

Why did Wolsey acquire and develop Hampton Court in 1514?

The first buildings at Hampton Court belonged to the Knights Hospitallers of St John of Jerusalem, a religious order founded in the early 12th century to protect the Holy Land from the Turks.

The Knights acquired the manor of Hampton in 1236 and used the site as a grange- a centre for their agricultural estates, where produce was stored and accounts kept. Excavations and early documents suggest that the Knights had a great barn or hall and a stone camera (room) which they used as an estate office. There was probably very little, if any, residential accommodation.

For many years Hampton Court has long been a favoured place. A manor has existed on the site since the time of the Saxons. When the Domesday Book was written, its value was set at the sum of £39, at the time making it expensive.

The founding father of this great manor Hampton Court Palace was Cardinal Wolsey. It was he who expanded the manor house into something much more splendid.

Thomas Wolsey, born in Ipswich in 1500, was the son of a grazier and innkeeper. Wolsey was educated at Magdalen College on Oxford, and after becoming a priest he was appointed chaplain to Henry VIII. Wolsey won rapid advancement, and was appointed Archbishop of York and Lord Chancellor as well as Cardinal. Wolsey became Minister and the most powerful subject in the Kingdom. During the first twenty years of his reign, Henry VIII left the shaping of politics in the hands of Wolsey, who sought to give England importance by acting as an arbiter between France and Spain.



Wolsey began to acquire great power and wealth. He received his first major secular appointment in 1511, when he was made a privy councillor. In 1513 he assisted in planning and carrying out the highly successful English invasion of France; in the following year he secured a peace with France. By the time he was made (1515) lord chancellor of England, he already virtually controlled both foreign and domestic affairs for Henry.

Wolsey raised royal authority in England to a new height, but in doing so he incurred many enemies. In the popular mind, Wolsey, as the executor of policy, was responsible for the imposition of heavy taxes to pay for wars. He also was unpopular with Parliament and the nobility because of his power over the king and his ostentatious displays of wealth at a time when there was increasing resentment against the clergy. In affairs abroad Wolsey attempted to make England arbiter of the struggle for power between king Francis I of France and Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. Wolsey played the two rivals against each other, giving England the balance of power in Europe until 1529, when Francis and Charles made peace with each other.

Wolsey also rose rapidly in the church and a papal legate in 1518. After being made a legate for life in 1524, he wielded power over the church in England comparable to his secular power as chancellor. He aspired to the papacy and made an alliance with Charles for his support in two papal elections. The emperor did not keep his word, however, and Wolsey never achieved his highest aim.

Wolsey ruled England without taking Henry's other Ministers views into account. Wolsey made decisions first and informed the other ministers afterwards. In source five we see the Venetian Ambassador Gustiani summing up Wolsey's rise to power in this way: When I (Gustiani) arrived in England in 1515, Wolsey would say to him " His majesty will do so and

so". Later he would say "We shall do so and so". But in 1519 he would say "I shall do so and so" Wolsey had power, but didn't use it wisely. Wolsey was to power crazed and big headed, and thrived on this power.

Although Wolsey was a cardinal and a man of the cloth, there was nothing saintly about Wolsey. Source six shows us that he used his position in the Church to get power and wealth. He even kept a mistress and had a son and daughter by her. Wolsey was hardly acting as a cardinal, and even made sure that his son was given an important job in the Church. A Churchman should not have a mistress, and should a Cardinal live in such a splendid palace? Wolsey seemed more interested in wealth and materialistic items. Wolsey had made a name for himself, and had made his way up the power ladder, but the way he used this power wasn't always for the best.

Obviously Wolsey was a powerful man, and he felt his power needed a solid manifestation and reflection of his status. As Henry V^{III} had brought peace and a stable government to England, castles were no longer needed for defence, and so could be used for comfort. Wolsey used the current predicament to his beneficial advantage. So Wolsey set about building a huge, glamorous and spectacular palace. However, Wolsey acquired and developed Hampton Court Palace for three main reasons:

- Power / Status
- Health and
- Wealth

The main purpose of Wolsey's palace was to impress, and Wolsey tried his best to do so. Wolsey began building with the west front and made the main approach through the Great Gatehouse, which was then two stories higher than it is today, Source one describes the appearance of Hampton Court Palace. The predominating Red Brick was enhanced with diamond patterns in bluish black. Again, the purpose of having a huge gatehouse and diamond patterns was simply to impress and reflect Wolsey's power. The first thing a visitor would see when visiting the palace would be the gatehouse. This merely gave an initial taste of the sumptuous palace.

Hampton Court was highly favoured by Wolsey. Wolsey found the location of Hampton Court perfect. It was near enough to London, but unlike London. Wolsey escaped the London smog and chills that he had previously encountered with when he had lived in his London palace called York palace. Wolsey had suffered from dropsy and Colic whilst living in London, therefore Hampton Court provided Wolsey with good health.

The Area of Hampton Court was a very pleasant place to live, and had the country fresh air. Another reason linked to this was that Hampton Court was near the Thames, and was free from damp. Hampton Court Palace lies on flat land, which meant Wolsey had good land to build his remarkable Palace on. Wolsey also said that he chose Hampton Court as the site for his new Palace because of the nearby springs of sweet water at Coombe, and he preferred them to the polluted water of the Thames and had them tapped.



