

Cardinal Wolsey c.1472-1530: Tudor Statesman and Chancellor

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Thomas Wolsey was a self made man, and a priest by necessity rather than conviction. When he was already over thirty he was introduced at court by his patron, Sir Richard Nanfan. In 1509 he won the personal favour of the new King, Henry VIII, and his career developed rapidly. He became first Almoner, then a Councillor, then Dean of York, before being created Bishop of Lincoln in February 1514. The following year he became Archbishop of York and Lord Chancellor. At the King's suggestion he was named a Cardinal in 1515, and *Legate a Latere* in 1518. Wolsey's power depended entirely upon his ability to retain the King's confidence, and that he did by exceptional shrewdness and a capacity for hard work. All his efforts, both at home and abroad, were intended to guide Henry in ways which would increase his power and reputation. His own 'glory' naturally followed, and he was styled 'alter rex', but in fact he had no policies independent of the King. His attempts at ecclesiastical reform were largely aborted by the fact that he represented in his own person some of the worst abuses – such as pluralism. His great wealth made him a generous patron of both education and the arts. However, when he failed to find a way to resolve the problem of Henry's first marriage, to Catherine of Aragon, he lost the King's confidence and his many enemies made sure that he lost his offices and power as well.