

**Key information****Wolsey's diplomacy**

It is important to recognise that the fate of the Great Matter was also bound up in foreign affairs. England had ditched her long-standing alliance with Spain in 1525–26 after Charles

refused to cut Henry in on the spoils of his great victory at Pavia. Wolsey had negotiated a new alliance with France, just as the Great Matter was beginning to emerge as the key domestic issue of the Tudor court. In the end Wolsey backed the wrong side at the wrong time.

- Wolsey hoped that he would be able to use his credentials as a papal legate and cardinal to attain what his master so desperately desired. With the Pope a prisoner, Wolsey wanted to call a council of leading archbishops to pronounce on the divorce without the Pope (*capto papa*). However, the French cardinals were reluctant to play along and in December 1527 Clement was technically freed from imprisonment even if he was still under Habsburg control. Wolsey's hopes of pronouncing on Henry's case without the Pope were dashed and he now depended upon a revival of French fortunes in northern Italy.

- Wolsey's next strategy was to have the case heard in England, with papal approval of course. The Pope wanted nothing to do with the Great Matter, as he did not want to antagonise Charles V for fear of losing papal independence in Italy. At the same time Clement wanted to pacify Henry, and to that end he suggested that Henry get divorced in England, marry Anne and then attain an official annulment from the Pope sometime in the future, possibly after Catherine had died. Essentially this amounted to bigamy and Henry was not interested in such solutions. Clement also told his legate Cardinal Campeggio, who was on his way to England to hear Henry's case, in 1528 that Catherine might enter into a nunnery and take her monastic vows, leaving Henry free to remarry. Yet again, this would not suffice as Henry wanted the annulment to be given through Rome, thus legitimising all future heirs through his subsequent marriage. There was even the suggestion that the succession might be secured through the marriage of Henry's illegitimate son Fitzroy to his daughter Mary, but once again this idea was never really taken seriously by Henry as the succession had to be watertight.

**Biography****Cardinal Campeggio (1472–1539)**

Lorenzo Campeggio was made a Cardinal in 1517 and papal legate to England in 1518. Subsequently he also became Bishop of Salisbury and Archbishop of Bologna, both in 1524. Best known for his role in the legate court at Blackfriars that aimed to resolve Henry's Great Matter, European politics dictated that Campeggio was in no position to decree on the divorce, and Clement VII had told him as much. He adjourned the court in July 1529 for the long, hot Italian summer, despite the location being England! The failure of the court marked the end of the road for Wolsey and the beginnings of the break with Rome.

**Biography****John Fisher (1469–1535)**

A devoted servant to Lady Margaret Beaufort and her son Henry VII, Fisher was less of a comfort to Henry VIII. Fisher was a staunch supporter of the Papacy and Catherine of Aragon, arguing that the Pope had every right to dispense on the issue of a man marrying his dead brother's wife. He also denied outright the idea of Royal Supremacy over the Church, a view revealed in the wording of the Pardon of the Clergy (1531) where Fisher insisted on *as far as Christ's law allows* being added to Henry's title of sole protector and Supreme Head of the Church. On 17 June 1535 Fisher was condemned to death under the new Treason Act, and five days later he was beheaded.

- Catherine had powerful supporters at the English court and her plight won her much sympathy. Catherine was determined to defend the validity of her marriage and the legitimacy of her daughter Mary. Catherine consistently argued that she was a virgin when she married Henry and that the King's Levitical line did not apply to an unconsummated marriage. Influential and important men such as **Bishop John Fisher** (see page 88) and Thomas More supported her cause while she was in regular correspondence with Rome and Charles V. Catherine was quite simply unprepared to accept that after eighteen years her marriage was somehow unlawful. To do so would have been an acceptance that she had no more than a royal mistress and her daughter a royal bastard. Her loyalty to Henry remained unwavering and was a source of embarrassment to the King when she appeared before Wolsey and Campeggio's legate court in 1529. The King's infatuation with Anne Boleyn further gave claim to the idea that Catherine was being cast aside by Henry in favour of a younger woman. Catherine's determined opposition along with her bloodline was a central reason why Henry was unable to attain an annulment.

