

## **Book Review – Wolf Hall by Hilary Mantel**

The book received a mixed reaction and some of the members did not attempt to read Wolf Hall for a variety of reasons – too complex, too long, too many characters ..... However, those who embarked on the tome felt well rewarded both with the style and content. The score itself is a reflection of only those who read the book – 8.5. The members total 10 but only 6 scored the book.

The novel itself is set in Tudor England during the 1520s when Henry VIII is on the throne and Cardinal Wolsey is his chief advisor. One of the primary characters is Thomas Cromwell who is a clerk to Cardinal Wolsey. At this time Henry is married to Anne Boleyn and without a male heir. Henry is concerned that the country could be destroyed by civil war if he died without a male heir therefore Henry VIII resolves to annul his marriage.

Cardinal Wolsey is charged with securing a divorce for the King and therefore his freedom to remarry however the Pope refuses to grant his wish; he and most of Europe oppose him. The efforts by the brilliant Cardinal Wolsey to achieve the king's freedom destroy him as his failure creates an atmosphere of distrust on the King's part. Into this atmosphere of distrust and need comes Thomas Cromwell, first as Wolsey's clerk, and later as his successor.

Thomas Cromwell is the son of a brutal blacksmith and leaves home at a young age. He travels widely and self-educates himself through work and study. He becomes a political genius, a briber, a bully and a charmer, Cromwell has broken all the rules of a rigid society in his rise to power, and is prepared to break some more. Rising from the ashes of personal disaster - the loss of his young family and of Wolsey, his beloved patron - he picks his way deftly through a court where 'man is wolf to man'. Pitting himself against parliament, the political establishment and the papacy, he is prepared to reshape England to his own and Henry's desires.

A good read for all who persevere - **Score 8.5**