

# Henry VIII and His Foreign Policy

**Early 16th Century Europe was dominated by four main powers.**

- The **Pope**, in the south (1443-1513)
- **Louis XII** of France (1462-1515), (House of Valois)
- Emperor **Maximilian** (1459-1519), most of central Europe. (Holy Roman Emperor)
- **Ferdinand** of Spain (1452-1516) (House of Hapsburg).

Henry's foreign policy was driven by a desire for himself and England to be a major power in Europe. He wanted England to be a '**Sovereign Nation State**' that is a country that did not rely on other countries. To begin with he wanted to follow the traditional policy of English Kings, which was to wage war against France to reclaim the French crown. The first twenty years of Henry's reign 1509-1529 were dominated by foreign policy and it was in this period that Thomas Wolsey was to rise to prominence.

- In 1511, Henry got his chance to increase his position. Louis XII had invaded Italy and the Pope Julius II felt threatened. He formed a Holy League, with Spain. Henry offered his services and joined the Holy League in November 1511. Henry sent an army of 12,000 soldiers, under the command of the Marquess of Dorset, to southern France. There, they waited for weeks for their Spanish allies to arrive. Unbeknown to the English, the Spanish had already defeated the French and made peace. Henry had been humiliated and felt let down. Yet, he was to learn a valuable lesson in the art of 16<sup>th</sup> Century European politics and the capriciousness of its monarchs.
- In 1513, Henry was to have another chance. This time Henry decided to do things his way and personally led a campaign into France.
- At Guinegate, he defeated the French in what has come to be known as 'The Battle of The Spurs' because of the speed at which the French army retreated. The town of Tournai was captured.
- However, in Henry's absence, James IV of Scotland, (1473-1513) decided to invade England and renew the 'Auld Alliance' with France. This was despite the fact that he was married to Henry's sister, Margaret. The Earl of Surrey marched north and defeated the Scots at the Battle of Flodden on 9th, September, 1513. James and many of the Scottish leaders were killed.
- The next ten years were to see a lull in warlike tactics and a drive towards peace. War had proved expensive and Henry was running out of money.

## PEACE 1513-1523

- Thomas Wolsey was to play a major role in Henry's foreign policy. Henry and Wolsey continued in their attempts to make England a major player in Europe. Wolsey has his sights set on becoming Pope and used his position to further his personal aims. He would befriend any power or person who could further his ambition.
- In 1514, Wolsey arranged the marriage between 53 year old, Louis XII of France and Henry's sister, Mary. This was a purely political marriage between a gout-ridden old man and a young, beautiful girl. Apparently, Mary only agreed on the marriage if she was allowed to marry whomever she wanted on Louis's death. She didn't have long to wait as within 11 weeks, the excitement of the marriage had proved too much for Louis!
- The Anglo-French alliance was in danger of collapsing. Wolsey and Henry had to do some quick thinking.
- On 3rd October 1518, Wolsey held a meeting in London, which was attended by representatives of the Pope, King of France, King of Spain, the Emperor and Henry VIII. This was a major diplomatic achievement for Henry. At the meeting it was agreed that Henry and the new French King, Francis I (1494-1547) should meet.
- It was at this time that Henry started making important changes to his advisors. Out went the fun loving, rowdy element and in came a more mature element "sound and ancient knights". Henry had matured and it was time to stop playing games. He was ready for what he had once called 'this troublesome business'
- On 7th June 1520, Henry and Francis met at 'The Field of Cloth of Gold'.

### **Field of Cloth of Gold** 7th-21st June 1520.

- Henry and Francis I met in France. The meeting was spectacular. It was a scene of merrymaking. The site was quickly converted into a temporary city and covered with beautifully decorated pavilions. Henry even had a prefabricated wooden hall made which was then built in France. There were tournaments, jousts, banquets, and concerts. To give you some idea of the enormity of the event, Henry took with him nearly 5000 attendants and 3000 horses. 7000 conger eels, 2014 sheep, 312 heron, 70 litres of mustard and over £100 of cream.

### **After the Field of Cloth of Gold**

- All the extravagance of the meeting came to nothing.
- Francis was thinking about war against the new Emperor Charles V, whilst Wolsey had now decided to have secret talks with Charles. Wolsey thought that Charles would be a greater help in his quest for the papacy.
- In 1520, Charles and Henry signed a treaty against France.
- In 1525, Charles defeated the French at the Battle of Pavia.
- Henry saw his chance to march on Paris and claim the throne of France for himself.
- Charles and Henry fell out. Charles could not except why Henry, who had done so little in the defeat of France, should have such a prize as the Crown of France.