- In April 1528 after much procrastination, Clement VII finally granted a commission to hear the case in England. Cardinal Campeggio was dispatched to join Wolsey, but by the time he arrived in October 1528 Imperialist power in Italy was assured and the likelihood of a papal annulment decreased still further. The actual trial was delayed again by the discovery of a Spanish brief. This was a letter from Julius II in 1503 to Catherine's mother, Isabella of Spain, which reportedly cleared up any discrepancies surrounding the marriage of Catherine to Henry. The English court believed the brief to be fake, and its discovery at such a crucial time does appear to be more than good fortune for the Spanish party. Henry demanded it be sent to England for examination but the Spanish would not let it out of their sight. Wolsey was desperate to get proceedings under way before Charles V had the case revoked to Rome. On 31 March 1529 the court opened at Blackfriars, although Campeggio was already under strict orders from Rome not to dispense on the Great Matter.

The Blackfriars court proceedings lasted until July 1529, with no resolution of the problem. Despite the case being heard in England, Campeggio used papal jurisdiction to adjourn proceedings for the long, hot Italian summer! The Treaty of Cambrai confirmed the ascendancy of Charles in Italy, and at the same time ensured that Catherine's case would indeed be revoked to Rome. The year 1529 therefore marks a turning point in the Great Matter. Although Henry would continue to pursue an annulment through Rome for the next two or three years he would also be open to the idea of a unilateral decision on the divorce being made in England.

**What was the royal policy in the years 1529–32?**

Some historians such as **G.R. Elton** see the years 1529–32 as ones without a clear policy. In some ways Elton is right as there does not seem to be

**Biography****G.R. Elton (1921–94)**

G.R. Elton was Regius Professor of Modern History at Cambridge University from 1983–88. He is regarded as one of the leading historians on the Tudor period. His works include *The Tudor Revolution in Government* (1953), *England under the Tudors* (1955) and *Reform and Renewal* (1973). Elton's thesis on the Tudor revolution in government is an important and contentious analysis of the administrative reforms of Thomas Cromwell, although some of his ideas are now regarded as slightly outdated.

Fish, a common lawyer, gives us an insight into the kind of anti-clerical material that was being disseminated throughout the south of England at this time. One should view the legislation of 1529 in the context of Wolsey's fall and such literature as that cited above. Fish called on Henry to reform a clergy that was idle and corrupt. Henry for his part began to become increasingly convinced that the Church needed to be brought to heel on the issue of the Great Matter and he began to assert his authority over the English clergy.

### Were Henry's views on the Great Matter changing by 1530?

- In 1530 Henry collected the opinions of the finest universities in Europe, including Oxford and Cambridge, on the Great Matter. The findings were published in 1531. Seven universities returned favourable verdicts on Henry's case, reiterating his Levitical line that his marriage contravened divine law, and that the Pope had no authority to dispense such marriages. Most of these universities had been bribed to support Henry's case. Thomas More was given the job of reporting the findings to parliament. Increasingly, his duty as Lord Chancellor was being compromised by his own personal opposition to the King's case.
- However, Henry was also beginning to consider a more radical option to solving his Great Matter.

- In 1530 some of Henry's leading clerical supporters, led by Edward Foxe, Bishop of Hereford, and **Thomas Cranmer** (see page 92), future Archbishop of Canterbury, put together the *Collectanea satis copiosa*. The *Collectanea* referred to ancient English manuscripts and Anglo Saxon chronicles in supporting the concept of the King as head of state and Church. In short, historical precedents were found or perhaps invented to support the idea of the Royal Supremacy. Henry was unquestionably intrigued and excited by the possibility of extending his power over the Church and using the English clergy under his authority to pronounce on the divorce.

At the same time pressure on the Church was exerted.

