

Teachers' notes:

1. Religion, the Reformation, the Dissolution of the monasteries and the Lincolnshire Rising

Henry VIII and his first marriage to Catherine of Aragon

Henry VIII married Catherine of Aragon on 11th June 1509, and they were crowned king and queen soon after on the 24th June. Catherine was the widow of Henry's brother, Arthur. Because of their relationship they had to get the permission of the Pope to marry. Their first child, a daughter, was stillborn. They subsequently had a son, Henry, Duke of Cornwall, who died after only 52 days. There followed a number of further stillbirths until a daughter, Mary, was born in 1519. By this time Henry was desperate for a male heir to secure the Tudor line and was becoming more and more convinced that Catherine would never provide him with one. He discussed the possibility of divorcing her with his chief minister, Cardinal Thomas Wolsey. Wolsey went to Rome but failed to secure the necessary permission. Having given special permission for the marriage to take place the Pope was now reluctant to allow it to be dissolved. Furthermore, Catherine had the support of her powerful nephew, Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor and King of Spain. As a result of his failure to persuade the Pope to allow a divorce Wolsey lost his position and Thomas Cromwell was appointed in his place.

The break with Rome

With the support of Thomas Cromwell Henry now concluded that the only way to secure his divorce from Catherine would be to separate himself and England from the jurisdiction of the Pope and the Roman Catholic Church. The Act of Supremacy of 1534 severed all ties with Rome and established a new Church of England with the monarch as its Supreme Governor. Thomas Cranmer was appointed Archbishop of Canterbury and he annulled Henry's marriage to Catherine, thereby allowing him to marry one of his courtiers, Anne Boleyn, who was already pregnant. The annulment was on the grounds that the marriage had never been legal because Catherine was Henry's brother's wife. It led to his daughter with Catherine, Mary, being declared illegitimate and kept apart from her mother, although they managed to correspond in secret.

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The Pope's refusal to grant permission for Henry to divorce Catherine of Aragon was an important factor in the decision to separate England from Rome, but his desire to remarry was not the sole motivation behind the changes that took place at the Reformation.

The importance of religion, the church and the monasteries

Religion was a central part of medieval society. Everyone was a member of the Roman Catholic Church. The belief in the afterlife, the existence of heaven and hell and the expectation of spending time in purgatory being cleansed of sin before being allowed to enter heaven were of great importance. There was a strong belief in the power of prayer in minimising the length of time spent in purgatory and people paid for prayers to be said for their souls and for those of their family members after death. The interiors of parish churches at this time were very different from today. Church services were read in Latin which meant that most ordinary people could not understand the words that were being spoken, but the inside walls of churches were covered with paintings to illustrate what was being said. Many of these warned what would happen to those who did not live good lives. The most graphic of these were the doom paintings which depicted scenes of good people being helped up to heaven while bad people were being forced down to hell where terrible fates awaited them.

Although they were also centres of learning and they provided help for the poor and hospitality to travellers, the main function of religious houses was to provide a constant round of prayer for the souls of dead. People from all walks of life paid for these prayers by making donations to the church and the monasteries either during their lifetimes or as bequests in their wills. Many of the wealthiest people gave land and resources for the founding and subsequent support of monastic houses, others came together in guilds to give collectively to the church, and many others made individual donations according to their means. The result was that the church and in particular many monasteries became very wealthy over time.

Although some monastic houses remained quite poor, the wealth and influence, and consequently the power of many began to be viewed with some suspicion and jealousy in the late medieval period. Furthermore, the religious and moral standards that were thought to prevail within them were beginning to be questioned by some people, both in England and in parts of Europe. The extent of the problems is not known for certain although periodic visitations by the bishops did reveal some lapses in standards.

Henry's financial problems

Henry had come to the throne in 1509 and his reign so far had been one of financial extravagance, both in terms of his own personal expenditure and in the amount of money that he had committed to furthering his influence overseas,

notably in France. He therefore came to view the wealth of the monasteries as a potential source of funding for the increase of his depleted financial resources.

