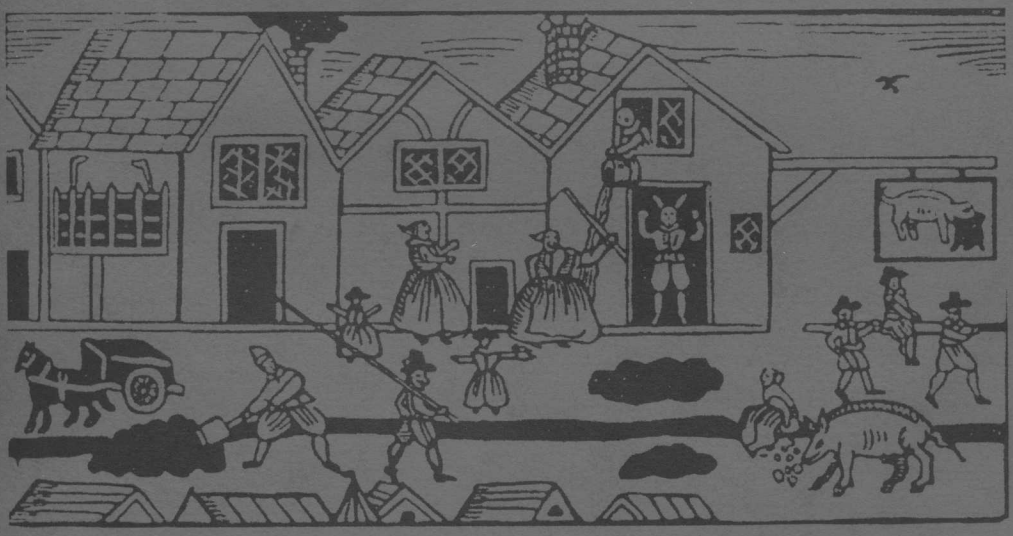
CAKE AND COCKHORSE



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Details of the Society's activities and publications will be found inside the back cover.

Cake and Cockhorse

The magazine of the Banbury Historical Society, issued three times a year.

Volume 16 **Number One** **Autumn/Winter 2003**

On 24 April 1564 the Banbury Corporation ordained four places for 'the laying of filth and dung': in St John's Street [South Bar] 'against the house where the wife of Hugh Slee now dwells', [two other places] and 'next the house where William Perkyns dwells...' Whether Mistress Slee and William Perkyns were consulted or given any option is unknown. But Ruth Brown has shown that whilst the smell might be obnoxious, its origin could be profitable.

Local history tends to be confined to recent centuries, from the Tudor period on. The reason is obvious: only for the past six centuries are records relating to 'ordinary' people abundant and in English. In all the forty-five years of *Cake & Cockhorse* we have only had a handful of pre-1500 articles (archaeological reports excepted). So it is with delight that we are able to reprint from *Warwickshire History*, published by our friends the Warwickshire Local History Society, Philip Tennant's article on an obscure (and unknown to most of our readers) 'rebellion' in 1321, which, though relating to Warwickshire and Worcestershire, must have had repercussions in Oxfordshire and even more so in Banburyshire.

Philip is a member of our Society and members will recall his *Edgehill and Beyond* (B.H.S. **23**, 1992) (itself stemming from an article in *Warwickshire History* which we were allowed to reprint). He has a wonderful knack of presenting national history as it reacted on the ordinary people who got caught up in its tumult. The research involved is evident from the footnote references.

Cover: Middens and Miasma (a woodcut reproduced in *The Oxford Illustrated History of Tudor and Stuart Britain*, ed. Morell, and appearing in many other publications).

MIDDENS AND MIASMA

A portrait of seventeenth century village life in Banburyshire

Ruth Brown

The English village. Three words which evoke images of rustic stone cottages, country pubs, rosy-cheeked inhabitants and cottage gardens. Strip away this romantic perception of rural living and what remains? What was the reality of a seventeenth century English settlement – a centre for industry as well as recreation? Most of all, what did it smell like?

This article will explore some of the everyday activities associated with seventeenth century village life within a ten-mile radius of Banbury, traditionally known as 'Banburyshire'. It will focus on those enterprises that would have contributed to the overall miasma that hung over the settlements of early modern England.

Agriculture

Although the effect of 'inclosure' was beginning to be felt, the area was still dominated by open field husbandry – a system that made the furlong, rather than the field, the cropping unit.

Since the end of the fifteenth century attempts had been made to increase the yield of arable land., but were with limited success.

'*...it must be admitted that the sort of husbandry exemplified by the Midlands system was never wholly successful in overcoming the central need for manure, limited by the availability of grazing*'.[1]

The shortage of manure increased its value. In an inventory taken in 1667 of the household goods of George Whitewell of Kings Sutton 'the dunge in the streete' was appraised at four shillings, showing that manure was a valuable commodity.

There is also a case of a Kings Sutton man instructing in his will that, on his death, his dung heap be equally divided between his two sons.

Manure comprised both animal and human waste. Along with the smaller dung heaps scattered about the village, there were also public cesspits where 'nightsoil' from chamberpots was emptied. R.B. Wood-Jones details the design and use of these cesspits.

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[1] J.A. Sharp: *Early Modern England: A social History 1550 – 1760* (London, 1987, 2nd edn 1997).

'Most of the Cottages and many of the best houses had a large vault as large as a small living room, and this was used for years without being emptied. Others of the more respectable class would have a box about 3 or 4ft long and about 18ins deep. This would be used until full.' [2]

When the manure had rotted well down it would then be spread on the fields. Well-rotted manure has little smell, but the fresh dung must have made an honest contribution to the miasma of the village and provided a perfect habitat for teems of flies and vermin of all types.

The provision of clothing

Preparing the hides in a tanyard.

Tanning

From the mid sixteenth century a gradual growth in industrialisation could be discerned. Tanning now took place in tanyards by skilled workers. There was a ready market in Banbury for shoes, saddles, baldrics etc and many surrounding villages had their own tanyard. To tan a skin was to saturate it with tannin, which was obtained from coarsely powdered bark of oak and hemlock.

First the hide was soaked in lime for about two weeks to soften it, before being dehaired with a blunt knife.

It was then soaked for 24 hours in diluted ammonia-rich pigeon dung to soften it further. Finally it was soaked in the tanning solution for up to four weeks. The skins were then hung up to dry before being 'dubbed' in grease – a mixture of cod-liver oil and melted tallow. The fumes must have been overwhelming![3]

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[2] R.B. Wood-Jones: *Traditional Domestic Architecture in the Banbury Region* (Manchester, 1963; 2nd edition, Wykham Books, Banbury, 1986).

[3] C.B. Cartwright: *The Household Cyclopedia of General Information* (London, 1881). Above illustration taken from this.