- In February 1531 the Church in England was forced to pay a subsidy as a monetary fine for their endorsement of Wolsey's papal posts. The whole clergy were charged with praemunire and as a result stumped up £118,000. The clergy were thereby pardoned for their offence of unlawfully exercising their spiritual jurisdiction in Church courts. Once more pressure was being brought to bear on Rome, and Henry was stamping his authority on the clergy.
- In the 1531 Pardon of the Clergy, mentioned above, Henry insisted that he be referred to as *sole protector and Supreme Head of the English*

any clear direction to Henry's plans for an annulment in these years. Moreover, Henry's new Lord Chancellor was Thomas More, a brilliant man in many ways but one who could not bring himself to support the King's case.

- The drift in policy is therefore understandable given the nature of the problem that Henry faced. On the one hand he would ideally have liked to attain a watertight annulment through Rome freeing him to marry Anne Boleyn. Yet this looked out of the question.

- On the other hand he is increasingly attracted by the proposition of an internal solution to the problem that would increase his own powers over the Church at the same time. Just exactly when Henry decided to take this radical step to break with Rome and establish a Royal Supremacy over the Church in England is highly debatable, although it is clear that by 1532 his mind was all but made up.

Throughout the period 1529–32 Henry still applied pressure on Rome to make a decision on the Great Matter in his favour.

- Wolsey's fate is sealed with the failure of Blackfriars in 1529. Henry has his once-favoured servant minister charged with **praemunire**. The charge against Wolsey was based on him supposedly exercising his power as cardinal legate in England to the detriment of the Crown. Henry had been more than happy for Wolsey to use his influence at Rome when it appeared to be in the interests of the Crown to do so, but now Wolsey was going to pay for his failure to attain an annulment with his life. At the same time the charge of praemunire made a point to Rome that Henry's authority was total in England.

### What was the role of the Reformation Parliament?

- The Reformation Parliament** opened in November 1529 and the legislation that it passed was anti-clerical in nature. The Probate, Pluralities and Mortuaries Act tapped into anti-clerical sentiment in England and again put pressure on Rome. Henry hoped through this legislation that the Pope might feel threatened by the consequences of not granting Henry his divorce.

### Source F

And what do all these greedy sort of sturdy, idle, holy thieves with these yearly exactions that they take of the people? Truly, nothing but exempt themselves from the obedience of your grace. Nothing but translate all rule, power, lordship, authority, obedience and dignity from your grace unto them. Nothing but that all your subjects should fall into disobedience and rebellion against your grace and be under them.

Simon Fish, *A Supplication for the Beggars*, written in 1529

### Question

What are the major grievances outlined by Fish in Source F above?

### Take it further

Find out about other anti-clerical lawyers such as Christopher St German (John Guy assesses the importance of St German in his book, *Tudor England*). What was the impact of such thought at this time on the progress of Henry's policy?

### Definition

**Radicals v conservatives**  
This was the key factional battle at court during the journey towards divorce. The radicals were men such as Foxe, Cranmer and, by 1531, Thomas Cromwell. They supported Anne Boleyn and advocated the Supremacy. This entailed a break with Rome, which suited the religious stance of these men as most leaned towards Protestantism. The conservatives were mainly traditionally minded bishops such as Fisher, Tunstall and Standish. Thomas More was also part of this group that supported Catherine of Aragon. The two groups fought for control of the King's policy. Both sides supported their case in print.

*Church and clergy.* The diehard conservatives such as John Fisher were outraged and insisted that this title be tempered with the line *as far as Christ's law allows*.

- Nevertheless, these two factors highlight the point that Henry was becoming increasingly won over by the idea of Royal Supremacy. As Henry became more convinced of his authority over the Church, so the radical faction at court began to hold sway over the conservatives.

### Biography

**Thomas Cromwell (1485–1540)**

Thomas Cromwell served in Wolsey's household until 1529, and his administrative efficiency was sufficient to gain him the attentions of the King. By 1532 he had worked his way into the inner council and had become Henry's willing servant on the issue of the divorce.

From 1533–40 Cromwell was Henry's leading minister and the man behind the break with Rome and the Royal Supremacy. As Henry's Vicegerent in Spirituals he also masterminded the dissolution of the monasteries between 1535–39, and introduced reforms such as the English Bible in 1538.