The Dissolution of the monasteries

A commission implemented a valuation of all properties in 1535 and a team of Henry's own inspectors subsequently carried out a hastily arranged survey of all the houses. The survey unsurprisingly confirmed the shortcomings of which they were suspected, and its findings were used as evidence to justify their closure. Between 1536 and 1539 all the monastic houses in the country were closed and their property confiscated. Monastic lands accounted for almost a quarter of all the land in England and Wales. At the same time parish churches and the clergy were undergoing similar scrutiny. Henry was advised and supported in his actions throughout by his chief minister, Thomas Cromwell.

The changes that were being imposed by Henry amounted to a major upheaval in both religious and secular life and they generated a considerable amount of discontent around the country. Yorkshire and Lincolnshire were two areas where opposition to the changes was particularly strong and where dissent erupted into rebellion.

The Dissolution of the monasteries in Lincolnshire **Case study: the abbeys and priories of the Witham Valley**

During the medieval period Lincolnshire as a county was particularly rich in monastic establishments, and the Witham valley beyond Lincoln was remarkable for the concentration of monasteries lying alongside it. Within a distance of about 16 miles there were nine. On the east bank there were six: Barlings, Stainfield, Bardney, Tūpholme, Stixwold and Kirkstead, with three more; Nocton, Catley and Kyme on the west bank.

This unusual concentration probably came about because of the high ecclesiastical status of Lincoln and because the River Witham provided a direct trade route to Lincoln and Boston for the export of the wool which made up an important part of the monasteries' income. The area provides an ideal basis for a case study of how the Dissolution of the monasteries and the events surrounding it were played out at the local level, and how these affected not just the lives of the men and women who lived within the institutions but also the wider structure of society.

Of the Witham valley abbeys and priories some such as Barlings were relatively prosperous. Others such as Tūpholme were never particularly wealthy, and Catley remained extremely poor throughout its existence. The religious and moral standards of their inhabitants are difficult to gauge precisely but records of visitations by bishops sometimes show that lapses did occur. For instance, in 1444 it was alleged that John Hole of Bardney Abbey 'does eat in a certain booth

by the water with a certain married woman contrary to the Lord's injunctions', and in 1497 Thomas Pynderwelle of Tupholme Abbey was banished to Croxton Abbey in Leicestershire for becoming involved with a local woman named Philippa and having a child with her. In 1482 the canons at Tupholme had also been reprimanded for sitting up drinking after the last prayers of the day. However, the purpose of the bishops' visitations was specifically to discover faults rather than to record good behaviour, and despite these recorded misdemeanours, there is no evidence to suggest that the monasteries were unpopular with their neighbours, or that local people were generally dissatisfied with the old order in the church.

Henry VIII's valuation of monastic properties in 1535 was carried out by a group of commissioners. The commissioners for Lincolnshire were from local gentry families. They reported in September 1535 but the decision to close the monasteries could already have been taken by then, and a separate inspection to investigate the morals and behaviour of their inhabitants was already underway. The Lincolnshire inspections were probably carried out around early December 1535 with all reports nationally to the king and Cromwell being complete by February 1536. The inspections had been a severe and unpleasant process for the monasteries, and legislation was passed in the spring of 1536 dissolving all those with a yearly value of less than £200 on account of the 'manifest synne, vicious, carnall and abhomynable living' that was claimed to be taking place within them.

Of the Witham valley abbeys, Stainsfield, Nocton and Tupholme were among the earliest casualties. They closed in 1536. Stixwold was also suppressed in the same year but was almost immediately refounded to accommodate the nuns from Stainsfield. The suppression procedure involved a further visit by commissioners to revalue the land, buildings and contents and make decisions regarding their disposal, as well as making arrangements where necessary for the futures of the inhabitants.

By 1540 all the monasteries were closed. Henry took the land and buildings, stripping them of valuable objects and treasures. Most of the monastic land and buildings passed to his supporters within the county. Henry instructed that the abbey churches should be demolished or at least have their roofs removed to speed their ruination, but he allowed other buildings to remain. In many cases the abbey cloister and surrounding buildings were converted into great houses. This was what happened at Tupholme Abbey.