Making Linen

By the seventeenth century linen making was becoming more capitalised. However, there is some evidence, particularly from inventories of the period, that the whole process of converting flax to linen was still occurring in villages. It was an elaborate procedure requiring many steps over many months starting with the mid-summer harvesting of the flax, when it was dried and combed. The flax was then 'retted', a process of rotting the adhesive substances that hold the fibres together. This was accomplished by placing bundles into a stagnant pond for about fourteen days, then hauling them out and spreading them across the fields, where the action of the dew, sunlight, air and rain completed the process of retting in about two weeks.[4]

Flax Flower

Pulling flax – stooking – ripling – bogging
From *A Short History of the English People*, Vol. 4, London, George Newnes, 1892.

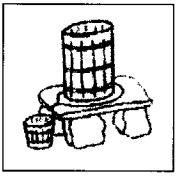
[4] *Linen Making*: www.theweaverscottage.com

One wonders, if the wind was unfavourable, what the villagers must have thought about the wafts of rotting vegetation drifting across their homes. Or did they notice the smell over the tannery and the dung?

Taking flax out of bog – spreading to dry – storing – beetling – breaking.
From J.R. Green, *The History of Britain,* Chapt. X, Vol. 4, 1892.

Soap Making

Soap was a valuable item at that time, even though the idea of bathing was not popular; it was needed for washing linen. Soap was produced by boiling lye and fats together. Lye was made by soaking wood ash in soft water. Stale urine or pigeon dung was added to strengthen its cleaning properties. The fats were prepared by rendering them to remove impurities. Waste fats from butchering, or collected cooking grease, were boiled in water on an open fire. Soap making was an outdoor activity. The smell from rendering rancid fat was too strong to wish in anyone's house – even the



Lye leaching apparatus.

seemingly impervious seventeenth century villager. When left overnight to cool, the clean fat would solidify and rise to the surface, making it easy to scrape off.

The lye and the fat would be then boiled together until it became a frothy mass. A small amount was then tasted (!) to see if it was ready. This boiling process would take six to eight hours. The resultant soft soap was stored until needed. To make hard soap, common salt was thrown in at the end of the process, but as salt was expensive and hard to get it was not usually wasted to make hard soap, unless it was for sale, when it was easier to store and transport. Hard soap for retail was often scented with lavender, caraway or wintergreen and sold as toilet soap in cities and towns.[5]

Laundry

Only linen was regularly washed. Woollen garments would have felted and shrunk if they were soaked and were too valuable to replace easily. In most seventeenth century inventories the first item to be appraised was usually 'His wearing apparel'. Clothes were inheritable items, passed from father to son and from mother to daughter. Presumably the lice and fleas were inherited with them! The process of washing linen was an arduous one. Any bad stains were removed with soap before being soaked overnight in a buck tub, the liquid then drained away and replaced with warmer and warmer solutions of lye which would be poured over the linen in the buck tub, the residual liquid being drained out from a tap at the bottom of the tub into a smaller buck called a buckette. Linen cleaned this way had to be well rinsed afterwards as it would have a characteristic smell, due to that vital constituent of lye, stale urine. Herbal rinses were much favoured at this time. Spreading the damp cloth over the grass would then bleach it. Providing the passing birds, village animals or thieves didn't get it, the oxygen released by photosynthesis by the grass, along with the sun, would bleach the linen in a couple of days. It could then be starched in a solution of flour and water. The smell must have been acrid, particularly in the earlier stages. It is no wonder that laundry was kept to a minimum, perhaps only done twice a year. There is supporting evidence from contemporary inventories that several dozen napkins and many pairs of sheets were commonplace in houses belonging to yeomen. This would be the quantity needed to support six-monthly wash days.[6]

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[5] *Soap making*: www.alcasoft.com

[6] Kevin Lodge (ed): *Landscapes and Laundry* (Eydon Hist. Grp, Vol 3, 2002).

Malting

Beer making was another semi-capitalized industry. There were many brew houses recorded in Banbury during this period. However, much of the malting was done as a sideline by villagers, the resulting malt being sold to the Banbury brewers. Evidence for this can be seen in local inventories, which often list malting, but no brewing equipment or brew house.

> 'It[em] In the killhouse seaventeene quarteres of mault rated at fower shillings a bushell
> It[em] in the mault house one mault mill & other Cumberments
> It[em] In the working house 2 mault garners'

An excerpt of the inventory of the goods and chattels of William Bradford of Bodicote, husbandman. 1623.

Barley would be harvested, then the grain soaked for 65-72 hours. During this time the water needed to be changed daily. The grain was then spread onto the specially tiled malt house floor to germinate before being dried and cured for about four days. The malt house needed constant air movement, so the aroma of toasting barley being vented out into the village must have been a welcome relief to the usual 'fragrance' of the village.[7]

Food

Food that could not be produced within the family had to be bought. Most purchases took place in the local markets, or in the village shops. Whilst the scent of a bakery could liven the appetite, to twenty-first century eyes and noses the butcher's shop must have been a nightmare. With little understanding of hygiene and few laws to protect the consumer, it is no wonder that the Englishman has inherited a taste for well-cooked meat.

Finally, add the pigs, cows and sheep that were grazed on every piece of available common land and the pounds to hold stray animals that wandered at will through the village. Add also the dyers emptying their vats of rotting vegetation into the gutters, the horses and bullocks being driven through the streets to the fields, the goose grease that was liberally applied to all things mechanical, and there is only one conclusion. Seventeenth century village life must have been noxious and at times nauseous.

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[7] Jonathan Brown: *Steeped in Tradition: The Malting Industry in England* (1983).

Did people notice the smell? Was it so much part of everyday life that people were not concerned? There is some evidence of an awareness in the better homes at least. Sweet smelling herbs were employed to disguise the smell of rotting rushes on the floor. Perfumes and pomanders were in common use and we have seen that herbs were used to perfume soap and hide the smell of lye. Perhaps there was an inevitability to the middens and miasma of the seventeenth century that was accepted by the locals, for who is to say how the standards of hygiene in the twentieth century will be judged in three hundred years' time?

BANBURY MUSEUM – OUR NEW MEETING PLACE

After many years of meeting in the lecture hall at the North Oxfordshire College, our committee, with much discussion, decided (by majority vote, almost the first in our existence) to move to the new Banbury Museum. Whilst the N.O.C. hall was excellent for accommodation (up to a hundred) and being tiered provided good viewing of illustrated talks, access involved three sets of stairs, a confusing approach (at least for newcomers) and invariably full car-parks within the College precincts. Members attending meetings were asked to express their views, which gave no clear resolution for or against. At the A.G.M. some dismay was expressed at our proposed change of venue.

