

English Renaissance – Henry VIII Court Rules: How to civilize the English noblemen?

Henry VIII became King of England in 1509, aged 18. He was determined to be a great king, looked up to by everyone. He showed this in lots of ways: his grand portraits, his keenness for French wars and his behaviour towards his court and to other kings. He also showed it in his control of every detail of his daily life. One measure of greatness at that time was the number of people that surrounded you, the more people, the more important you were. When Henry stayed at Hampton Court he was attended by nearly 1,000 people. Controlling this number of people was quite a job and in 1526, while he was staying at another of his palaces, at Eltham, a strict and detailed set of rules was drawn up by his closest advisor Cardinal Thomas Wolsey. Here are some extracts from these rules.

Source 1 A

[it] is ordered, that from now on the pages of the Kings chamber shall daily arise at seven of the clock, or soon after; making the fire and warning the esquires for the body similarly to arise soone after that hour, so as they may be ready in the King's chamber, dressed in all such things as relate, by eight of the clock at the latest. And moreover, that none of the servants of the said esquires for the body come within the pallet chamber, but be attendant at the door of the same, as well as pages, at the request and commandment of the said esquires, fetch in and bear out their night gear, and all other their clothing; and in the same way make them ready, as well at night as in the morning.

Source 1 B

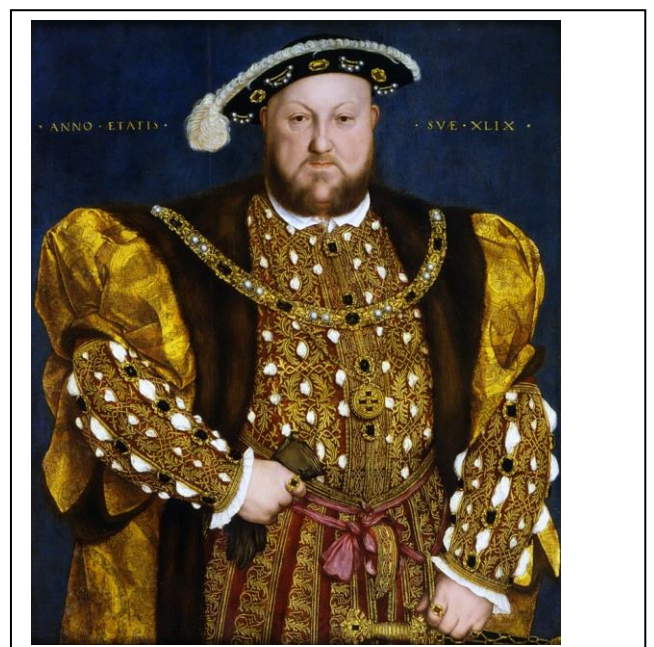
It is also ordered that the six gentlemen of the privy chamber, by seven of the clock or sooner, as the King the night before decides to arise in the morning, shall be in the said chamber there diligently attending upon his Grace coming forth; being ready and prompt, to apparel and dress his Highness, putting on such garments, in reverent, discreet and sober manner, as shall be his Grace's pleasure to wear; and that none of the said grooms or ushers do approach or presume (unless they be otherwise by his Grace commanded or admitted) to lay hands upon his royal person, or intermeddle with preparing or dressing of the same, but only that said six gentlemen : except it be to warm clothes or to bring to the said gentlemen such things as shall apply to the apparelling and dressing of the King's said person.

This is an extract from the Ordinances of Eltham which sets out the start to the King's day.

- Write down what the pages and esquires did each morning
- What did the gentlemen of the privy chamber have to do?
- Who were the only people allowed to touch the King?
- Why do you think this was?

Source 2 A

It is also ordered, that the King's barber shall be daily by the King's uprising, ready and attendant in the privy chamber there having ready, his water, cloths, knives, combs, scissors, and such other stuff as he needs, for trimming and dressing the King's head and beard. And that the said barber take special regard to the pure and clean keeping of his own person and apparel; using himself always honestly in his conversation, without resorting to the company of vile persons, or of misguided women, in avoiding such dangers and annoyance as by that means he might do unto the King's most royal person; not failing this to do, upon pain of loosing his room, and further punishment at the King's pleasure. [...] Nor also that there be no manner of playing at dice or cards, used within the same chamber, after the King be served for All-night, except it with the King's permission.



This section of the ordinances deals with the duties of the King's barber and the behaviour of his staff.

- How often did the barber visit the King?
- What tools did he use to help him with his job?
- What was the punishment for the barber if he mixed with the wrong kind of people?
- Why do you think that it was important who he mixed with?
- What were you not allowed to do in the King's chamber?
- When was the only time you would be allowed to do this?
- Why do you think it was so important,

Source 3

it is ordered that such persons as be appointed to the privy chamber, shall be loving together, and of good unity and accord keeping secret all such things as shall be done or said in the same, without disclosing any part thereof to any person not being for the time present in the said chamber, and that the King being absent, without they be commanded to go with his Grace, they shall not only give their continual and diligent attendance in the said chamber, but also leave asking where the King is or is going, be it early or late, without grudging, mumbling, or talking of the King's pastime; late or early going to bed

This piece of the document deals with how the people who worked in the Privy Chamber should act.

- What do you think is meant by the sentence 'shall be loving together, and of good unity and accord'?
- Why do you think they were not allowed to talk about what happened in the chamber?
- If you had to write a list of rules for the people who worked in the chamber, what would they be?

To Sum up (this must be written and handed back to your teacher, one paper by group, bearing each name on it)

Subject: Explain how these extracts from the Ordinances of Eltham help to explain the strong sense of personal monarchy which will characterize the Tudors.

To help you in your reflexio, you might tell the point of all this was to increase the importance of Henry VIII. How do each of the following points show this?

- having lots of servants
- having upper class people serve the King
- doing things in the right order
- strict control of good behaviour