

The English Reformation

How and why did Henry VIII force a break with the Catholic Church? Use this timeline to chart the key events of the English Reformation

Reformation

The English Reformation was a tumultuous period in English history, involving a long period of religious political turmoil with international repercussions. Few would have predicted in 1517 that Martin Luther's protest against church abuses would eventually lead to such a significant religious change in England. Indeed, King Henry VIII rushed to the defence of the papacy and of the Catholic Church. He was rewarded by Pope Leo X with the latin title '*Fidei Defensor*' meaning 'Defender of the Faith'. It's a title still used today by the British monarchy and can be seen on every British coin (the letters FD).

A few years later, however, Henry's attitude had changed. His marriage to Catherine of Aragon had only produced a daughter, rather than the son he craved, and with the Queen now in her 40s further children seemed unlikely. Henry sought an annulment of his marriage but the Pope refused.

1515 1520 1525 1530 1535 1540 1545 1550 1555 1560

1521
Henry VIII writes in defence of Catholicism and is rewarded with the title *Fidei Defensor* (Defender of the Faith) by the Pope

1532
Laws passed preventing English church appealing to the Pope and making laws without royal consent

1534
Act of Supremacy establishes Henry as head of the Church of England

1547
Edward VI becomes King

1553
Mary I becomes Queen and returns England to papal obedience

1559
Act of Supremacy makes Elizabeth head of the Church of England. The Act of Uniformity establishes a national set of rules for the English church

1529
Henry fails to get his marriage to Catherine of Aragon annulled

1533
Archbishop Cranmer annuls the marriage with Catherine of Aragon, Henry marries Anne Boleyn

1536
Act of Dissolution begins process of closing monasteries with the revenues going to the King; Pilgrimage of Grace occurs, a major rebellion in Yorkshire against the religious changes

1549
The Book of Common Prayer is published

1558
Elizabeth becomes Queen

The Church of England

During the early 1530s Henry, and those advising him including Thomas Cromwell and Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, reduced the ability of the Papacy to interfere in English affairs. By 1533, Henry felt confident enough to divorce Catherine and marry Anne Boleyn. In 1534, Parliament passed the Act of Supremacy, making Henry head of the Church of England and two years later the dissolution of the monasteries began. The lands, revenues and treasures of these monasteries now belonged to the Crown, and the ruins of many of these once massive complexes are scattered over the English countryside.

Henry's split with Rome was primarily political, not religious. Some historians have described Henry as a schismatic Catholic, not a true Protestant. Many English people remained adamantly opposed to the rapid changes being imposed. The Pilgrimage of Grace in Yorkshire is evidence of the deep unease felt in many rural areas. Henry was ruthless about suppressing dissent but he also did not push the extent of religious change as far as many protestants wanted.

Changes after Henry

On his death in 1547, the crown passed to his 9-year-old son, Edward VI, and those ruling on his behalf pushed England in a much more radical direction. *The Book of Common Prayer*, first published in 1549 and revised in 1552, attempted to standardise English Protestantism. Edward's death in 1553 and the accession of his Catholic sister Mary led to an abrupt reversal. Protestant reforms were abandoned as Mary returned the country to Catholicism. Her repression of Protestants earned her the title 'Bloody Mary' but her death aged just 42 left the throne to her half-sister Elizabeth, the daughter of Anne Boleyn.

A new Act of Supremacy established Elizabeth as head of the Church of England in 1559 but Elizabeth deliberately avoided the more extreme Protestant demands and retained some Catholic practices such as priestly robes. The Elizabeth settlement, based on Protestant theology, but with many of the trappings of Catholicism, has proved to be the foundation of the modern Church of England.

ModernHistoryReviewExtras

Go online for a printable pdf of this centre spread (www.hoddereducation.co.uk/historyreviewextras)

Tim Lockley is a professor of history at the University of Warwick.