After this concern it is a great relief that the move has proved to be an almost embarrassing success, in that at the October and November meetings (perhaps because of popular subjects) we have been sore pressed to accommodate all attending – sixty or more each time. Moreover, for the first time, we have been able to welcome disabled members.

We must thank Simon Townsend, who stays on after hours to supervise our arrivals and departures, and juggles the seats.

THE REBELLION OF 1321: A WARWICKSHIRE PERSPECTIVE

Philip Tennant

This article first appeared in *Warwickshire History*, **12**.1 (Summer 2002) and is reprinted here with the permission of the Warwickshire Local History Society. **J.G.**

All place-names have been modernised. Except for the earls of Warwick and Lancaster, articles, prepositions and titles have been omitted from personal names and a compromise spelling adopted to avoid the extremes of medieval variations. The maps are intentionally simplified: I am grateful to Olivia for her patient help with these. **P.T.**

In Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II* the playwright imagines Guy Beauchamp, the earl of Warwick and among the most powerful barons in the land, threatening to confront the king with a popular uprising from his midland power-base: 'all Warwickshire will leave him for my sake'. Actual events, in fact, had not quite followed that pattern, nor has much historical evidence emerged so far to suggest that the civil war which eventually swept Edward from power was fuelled to any great extent by the peasants' revolt of Marlowe's oppressed multitude, 'that are but sparks rak'd up in embers of their poverty'.[1] Yet the worst famine in English history, coupled with discontent over increasingly frequent taxation imposed by an inept young king busy squandering a rich inheritance, significantly aggravated the many undercurrents of social unrest, and the sheer precariousness of existence must have made both lord and peasant more than usually ready to resort to desperate measures.[2] Local gentry leaders found little difficulty in tapping this discontent and in mobilizing support to oppose the king's capricious policy-making, particularly after the English humiliations in Scotland,

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[1] *The Plays of Christopher Marlowe*, Everyman Library, 1950, pp. 226, 228. For Marlowe's rewriting of history, see the introduction to Christopher Marlowe, *Edward II*, ed. C.R. Forker, Manchester 1994, pp. 41-66.

[2] I. Kershaw, 'The great famine and agricultural crisis in England, 1315-22', *Past and Present*, 59, 1973. On taxation, R.H. Hilton, *Bondmen Made Free*, London 1973, pp. 146-7; J. Taylor and W. Childs, *Politics and Crisis in Fourteenth Century England*, Gloucester 1990, p. 21; F.M. Powicke, *The Thirteenth Century*, Oxford 1962, pp. 523-525; J.F. Willard, *Parliamentary Taxes on Personal Property, 1290-1334*, Cambridge, Mass., 1934, pp. 344-5. On Edward's inheritance, M. McKisack, *The Fourteenth Century*, Oxford 1959, pp. xvii-xviii, 1-2.

Ireland and France; and soon the hostility aroused by the king's favourites, the Hugh Despensers father and son, compounded the slide towards anarchy. A rare surviving contemporary poem of the 1320s paints an unremittingly bleak picture of these turbulent times.[3]

The earl of Warwick had already been primarily responsible for the murder of Gaveston, the previous court favourite, outside Warwick, and for the drafting of the Ordinances to oversee constitutional reform; and it seems worthwhile to consider Marlowe's passing acknowledgement of a Warwickshire dimension to the rebellion which eventually broke out in 1321. Much attention has been focused by historians on the course of the baronial wars in Wales and the Marches where the rebellion began, but much less on events elsewhere – a strange omission given the king's repeated orders to arrest those attacking his subjects throughout the Midlands with 'a great multitude of armed men, horse and foot', and Edward III's leniency towards debtors in Warwickshire, 'considering the damage and grievances that the community have suffered by the frequent marchings of the magnates in his father's time'.[4] In reality, the rebellion in the west, dramatic though it was, formed merely a brief prelude to a long period of serious disruption across the English Midlands, implicating magnates and their gentry followers together with an unknown but clearly significant number of ordinary local people. These events were reflected in their turn in an exceptional spate of litigation, involving crown representatives like sheriffs, justices and peace-makers, minor gentry and modest landholders; and this aspect has also been little explored by historians. In all this, Warwickshire was no more affected than its neighbours, but as a short essay cannot consider more than a part

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[3] 'Poem on the evil times of Edward II', in *The Political Songs of England*, ed. T. Wright, Camden Society, old series, vi, 1839, pp. 323-45; *Thomas Wright's Political Songs of England*, ed. P. Coss, Cambridge 1996, pp. xliii-xlv for interesting comments.

[4] T.F. Tout, *The Place of the Reign of Edward II in English History*, Manchester 1936; J.C. Davies, 'The Despenser war in Glamorgan', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society (TRHS)*, 3rd series, ix, 1915; J.C. Davies, *The Baronial Opposition to Edward II*, Cambridge 1918; B. Wilkinson, 'The Sherburn indenture and the attack on the Despensers, 1321', *English Historical Review (EHR)*, lxiii, 1948; N. Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II, 1321-1326*, Cambridge 1979. One exception is S.L. Waugh's excellent 'The profits of violence: the minor gentry in the rebellion of 1321-1322 in Gloucestershire and Herefordshire', *Speculum*, lii, 1977, though even he conveys the impression that the campaigning was restricted to the west (pp. 848, 852-3). *Calendar of Patent Rolls (CPR), 1321-1324*, p. 62; *Calendar of Close Rolls (CCR), 1330-1333*, p. 268; *Rotuli Parliamentorum (RP)*, i, p. 393.

of the whole midland area the focus will largely be on the single county at its centre. It was here, after all, that events produced such an exodus of residents that the collection of a levy was abandoned at one point because of 'the few persons which remain' likely to make it worthwhile.

Guy of Warwick's premature death in 1315 – claimed by a contemporary chronicler to be a political poisoning – robbed him of the chance of assuming the kingmaker role of his celebrated successor for which his character and career might well have fitted him.[5] Instead, a long period of political upheaval followed, initially dominated by the powerful Marcher lords and Guy's ally, Thomas earl of Lancaster, leading directly to civil war in 1321 and eventually, even though both earls were by then long dead, to the king's own downfall. At the time of his death the most powerful of the midland lay barons and of a family hitherto noted for its loyalty to the king, Guy Beauchamp, with estates spread across twenty counties, was the first earl of Warwick to assume national as well as local importance. After the Gaveston crisis he had been reconciled to the king and by 1315 was acknowledged as 'the king's counsellor'. His midland estates comprised large tracts of Worcestershire and Warwickshire, including castles, rich manors and the advowsons of a cluster of parish churches, together with many more overlordships and an impressive tally of over one hundred knights' fees – still a powerful factor in cementing loyalty to a lord even if no longer an automatic guarantee. Together with wide family links, a valuable network of allies and relationships formed the beginnings of a veritable Beauchamp affinity.[6] (Fig. 1)

Before concentrating on the political turmoil of the years immediately following Guy of Warwick's death, it is as well to emphasize that events must be seen against the sombre background of one overriding feature of the time, the great famine and livestock epidemics of which contemporary chroniclers have left such graphic accounts.[7] It is difficult

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[5] *Thomas Walsingham, Quondam Monachi S. Albani, Historia Anglicana*, ed. H.T. Riley, 2 vols, Rolls Series, 1863-4, i, p. 137. The earl of Warwick was forty-three, his son and heir Thomas (1313-1369) an infant of two.