The Pilgrimage of Grace and the Lincolnshire Rising 1536

The Pilgrimage of Grace was a catholic rebellion in the north of England against the changes that were being imposed at the Reformation by Henry. The rebellion first broke out in Lincolnshire with the Lincolnshire Rising.

Lasting for little more than a week, the Lincolnshire Rising was concentrated mainly in parts of Lindsey in the north of the county. It was provoked by a combination of the closure of the lesser monasteries, visitations of the clergy and increased taxation. At the end of September three separate visitations were taking place in the area and rumours were beginning to circulate that parish churches and their contents were also under threat. The rebels were made up of both ordinary men (the commons) and members of the gentry (the gentlemen).

The rebellion began in Louth on the evening of Sunday October 1st with about 100 people assembling outside the church. The following day they gathered more support from the surrounding area. They seized some of Henry's commissioners who were working in the town, including the bishop of Lincoln's steward, Sir John Heneage, and made them swear an oath 'to be true to Almighty God, to Christ's Catholic Church, to our sovereign Lord the King, and unto the Commons of this realm'.

On Tuesday 2nd they travelled to Caistor and forced members of the commission there to return with them to Louth where they too were made to take the oath. In the meantime the rebellion was gathering momentum and spreading to Horncastle, Spilsby and Alford. On Wednesday the protests in Horncastle erupted into violence and two commissioners, Dr Rayne and George Wolsey were deliberately killed.

Also on the Wednesday groups of rebels from Rasen and Alford came into Louth and the assembly prepared to march to Lincoln the following day. They reached Market Rasen on Thursday night where they were joined by a contingent of about 10,000 men from the north of the county. On Friday they continued on to Grange de Lings just north of Lincoln. Meanwhile the Horncastle rebels were also approaching Lincoln, about 100 of them staying on the way at Barlings Abbey in the Witham valley where they enlisted the support of the Abbott and some of his canons (although they were probably unwilling participants). By Saturday October 7th, therefore, a large force of men was gathered in and around Lincoln. It is thought that they may have numbered around 30,000. Over the weekend a list of demands was drawn up to send to the king and on Monday 9th a letter was dispatched.

The king, however, had already been informed of the Lincolnshire protests by Lord Burgh who had escaped the rebels in Caistor on the Tuesday. Other gentlemen loyal to Henry, among them Lord Hussey in Sleaford, had also managed to avoid being taken. By the time the letter was sent forces to put down the uprising were already being gathered. Henry was furious when news of the rebellion reached him, famously calling Lincolnshire 'the most brute and beastly shire in the realm'. His response to the letter was to refuse all the demands, to urge the gentlemen to round up the ringleaders and to persuade the commons to disperse. A body of his men led by the Duke of Suffolk were approaching the county from the south, forces were gathering in Nottingham, and attempts were

being made within Lincolnshire to raise further men, although loyalty there was not always forthcoming and Lord Hussey and Lord Burgh could not raise the numbers that were expected of them.

Despite the fact that by this time Yorkshire was also rising and that some of the rebels were keen to carry on, the commons were persuaded to disperse and by the time the king's men arrived on Friday 13th they had largely departed leaving the gentry to face the wrath of the king alone. The Lincolnshire Rising was therefore over but the rebels had posed a major threat to Henry and he was still faced with dissent in other areas of the country, notably in Yorkshire.

What happened after the Rising?

After the Lincolnshire Rising some of those who had been involved were executed for their involvement. These included the Abbott of Bardney and four of his canons who were found guilty of treason and hanged at Lincoln on 26th March 1537. A similar fate befell Lord Hussey, who was put to death because Henry considered that he had not acted swiftly or forcefully enough to quell the rebellion.

Henry also made sure that his loyal supporters had a strong presence in the county by passing confiscated monastic land and properties into their ownership. Three important noblemen in particular consolidated their positions in the county at this time; Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk, who was the king's brother-in-law, Edward Fiennes, Lord Clinton and Saye, and Thomas Manners, 1st Duke of Rutland. Other notable families also benefitted at that time, for example the Tyrwhitts and the Heneages who were granted Bardney Abbey and Tūpholme Abbey respectively.

Sources

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