## **A change of Policy**

- Wolsey immediately changed tactics and tried to arrange an alliance of France, England and the Pope against the Emperor.
- In 1527, Charles marched into Rome and captured the Pope Clement VII.
- Wolsey alliance collapsed. Charles was now very much in control. Wolsey was becoming unpopular. His policies had failed and had proved expensive, an expense which parliament and the people were no longer prepared to accept.
- By now Henry's was reviewing his marriage to Catherine of Aragon. Henry had a problem. He could only get a divorce if the Pope granted it, and unfortunately the Pope was a prisoner of Charles V who was the nephew of Catherine of Aragon. A very tricky situation.
- After the divorce was sorted out, Henry was preoccupied with matters at home. His finances were in poor order and this had to be put right.

## **IRELAND**

- However, during this quiet period he did turn his attention to Ireland. The Pope had given Henry II the title "Lord of Ireland". After the break with Rome, Henry VIII changed the title to "King of Ireland". He was worried about the support the Pope might get from the Irish chieftains and so he bribed them with grants of monastic lands. In 1537, a rebellion by the Earl of Kildare was ruthlessly put down and he and five of his relatives were executed.

## **FOREIGN POLICY UNDER THOMAS CROMWELL**

- Matters remained fairly quiet until in 1538, Charles and Francis signed a ten-year truce. At the same time, the Pope issued a decree saying that Henry was no longer King of England and called upon Catholics to attack him. Henry rightly felt very nervous about the possibility of a Catholic Crusade to oust him.
- Henry and Thomas Cromwell (Wolsey's replacement) started to look for a European ally. Meanwhile, the country was put into ready alert for an invasion.
- One solution was to find Henry a fourth wife. Margaret, Francis I daughter and Marie, daughter of the Duke of Guise were possibilities, but with Henry's track record and the break from Rome, these ladies thought wiser of it.
- Thomas Cromwell suggested a marriage to Anne of Cleves. This would prove a useful alliance. Henry agreed after seeing Holbein's portrait of Anne. Sadly, the portrait showed Anne in a flattering light, and when Henry saw her face to face, he was gravely disappointed and furious. Within four months they were divorced, and Cromwell lost his head.

## **THE FINAL YEARS. HENRY TAKES CHARGE**

- As his health began to fail him, Henry once again turned his thoughts to war. Henry decided to be in charge of his own foreign policy.
- In the summer of 1542, Charles and Francis broke their truce.
- Henry once again saw a chance to claim the throne of France.

### **SCOTLAND**

- Before he did so, he had to make sure that Scotland would not pose a threat. Henry ordered his troops to muster on the Scottish border.
- With the threat of imminent invasion, Henry asked James V of Scotland to sign a treaty that would in fact make Scotland a satellite state of England. Naturally, James refused, no doubt as Henry had hoped.
- At the Battle of Stirling Moss on 23rd November 1542, the Scots were defeated. James V died a few days later from the shock news. He left behind a 7-day-old daughter, Mary Queen of Scots. Henry demanded that Mary be an eventual bride for his son Edward. Naturally, the Scots refused and the war continued. Edinburgh was sacked and the leader of the Scottish Catholics, Cardinal Beaton was murdered.

### **FRANCE**

- In 1543, Henry and Charles signed a treaty. It was agreed that each of them would invade France in the summer of 1543.
- Henry invaded and defeated the French, capturing Bolougne.
- Charles and Francis then made peace with each other, and The English army under the command of the Dukes of Norfolk and Suffolk was forced to retreat to Calais. Here an enemy force of 50,000 men trapped them.
- Reluctantly, the English had to leave France and sail back to England.
- In 1545, England again prepared itself for an invasion from across the Channel. In July, Francis ordered 200 ships into the Channel. A few skirmishes took place, but as is so often the case, the weather hindered the ships and the French ships returned home.
- The war with Scotland and France had cost Henry over £2 million and once again his treasury was nearly empty. However, Henry was to die within 18 months.

## **HOW SUCCESSFUL WAS HENRY'S FOREIGN POLICY?**

- Henry had wanted to establish England as a major power. In this aim he was only partially successful, as with each hurdle he crossed, he was invariably let down by his fickle allies. His campaigns in Scotland were militarily successful, but they failed to bring Scotland under English control, and he died before he could marry off his son, Edward to Mary, Queen of Scots. His campaigns cost the country millions of £'s. However, by increasing the navy from a mere 7 battle ships to 33 by the end of his reign, he showed a clear understanding of the importance of naval power.
- This was to prove vital in the years to come. Henry is often referred to as the "Father of the English Navy" and this was the beginning of the English Navy becoming masters of the seas.