[6] K.B. McFarlane points out that the only Beauchamp disloyalty in 178 years was provoked by the incompetence of Edward II and Richard II: *The Nobility of Later Medieval England*, Oxford 1980, p. 193. For the Beauchamp estate in 1315, *Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem*, v, pp. 397-413.

[7] The best contemporary accounts of the famine in England are *Johannis de Trokelowe et Henrici de Blaneforde, Monachorum S. Albani ...Chronica et Annales*, ed. H.T. Riley, Rolls Series, 1866, pp. 80-98, 104; *Flores Historiarum*, ed. H.R. Luard, 3 vols, Rolls

Fig.1. Estates of the Higher Nobility in Warwickshire and Worcestershire, 1315-1322

Medieval county boundaries. The Worcestershire hundreds of Doddingtree and Halfshire were held by the earls of Warwick as hereditary sheriffs.

- ● Manors of Guy Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, reverting to King, 1315
- ■ Manors of Thomas, Earl of Lancaster, forfeited to King, 1322

to exaggerate the impact of such a crisis on a society totally reliant on primitive agriculture; three centuries later, in a much better regulated economy, Shakespeare was still driven to evoke unforgettable images of similar natural catastrophes.[8] The effect on the medieval mind-set, a full generation before the ultimate misery of the Black Death, was powerfully apocalyptic: the world appeared afflicted, the horrors compounded by supernatural portents in which 'the hand of God appears raised against us'. Already the comet of 1313, it was said, had signalled the English *débâcle* of Bannockburn, and now an even more dazzling comet trailing across the bitter winter of 1315-16 seemed to testify to a general pestilence:

> *Finally there appeared a huge comet, conspicuous above the four regions of the earth, enthroned near the North Pole, shedding its rays all night long and holding its course from Christmas Eve until Twelfth Night, and foretelling later misfortunes to many parts of the world. And in the Year of Our Lord 1316 there occurred in the realm of England cruel and horrible deaths afflicting the people so far as to cause a splitting asunder of the spirit and the flesh...*[9]

The more concrete results of a medieval famine, at a time when England's population was probably unsustainably high, have often been described: high mortality, derelict homes, vacant holdings, land reverting to waste around dying villages and, inevitably, unparalleled inflation and

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Series, 1890, iii, pp. 174, 340-43; *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, ed. N. Denholm Young, London 1957, pp. 69-70. For excellent modern analysis, Kershaw, 'The great famine'; J.E. Thorold Rogers, *A History of Agriculture and Prices in England*, 7 vols, Oxford 1866-1902, i, pp. 197-201; E. Miller and J. Hatcher, *Medieval England: Rural Society and Economic Change, 1086-1348*, London 1978, p. 60; and for statistics, A. Briggs, *A Social History of England*, London 1983, p. 84.

[8] The sense of universal collapse and the malevolence of 'wreakful heaven' (*Timon of Athens*, IV.3) are powerfully evoked in the storms of *King Lear* and *The Tempest*, the supernatural portents in *Julius Caesar*, *Macbeth* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, Titania's speech in *Midsummer Night's Dream* etc. The parallels between Shakespeare's *Richard II* and Marlowe's *Edward II* have often aroused comment: John of Gaunt's dying accusations could as easily have been levelled at Edward as at Richard.

[9] *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, p. 64. The quotation is a free translation of *Flores Historiarum*, pp. 173, 340. The 1315 comet is historical, extensively observed December 1315-March 1316: G.W. Kronk, ed., *Cometography*, Cambridge 1999, pp. 233-5; *cf.* R. Holinshed, *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland*, 6 vols, 1807-08, ii, p. 554. One chronicler adds for good measure eclipses, earthquakes, floods and, in 1317, a plague of giant water mice: *Le Livere de Rois de Engleterre*, ed. J. Glover, Rolls Series, 1865, pp. 331-3, 337.

an increase in official corruption and crime. More specific evidence of these factors is required across the Midlands, but there are significant pointers. One estate manager in Leicestershire was obliged simply to ignore twenty acres of demesne in his accounts because 'he could find neither animals to till the land, nor even animals in the area to agist it as pasture'. Extensive tenement vacancies are recorded in Oxfordshire; income on Lancaster manors in the north Midlands declined steeply as thousands of acres went out of use because of severe stock shortage caused by murrain; there was acute depression at Tutbury and a similar picture for land belonging to Worcester priory; and, when Elias Collier, a prominent charcoal merchant living near Sutton Coldfield, was robbed nearby on the highway, the sheriffs were unable to recover any compensation because 'the people were so much indebted and impoverished by Murrein of their Cattel, dearth of Corn and other accidents that they were not able to pay'.[10] Desperation and hopelessness, reflected in contemporary literature, must have been the hallmark of these years following the death of the earl of Warwick, as revolts broke out in the provinces and the king feebly attempted to curb extravagant banqueting by grandees, set price controls – and check banditry in royal forests like Sherwood.[11] If the famine was indeed 'a turning point in demographic history', little wonder that the anonymous contemporary poet was clear about its purely moral effects:

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[10] Kershaw, 'The great famine', pp. 33, 41-2; J.R. Birrell, 'The forest economy of the honour of Tutbury in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries', *University of Birmingham Historical Journal*, viii, 1962 (also quoting the effects on local industry); *Victoria County History (VCH), Staffordshire*, vi, pp. 36-7; *The Liber Albus of the Priory of Worcester*, ed. J.M. Wilson, Worcestershire Historical Society, 1919, pp. 48, 73; W. Dugdale, *Antiquities of Warwickshire*, London 1656, p. 912.

[11] Holinshed, *Chronicles*, ii, pp. 554-7; M. Prestwich, *The Three Edwards: War and State in England, 1272-1377*, London 1980, pp. 142, 161; Miller and Hatcher, *Medieval England*, pp. 229-230; J.F. Baldwin, 'The household administration of Henry Lacy and Thomas Lancaster', *EHR*, xlii, 1927; *CPR 1313-1317*, p. 422. Robin Hood: it has been argued that the ballads may well refer to an outlaw of Edward II's time who was a follower of Thomas of Lancaster, and that the legendary visit of the king to Robin in Sherwood relates to Edward's northern itinerary of 1323 when a Robert (sic) Hood is named in the king's accounts: R.H. Hilton, 'The origins of Robin Hood' in R.H. Hilton, ed., *Peasants, Knights and Heretics: Studies in Medieval English Social History*, Cambridge 1976, pp. 224-5. *Cf.* also J.C. Holt, 'The origins and audience of the ballads of Robin Hood', *Past and Present*, 18, 1960, pp. 89-110.

