has been credited with the invention of the parliamentary subsidy. The problem with raising extra taxation to pay for wars was that by the early 1500s the existing parliamentary taxes of **fifteenths and tenths** had, in effect, become fixed sums. They produced too little money for the Crown. Also, the royal lands produced insufficient revenue, and due to the needs of and the generosity of Henry VIII income from them grew less after 1509. Thomas Wolsey introduced an Act of Resumption in Parliament in 1515 to regain lands for the Crown which had earlier been granted away. This did little to meet Henry's financial demands. Arising out of his experience in organising the French expedition of 1513, Wolsey grasped the need for a new tax which would be flexible in its demands. It was also based on accurate valuations of the taxpayer's wealth. This subsidy was just the tax needed to pay for Henry VIII's constant desire for wars, especially with France, and his extravagance in building, improving and furnishing his growing numbers of palaces.

The subsidy proved to be a success, especially as Wolsey worked out the practicalities of assessment and collection with the able assistance of John Hales, who was a judge in the Court of the Exchequer. It was levied four times in 1513–15 and 1523. All in all, it brought in over £300,000, while separate clerical taxation also produced useful sums. So the Crown was now raising realistic sums by taxing its subjects, but its demands were increasingly resented by the propertied classes who had to pay these parliamentary taxes. Wolsey did not prove adept in managing his first Parliament in 1515, when complaints against the Church dominated and led to its soon being dissolved. This may, in part, explain why there were no more parliaments until 1523. However, the period 1515–21 was one of peace which made calling a parliament unnecessary.

In 1522 war began against France and once again it was necessary to raise large sums in extraordinary taxation. To begin with, Wolsey raised over £250,000 to pay for the war by means of loans from the propertied classes. These were resented – as usual. When parliament was summoned in 1523, the Cardinal demanded £800,000 in extra taxes, on top of the loans of 1522–23. Wolsey tried to overcome resistance, especially from the Commons, by addressing them in person. However, that and his other tactics failed, including keeping Parliament sitting longer than normal, and in the end he had to settle for a rate of two shillings [10p] in the £ on incomes in land or goods of over £20.00 per year. In spite of keeping Parliament sitting between May and July, Wolsey obtained no more from

them than they had at first offered. This was no compliment to Wolsey's abilities as a parliamentary manager.

So in trying to meet Henry VIII's demands for money in 1522–23 Wolsey had made himself increasingly unpopular with the political and propertied classes of England. However, the war against France continued and when Henry decided to invade his enemy's country in spring of 1525, again the Treasury was empty. Wolsey knew that he would have to raise money to pay for the war, but he did not want to risk calling a new parliament after the disputes of 1523. Instead he decided to raise a tax based on the valuations of property and goods which had produced the loan of 1523. Wolsey called it an 'amicable grant' and hoped that by appealing to their patriotism people would pay. Both the clergy and the laity were asked to contribute, the latter by means of a sliding scale depending on the size of their income.

Laity: The body of people who were not clergymen.

This new demand proved to be the final straw for taxpayers. When the commissioners were sent out in March and April 1525 they met with strong resistance, both in London and the provinces. Within weeks Wolsey had to backtrack on his demands and in the end settle for voluntary contributions. However, such a retreat did not occur before discontent had flared into near-rebellion across large parts of England, especially in London and East Anglia where it centred on the wool town of Lavenham. Many of the nobility, although no lovers of Wolsey, were alarmed by the widespread nature of the popular resistance to the taxation and informed Henry VIII of this. The King, whose war policy had been the cause of the discontent, decided to back down in the face of the popular anger. He left Wolsey to arrange a stage-managed display of clemency (apology) at which the defeated Lavenham rebels were pardoned, with the Cardinal himself paying off their prison expenses. This was a humiliation for Wolsey, who had been trying to carry out his master's demands. However, he knew that when affairs went well Henry VIII took the credit and when they did not his ministers and courtiers took the blame.

The Amicable Grant of 1525 was the nearest that England had come to rebellion between the Cornish rising of 1497 and the Pilgrimage of Grace in 1536 (see Chapter 5). Wolsey's very success in devising the subsidy and in raising taxation to pay for Henry VIII's excesses between 1515 and 1523 carried the seeds of its own failure. By 1525 people were tired of taxation to pay for the wars which were expensive and disruptive of economic life. The Amicable Grant caused a display of popular feeling, that in the last resort both Henry and Wolsey were too shrewd to ignore, but it was the Cardinal who took the blame. The King's confidence in him was shaken and his enemies began to 'sharpen their knives'. The near-revolt of 1525 led to the abandonment of the war against France and was a direct cause of the Eltham Ordinances of January 1526 when Wolsey set out deliberately to disarm his enemies, both at Court and in the Council.



1. Explain how Wolsey attempted to raise money for Henry VIII.

2. How far was Wolsey responsible for the near-rebellion caused by the Amicable Grant of 1525?

To what extent did Wolsey seek to reform the Church?

As in the other areas, Wolsey did on occasions come up with plans to reform the Church. In 1519 when Wolsey announced that he intended to reform the clergy, it was but one aspect of the ambitious plans to overhaul both Church and State which he dangled in front of Henry VIII when he was dealing with his political enemies at Court in that year. In practice, the plans came to little. However, the Cardinal was well aware of the 'New