### Biography

**Thomas Cranmer (1489–1556)**

Cranmer was a key figure in the Henrician Reformation. In the early stages he discussed with Foxe and Gardiner the King's Great Matter and proposed an appeal to the universities of Europe in 1530. Henry was pleased with Cranmer's contribution to his problem and he was appointed a royal chaplain and attached to the household of Anne Boleyn's father. On an embassy to Germany to meet with Charles V, he met and married a niece of the reformer Osiander. As he had entered the priesthood, this had to be done secretly. In 1533 he was recalled by Henry VIII to succeed Warham as Archbishop of Canterbury. In May 1533 Cranmer pronounced Catherine's marriage null and void and the private marriage to Anne evangelical and was eager to promote the accessibility of scripture to the masses. In 1538 injunctions were issued by Cromwell for a Bible in English and in 1544 Henry authorised the use in English of Cranmer's Litany.

### How important was Thomas Cromwell in introducing the Royal Supremacy?

In 1532 the whole fabric and structure of the Church in England began to change as the break with Rome hit the statute book and the Royal Supremacy gathered pace. The architect was **Thomas Cromwell**.

In 1532 Cromwell introduced a petition against Church courts and clerical jurisdiction into the Commons. The petition was known as the Commons

### Source G

Sir, Master Cromwell, of whose origin and antecedents your Secretary Antoine tells me you desire to be informed, is the son of a poor blacksmith, who lived in a small village four miles from this place, and is buried in a common grave in the parish churchyard. Cromwell in his youth was an ill conditioned scapegrace. For some offence he was thrown into prison, and was obliged afterwards to leave the country.

A letter from Eustace Chapuys to Charles V, 1535

Supplication against the Ordinaries, and Cromwell's political skill lay in the fact that he convinced the Commons that this was their Bill and nothing at all to do with the King or the government. In reality they were endorsing Henry's proposed attack on the legislative independence of the Church in England.

### Source H

Firstly the prelates and other of the clergy of this your realm, being your subjects, in their Convocation by them holden . . . have made and daily make divers fashions of laws and ordinances concerning temporal things; and some of them be repugnant to the laws and statutes of your realm; not having nor requiring your most royal assent of the same laws by them so made, nor any assent or knowledge of your lay subjects is had to the same, nor to them published and known in the English tongue.

Supplication against the Ordinaries, 1532

Convocation naturally defended its right to make laws, but Henry appeared determined to assert his supremacy over the Church. On 15 May 1532 the Submission of the Clergy was drawn up in which the legislative independence of the Church was surrendered to the Crown.

- convocation could only meet with the permission of the King
- new canon laws had to be approved first by the King
- existing canon laws were to be inspected and any that undermined royal authority were to be removed.

### Why was the year 1532 a turning point in royal policy?

Thomas More resigned the chancellorship as a consequence of the Submission of the Clergy and slipped out of the political limelight for the time being. Ultimately, he could not reconcile his loyalty to the Crown with his loyalty to the Church. The Church in England was now effectively under Henry's control and the way to the Supremacy was becoming clearer. First Henry and Cromwell had to sever links with Rome in order that Catherine's appeal to the papacy could be nullified. Already this process was under way as in March 1532 parliament passed the Act in Conditional Restraint of **Annates**.

The very fact that the legislation was made conditional shows us how much opposition and controversy was caused by such a decree. It was not merely the economic aspect of papal power that was being challenged but also papal rights of consecration. The statute stated that should the Pope refuse to consecrate bishops as a result of annates being abolished, those bishops would be consecrated by English authority. Traditional bishops voted against the legislation. Although they stood to benefit

### Question

What is the major grievance drawn up in the Supplication against the Ordinaries?

### Definition

#### Annates

Annates were the payments made to Rome by bishops when they took up their post for the first time. In return for papal consecration a payment was made that roughly equated to one-third of a year's income. Annates were paid across western Europe and deeply resented. They were at the same time a lucrative source of income for the papacy.