And with that last dearth came there more shame,
That ought with good reason to make us all tame:
The devil was master, and raised such a strife
That each lord was busy to save his own life...[12]

Not surprisingly, therefore, the tenurial history of the Warwick estates following Guy Beauchamp's death is anything but straightforward, reflecting the twists and turns of competing interests in a national crisis, royal incompetence and a general breakdown of law and order which had been building for some time. Shortly before his death the earl obtained from Edward an important concession – 'out of the king's special affection towards him', it was said – that the Warwick inheritance be placed in the custody of his executors during his son's long minority. Considering the king's notorious unreliability, this was clearly a wise precaution against the all-too-common official meddling in such circumstances: one of the main charges soon to be levelled against the court favourites the Despensers would be that of acquiring the Warwick custody illegally.[13]

Intriguingly, however, though reflecting the sober character of a man who requested that he should be buried without pomp,[14] the earl's chosen executors were not ambitious political schemers but almost without exception worthy, obscure, apolitical men, predominantly Worcestershire clerics, long faithful to the Beauchamps but quite lacking the political status and will needed to fulfil their mandate in an increasingly cut-throat climate. They consequently played little part in subsequent events.[15] In a volatile situation, in which Guy's widow Alice

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[12] B.F. Harvey, 'The population trend in England between 1300 and 1348', *TRHS*, 5th series, xvi, 1966, p. 23. The poem is a free translation of *Political Songs*, p. 342, lines 412-24.

[13] *Calendar of Fine Rolls (CFR), 1307-1319*, p. 255; *CCR 1318-1223*, p. 494. The charges against the Despensers are detailed in *Statutes of the Realm (SR)*, 11 vols, Record Commission 1810-28 , i, p. 183.

[14] *Testamenta Vetusta*, ed. N.H. Nicholas, 2 vols, London 1826, i, pp. 53-4: 'My body to be buried in the Abbey of Bordesley, without any funeral pomp'. Dugdale summarises the contents of the will in *Antiquities*, p. 392.

[15] Guy's executors are named, in *CPR 1307-1319*, p. 265, as John Hamelyn, Peter Blount, Adam Herewynton (i.e. Harvington, Worcs.), William Wellesbourne and Roger Caumpes (or Caumbray, etc.); to which are added Henry Sidenhale, Richard Bromsgrove and Simon Sutton in *Year Books for 10 Edward II*, ed. M.D. Legge and W. Holdsworth, Selden Society, liv, 1935, p. 62, and John Hastings in Dugdale, *Antiquities*, p. 393. All these can be identified as being linked to the Beauchamps

pleaded that 'the king's escheators do no destruction or damage' to her dowry, the chosen executors were promptly side-lined while the king prevaricated and, pressurized by the Despensers, according to the authoritative Warwickshire historian William Dugdale, began appointing his own custodians. Within weeks, on 28 September 1315, arguing that 'it was excepted in the covenants made', Edward granted custody of Warwick Castle to Richard Damory, a current court favourite married to the king's niece although not, in fact, as events would soon show, a consistent royalist. While the royal advisers themselves were expressing misgivings over such interference, unrest broke out in the castle serious enough to warrant the king's sending a trusted envoy, John Walwyn, to investigate and punish unspecified 'outrages' being committed against him there.[16] Beauchamp properties everywhere were now being redesignated officially as 'in the king's hands' and their custody granted to reliable allies: Sutton Coldfield to the tyrannical John Somery, lord of Dudley and Weoley, on whom the king was relying for control of north Warwickshire; the Templars' manor at Sherbourne to a prominent Warwickshire loyalist, John Pecche; and Warwick Castle soon transferred to the dependable Walter Beauchamp of Alcester, an estranged cousin of Guy of Warwick. The biggest rewards of all, however, went to Hugh Despenser senior, who received the bulk of the estates, including the most profitable, Brailes, on absurdly advantageous terms. Widow Alice's dowry of manors (Lighthorne, Haseley, Beausale, Berkswell and Claverdon) was eventually granted, but otherwise only the late earl's goods, and crops sown on his manors, were to remain to

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over many years. The sole exception to their general obscurity (though the Hamleyns, Hastings and Blounts were substantial midland gentry) is Adam Harvington, a high-profile lawyer-cleric closely associated with Guy at first but later becoming king's clerk, chancellor to the exchequer in Dublin, abbot of Pershore, canon of Hereford and vicar of Tredington. He was one of a select few able to reconcile the conflicting loyalties and thrive seemingly without blemish under all three Edwards. See M. Hodgetts, 'Adam of Harvington, prelate and politician', *Transactions of the Worcestershire Archaeological Society*, xxxvi (3), 1959.

[16] *Calendar of Chancery Warrants (CChW) 1244-1326*, i, pp. 420, 425, 431-2. On the Despensers, Dugdale writes: 'so much was the king wrought upon by them whose miscarriages afterwards gave the discontented nobles opportunity to work his own ruine' (*Antiquities*, p. 393). It is unclear whether Damory actually took up the post offered: *CChW*, i, p. 432. The affronts to the king are not specified: '.... aucuns grantz outrages et despitz ...' which are to be 'bien et reddement puniz' (*CChW*, i, p. 431).

the executors.[17] In a clear hint at which way the wind was blowing, the rector of Tanworth-in-Arden, Thomas Talbot, a Beauchamp protégé, was replaced in 1318 by a Despenser one (who promptly sought leave of absence and was still 'in attendance' on Hugh Despenser as late as 1323), while the elderly Hugh also displaced Alice as guardian of the young earl Thomas in 1319. The whole haphazard episode of the disposal of the Beauchamp lands seems typified by the fact that at one point even the king's sister Joan, the nurse to the young Princess Eleanor, was described as 'keeper of the Beauchamp land and heir of Guy'.[18]

Besides providing the Despensers with this territorial windfall, Guy's death brought a second, equally important, result, in promoting his ally, the intractable and ambitious Thomas, earl of Lancaster, to a position of unrivalled supremacy within the ruling circles. Thomas was now the leading 'Ordainer', able to ignore or neutralize what little moderating counsel there was while indulging his naturally obstructive bent. With vast estates spread across twenty-two counties and 'more earldoms than an ass can bear', in Marlowe's delightful jibe, for a few short years he reigned supreme, able to rely on over five hundred liveried retainers and fifty or so knights – in effect, a substantial private army. Although a northerner, Thomas of Lancaster had extensive interests elsewhere, particularly in the Midlands. In Warwickshire alone he possessed ten manors centred on Kenilworth (Fig.1) where he entertained on a scale more lavish than the king himself, while at the same time upsetting tenants like John Pecche by seizing pasture to create a vast 800-acre park. Among his powerful allies in Warwickshire were sheriffs or members of parliament like William Trussell, lord of Billesley and