Wolsey acquired Hampton Court on June 24th 1514. Wolsey took out a lease on the manor of Hampton Court, and paid £50 a year, which was quite expensive at the time. Although Wolsey took up residence at Hampton Court for his health, there were other reasons too. We know that Wolsey liked to show off his power, and did this by living at Hampton Court, and

decorating it beautifully and having many important people to visit. It seems that the only motive in Wolsey taking Hampton court was simply to impress and show off. Wolsey thought that if the manor was to be a resort of pleasure, that pleasure was to be ostentatious and impressive. Wolsey was too into impressing and showing off, that he sometimes forgot his position and that his major concern was to know what was going on in the country.

Wolsey had many plans for his new home. Wolsey had noticed that peace and sound government had brought wealth, and that Henry VIII had built upon the achievements of his father. Wolsey was excited about his new residence. He believed implicitly in the political theory that 'foreigners' took notice not of words but of demonstration of affluence and power as commented on in source thirteen. Wolsey is really trying to explain that foreigners only took notice of spectacular palaces and great wealth, rather than those who spoke politically correct. Wolsey's palace did bring some good news for Henry as well. If any Chief minister is capable of having such a magnificent house and hosting such fine banquets, then the country must have a very powerful and self-confident King.

Source nineteen shows how admired Hampton Court was, and how others thought that Hampton Court was more elegant than the King's court.

“ Why come ye not to Court?
To which Court?
To the King's Court
Or to Hampton Court?
Nay to the King's Court.
The King's Court
Should have the excellence
But Hampton Court
Hath the pre-eminence”

Wolsey had many plans for his new home. Hampton Court was the first palace that Wolsey had built. As the country was in a current situation of peace, there was no need to build a castle with a motte, so Wolsey used this, as an excuse to focus on building a glamorous palace that would attract. Wolsey wanted a palace that would make others astound. Wolsey's palace was at a grand scale, and a new style. Wolsey made sure that he had modern conveniences, and had fresh water and pipes laid. Wolsey had a palace and not a fortress. Whether such a splendid palace should be the result of a man of the cloth was something Wolsey did not consider important.

Wolsey wanted to impress, and set about trying to make his palace as extraordinary as possible. Wolsey's palace was built around three principle courtyards. The Base court, the adjoining one also known as the clock court, and another court to the east, formerly known as Cloister Green but now known as the present Fountain court. Wolsey began building with the west front and made the main approach through the great gatehouse, then two stories higher than it is today. Again having such a high and tall gatehouse was to impress. The predominating red brick was enhanced with diamond patterns in bluish black; once again the lavish décor was to impress. The whole edifice was crowned with numerous turrets, each one capped with a leaden cupola (chimney). The exterior of that palace was further adorned with his coat of arms and a set of terracotta roundels, originally coloured. Wolsey wanted everyone to know that this great palace was his. Wolsey spent a lot of money on his new found home, making sure that every last bit of wall was covered in some sort of fantastic décor. Wolsey's palace was made of brick, not stone, and was built for show and comfort. In fact, it was so magnificent that his contemporaries began to wonder.

Wolsey liked to make a procession of events. So when Cardinal Wolsey's Cardinal hat arrived from Rome, it was brought by a protonotary from the Curia, who on landing was given a change of sumptuous clothing. Wolsey liked to impress, and made a more than needed fuss of the arrival of his Cardinal hat. Did a hat really need such an extrovert welcoming? In the eyes of Cardinal Wolsey, yes, being a man who felt impressions were everything. Source 14 states that two hundred and eighty rooms were used just for visitors to the palace and it contained a thousand rooms overall. This shows that Wolsey must have welcomed visitors to Hampton Court. Visitors to the palace often came on business so of course Wolsey

would approve of it. He was a big show off and as Source 7 shows, 'he kept his own court, quite distinct from the King's' in order to show he had power and money. He was also very lazy. Wolsey was obviously very impressed by physical beauty and felt this made more impact than words with visitors, backed up by Source 12 where it says 'foreigners took notice not of words but of demonstrations of affluence and power.' He used the excuse that it would make Henry look good when spending great deals of money on Hampton Court. Source 16 explains that any foreigner would have no choice but to be impressed at the magnificent house and five banquets, and that this must be the works of nothing but a 'very powerful and confident King.' He wanted to show all foreigners how great the King was. The rhyme in Source 19 states that Hampton Court was better than Kings was. 'The King's Court should have the excellence, but Hampton court hath the pre-eminence.' Hampton Court was by far the most supreme and the best.

Wolsey lost favour with Henry V111 because I feel Henry was becoming increasingly jealous Of Wolsey's power, and didn't want him as King to be out shined by someone else. When Wolsey failed to get a divorce for Henry, this was the perfect excuse to dispose of Wolsey and he did so, acquiring Hampton Court.

I have come to the conclusion that Wolsey chose to acquire and develop Hampton Court because of his power hungry nature. Wolsey had already risen to the top of his profession yet he still longed for more recognition. Wolsey could never give up the fight for more power. It was simply his character; he got power-crazed not big headed.