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[17] The redistribution process had evidently not been completed in 1316, when some manors are described as 'in the king's hands' while others are still 'earl of Warwick': *Inquisitions and Assessments Relating to Feudal Aids, 1284-1431*, 6 vols, HMSO 1899-1920, v; *CFR 1307-1319*, p. 331; *VCH, Warwickshire*, viii, p. 466; Walter Beauchamp had quarrelled with Guy, *c.*1300, and had then been the king's steward for many years. *CFR 1307-1319*, pp. 331-2; *CPR 1313-1317*, pp. 121, 123-4, 664; *CChW 1244-1326*, p. 472; *CCR 1313-1318*, p. 491.

[18] *The Register of Thomas de Cobham, Bishop of Worcester*, ed. E.H. Pearce, Worcestershire Historical Society, 1930, pp. 233, 238-9, 242, 260; P.A. Bill, 'Five aspects of the medieval parochial clergy of Warwickshire', *University of Birmingham Historical Journal*, x, 1966; *CCR 1327-1330*, p. 192; *CCR 1343-1346*, p. 59. Hugh Despenser senior remained Thomas's guardian until 1325 when the king replaced him: *Register of Thomas Cobham*, pp. 242, 244.

Milverton, and Peter Lymesey, lord of Arley and a whole cluster of estates around Long Itchington and Radford Semele; and many more similarly prominent figures from Staffordshire, Leicestershire and Northamptonshire: Robert Holland, who enjoyed the privilege of a special chamber reserved for him in Kenilworth Castle, Roger Beler, Hugh Cuilly and several members of the Northamptonshire Segraves. Many of these had already proved their political credentials by joining Guy of Warwick and Thomas of Lancaster to destroy Gaveston in 1311, been pardoned for supporting Thomas again in further disruption in 1318, and were quite ready to act against the new favourites in 1321.[19]

There was yet a third, more imponderable factor in attempting to characterise Warwickshire's political complexion at this time. Lacking any geographical unity and highly fractured in its manorial structures, the entire county presented an intricate patchwork of small estates representing the territorial ambitions of competing gentry, made even more complex by the universal practice of sub-infeudating or sub-letting: Brailes and Tanworth, for example, comprised five and eleven sub-manors respectively leased by the earl of Warwick to rival lords.[20] Few medieval barons cohabited easily or for long with their neighbours, and normal tensions easily degenerated into vicious feuding with a political edge as rivals lodged cheek-by-jowl. The ultra-loyalist Pecche family had long-standing interests in Honiley, bordered on one side by the earl of Warwick's Wedgnock Park and on the other by Thomas of Lancaster's Kenilworth Park. Studley's twin lords, loyalists Peter

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[19] Marlowe, *The Plays*, p. 233. The definitive and wide-ranging study of Earl Thomas is J.R. Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster, 1307-1322*, London 1970, *cf.* pp. 32-5, 40-66 etc. See also McKisack, *Fourteenth Century*, pp. 47-9, 67-8; Miller and Hatcher, *Medieval England*, pp. 299-30; J.F. Baldwin, 'The household administration of Henry Lacy and Thomas of Lancaster', *EHR*, xlii, 1927, pp. 193-4; G.A. Holmes, *Estates of the Higher Nobility in Fourteenth Century England*, Cambridge 1957, App. 2, pp. 134-42; *VCH, Warwickshire*, ii, p. 290. The rebel pardons granted in 1318 and 1321 are listed in *Parliamentary Writs and Writs of Military Summons (PW)*, 2 vols, Record Commission 1827-34, ii, pp. 164-8; and Thomas Rymer, *Foedera (RF)*, 4 vols, Record Commission 1816-30, ii, pp. 230-1.

[20] B.K. Roberts, 'The historical geography of moated homesteads in the Forest of Arden, Warwickshire', *Transactions of the Birmingham Archaeological Society (TBAS)*, lxxxviii, p. 65n. The dauntingly complex Fig. 3 of this article illustrates the problems in studying landholding patterns, *c.*1315. Such split manors were often recognised by name (*e.g.* Shustoke Mowbray and Shustoke Cuilly, Pailton Cuilly and Pailton Lymesey), some remaining to this day (Wellesbourne Hastings and Wellesbourne Mountford).

Corbizon and John Middlemore, cannot have easily accommodated the interests of the prominent Thomas Blankfront of Alvechurch, who owned the water-mill, and another landholder, John Hastings, of the particularly fractious Warwickshire family. At Kineton the same rebels, Blankfront and Hastings, along with another, Nicholas Segrave, may have co-existed fairly amicably, but the hundred bailiffs who exploited the rich Feldon pastures included political opponents like Robert Atwood and John Andrew. Similarly, when in the north of the county, as already noted, the domineering John Somery of Dudley and Weoley was given custody by the king of Sutton Coldfield, he acquired as neighbours the militant outsider John Wylington at Wiggins Hill, the Lancastrian retainers Hugh Cuilly and Peter Lymesey who possessed a cluster of manors at Curdworth, Shustoke, Minworth, Dunton, Lea Marston and Coleshill, and the Marmions at their family fortress uncomfortably close at Tamworth – and all this in a district already considered by the royalist Ralph Bassett at Drayton as his own (Fig.2).

The ramifications of such a situation are endless, but clearly the county had an in-built tendency towards instability and confrontation. Of course, it is impossible to disentangle distrust of a weak king from genuine fears prompted by economic insecurity or the normal gentry urge towards self-aggrandizement; but in so far as it is possible to generalize about a time of short-term opportunism rather than idealism – a tendency clearly encouraged by the famine – Warwickshire's loyalty to the king appears extremely suspect. The omens were certainly not good, all the more so as the county had almost continuous Lancastrian representation in Parliament in these years, providing the basis for an almost permanent obstruction of central or local government, while the sheriffdom was scarcely better, some of the same names recurring in both capacities. In the jargon of the day, it was to be largely 'contrariant' country (along with Worcestershire, Leicestershire and Staffordshire but unlike, say, Oxfordshire), needing little excuse effectively to paralyse a central government already under severe strain.[21]

It is not difficult, therefore, to recognize in early fourteenth-century Warwickshire the potential for disruption by over-mighty barons patronised by the great magnates, the thrust of personal ambition and

[21] Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster*, p. 64. Sheriffs are listed in Public Record Office (PRO) (now National Archives), *Lists and Indexes*, ix, 1963, p. 144 and (with minor discrepancies) by Dugdale, *Antiquities*, p. 1150.

economic insecurity, or the bitterness of individual rivalries. Here as elsewhere the power wielded by aristocratic followers was almost total. Wealthy knights, entrusted by the crown with important legal and administrative duties as sheriffs, commissioners, justices and esheators, were at the same time being supported by magnates whom they often served as indentured retainers and from whom they regularly received annuities and gifts. Many had extensive judicial powers in cases of theft, assault and rape and could arrest and hang felons. Locally, their capacity to influence events and misuse power was almost limitless. Not surprisingly, it seemed to contemporary chroniclers that the conflict against the king was essentially one which pitted one set of household retainers against another.[22] Their authority was well-nigh unchallengeable. William Trussell, for example, the king's sheriff at the time of Guy of Warwick's death, was also one of Thomas of Lancaster's staunchest allies in Warwickshire and Leicestershire. He could give orders to local mayors, demand compliance accompanied by threats, exact payment for a variety of dubious personal expenses and still receive generous gifts to keep him good-humoured. His power grew still further as events unfolded, culminating eventually in a central role in Edward's deposition, as depicted by Marlowe. Opposed to him in north Warwickshire was John Somery, lord of Dudley and Weoley. He acquired Sutton Coldfield on Guy's death and, as already noted, was regarded by the chief justice William Bereford as little better than a tyrant:

> *...he had taken upon himself so great authority in Staffordshire that no man could have law or reason...and domineered there more than a king; as also that it was no abiding for any man in those parts except he well bribed the said John for protection, or yielded him much assistance towards the building of his castle; and that the said John did use to beset men's houses for to murder them, as also extorted large sums of money from them.*[23]

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[22] Baldwin, 'Household administration', p. 91; Waugh, 'Profits of violence'; G.A. Holmes, *The Later Middle Ages, 1275-1485*, London 1974, p. 110; Holmes, *Estates of the Higher Nobility*, p. 72; A. Harding, *The Law Courts of Medieval England*, London 1973. A celebrated later statute condemned retainers as 'maintainers, instigators, barretors, procurers and embracers of quarrels' (*SR*, ii, p. 75); *cf.* N.B. Lewis, 'The organization of indentured retainers in fourteenth century England', *TRHS*, 4th series, xxvii, 1945.

[23] For Trussell, *VCH, Warwickshire*, iii, p. 60; *CFR*, iii, pp. 102-3; W. Dugdale, *The Baronage of England*, 2 vols, London 1675-6, ii, p. 143; *The Records of the Borough of Leicester*, I, ed. M. Bateman, London 1899, pp. 328-30 (in Marlowe's play he relieves the king of his crown in the deposition scene, *Plays*, pp. 278-9). For Somery, *Inquisitions Post Mortem for the County of Worcester*, ed. J.W.W. Bund, 2 vols,

Peter Lymesey, another member of the north Warwickshire landholding élite and a trusted Lancaster retainer, while keeping a variety of crown appointments, was similarly overbearing. Exploiting the death of a husbandman, Roger Attleborough of Over Whitacre, by dispossessing his daughter Joan of her rightful inheritance, he was then faced with court action following a brave petition from this 'pauvre femme', as the record states, and threatened witnesses 'that if they should come before the justices, they should be killed, burnt and maimed'.[24]

A final example of this imperious breed is John Pecche, one of the king's most active servants in Warwickshire. The two John Pecches, father and son, of a family long distinguished in both spiritual and military affairs, were lords of Hampton-in-Arden, Wormleighton and Fenny Compton and, like their peers, did not easily allow dissent. In an obscure dispute at Wormleighton John Pecche the younger joined with Prior Alexander and his clerics of nearby Chacombe in 1315 to ruin the livelihood of John Port and his wife Agnes by a campaign of harassment, destroying property, killing and stealing livestock, devastating ripening crops and seizing produce – all at the height of the great famine. Later, after serving as the king's constable in Warwick town and castle in 1321, commanding an armed guard charged with arresting local malefactors, and then fighting for the king in Staffordshire, Shropshire and finally at Boroughbridge in March 1322, he led a protracted vendetta against a troublesome local family, the Dunheveds of Dunchurch, a manor allegedly mortgaged to Pecche. The case involved unpaid debts going back years, disputed inheritance and eventually murder. Events had already come to a head in 1319 when several members of the Dunheved family were charged with gang rape and fled the district for a time, before the murder of Pecche's local rent collector, another Dunheved, brought a further climax some years later. Having already seized his suspect, John Dunheved, Pecche arrived one midnight with his wife and an armed gang, broke into the family home in Dunchurch, stormed into Margaret Dunheved's bedroom, seized her by the arm with his mailed

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Worcestershire Historical Society, 1894, 1909, ii, pp. 112-16; *Historical Collections for a History of Staffordshire*, William Salt Archaeological Society, 3rd series, 1911, p. 352; Dugdale, *Antiquities*, pp. 716, 920.

[24] *VCH, Warwickshire*, vi, pp. 8-9: this 'blatant case' (Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster*, pp. 51, 63) is calendared *verbatim* in *RP*, i, p. 401, from PRO, SC8/6/260 (Ancient Petitions).

fist (the details are specific) and paraded the terrified woman naked to the company to prove that she was not pregnant with a potential heir. Three days later, Margaret claimed, Pecche used his powerful court contacts, Hugh Despenser the younger and Edmund earl of Arundel, to concoct a false murder charge against her husband of having shot the rent collector with an arrow to the heart. Guilty or not, Dunheved was pardoned, but legal wrangling between the two families continued well into the next reign. In its wealth of circumstantial detail this tortuous and murky case, unimportant in itself, is a typical illustration of the *sauve-qui-peut* climate of a vicious, fracturing society. Countless such cases feature in the legal records of the time; they are the warp and woof of history.[25]

How tensions manifested themselves locally is everywhere illustrated in the many surviving records, and they were apparent, of course, long before the rise of the Despensers seemed to legitimize rebellion. Though it would naturally be unwise to interpret each local affray as evidence of political unrest, many episodes, trivial enough in isolation, suggest ancient family feuds now being given a new edge in these turbulent years of famine and doom. The case of the Warwick friars pleading in June 1317 for the king's protection against attacks by the townspeople might suggest a religious rather than a political dispute, yet the two were usually inseparable. As already noted, Sherbourne and the Temple Manor, as part of the Beauchamp estate, had been hastily transferred at the earl's death to the staunch royal servant, John Pecche, to administer, but the friars were soon claiming brutality to their servants as well as the usual destruction of hedges and enclosures. Not long after, in early 1318, properties belonging to Pecche at Sugarswell, between Tysoe and Shenington, were attacked by a force of about thirty citizens who assaulted his servants, looting and burning their houses. The culprits were mostly ordinary local people, from Banbury, Epwell, Newbold Pacey and Pillerton, though some, like Edmund Hagley of Worcestershire, who had acquired land at Adderbury, Bodicote and Milton in 1316, Thomas Hastings, of the prominent Warwickshire gentry, and a large contingent from Coventry suggest a wider context.

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[25] *CPR 1313-1317*, pp. 422-3, 493; *CPR 1317-1324*, p. 59; *CCR 1313-1318*, pp. 503, 505. Dunheved incident: PRO, SC18/18/863, calendared in *RP*, ii, p. 418: Pecche 'lui prist par les bras ove ses mayns gauntes de plat & l'amena tot neu hors de sa chaumbre en la sale ...'. Waugh, 'Profits of violence', pp. 849-50, gives examples of similar bullying and extortion in Gloucestershire.

The powerful Hastings family held estates and advowsons in many parts of the county, several of the earls of Warwick, and was linked to some of the most intransigent Marcher families like the Bohuns, Mowbrays and Mortimers as well as to Thomas of Lancaster. Thomas Hastings himself was lord of nearby Shenington and Balscote, and could not have been unaware of the rival interests of the Arden, Clare and Despenser families in the immediate district as well as their deep involvement in the looming crisis in south Wales. The participation of several gentry wives in the violence and arson at Sugarswell, including Matilda Hastings and Isabel Hagley, would also suggest a planned operation rather than indiscriminate vandalism. Only weeks later – coincidence or not – it was the turn of the Hastings' estate at Shelfield, in Aston Cantlow, to be similarly attacked (Fig. 2).[26]

With famine and inflation at a peak, and with Scots' invasions, a Welsh uprising, campaigning in Ireland and rebellion at Bristol, the years following Guy of Warwick's death were desperate ones. Lawlessness had marked Edward's reign from the beginning, but now the purely political climate was degenerating too, and locally there was near-anarchy as administration was breaking down. Repeatedly between 1316 and 1320, orders were re-issued forbidding unlawful assembly, guarding the ports to prevent suspects leaving the country, punishing those found guilty of spreading false rumours, prohibiting jousting (long feared by the authorities as a cover for potential subversion), checking illegal recruitment and instructing constables everywhere to garrison castles as a precautionary measure. Following the disturbances at Warwick already reported, the trusty Walter Beauchamp was ordered in 1317 to 'install thirty fencible men at the king's wages' in the castle and to repair its walls and, anticipating possible siege, its mill. Hugh Despenser himself was to act similarly at Guy's former castle at Elmley in Worcestershire. In 1318 alone, with more disturbances reported in Warwickshire, orders against tournaments were repeated, this time every few months, in January, April, July and December, with the king being forced to admit that these orders 'have been greatly infringed'.

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[26] *CPR 1313-1317*, p. 675; *CChW 1244-1326*, i, p. 472; *CPR 1317-1321*, pp. 100, 174, 176; *VCH, Oxfordshire*, ix, p. 141 (the Clare connection). The influential Hastings family had very divided allegiance, and the fortunes of their many Warwickshire properties over this period would merit detailed research. Coventry, PRO, KB27/265, m. 12d.

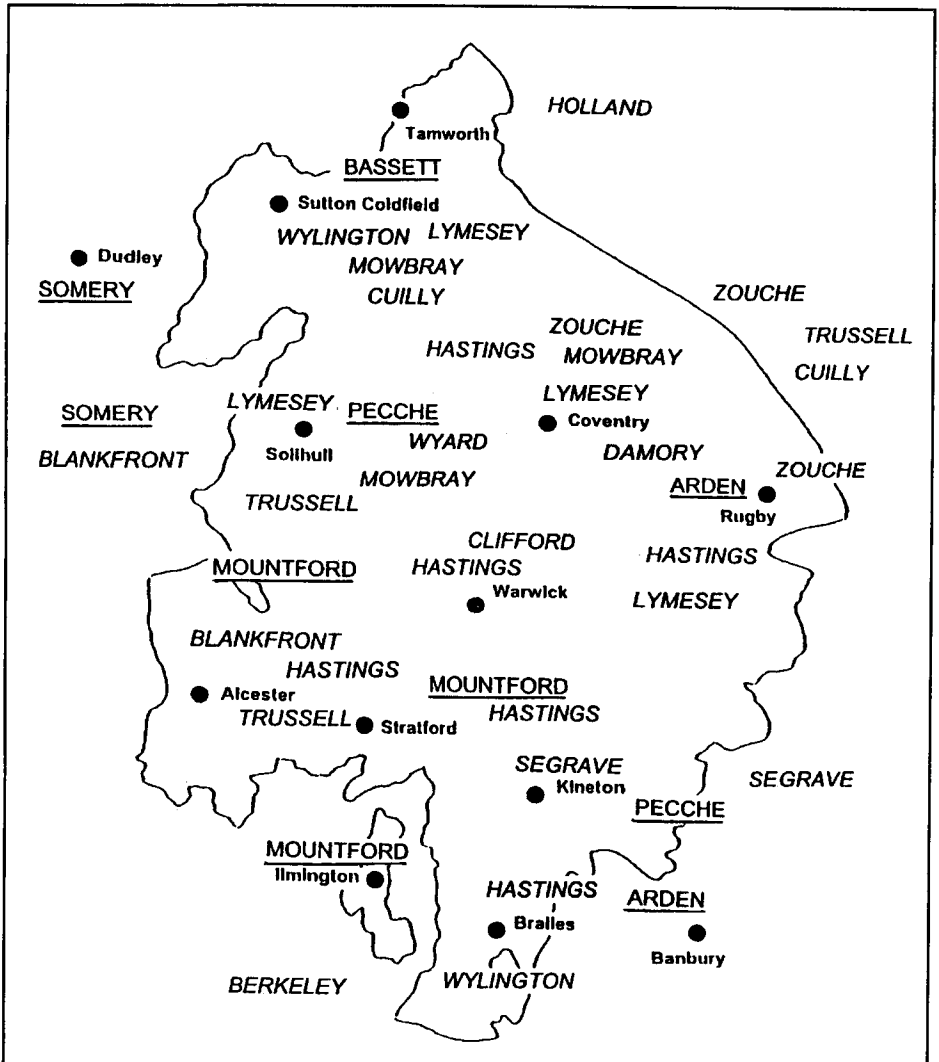

Fig.2. Militant Barons: Allegiance and Areas of Influence

SOMERY *for the King* BLANKFRONT *against the King*

Note: the Hastings family transferred allegiance to the King, 1322

Warwickshire shared in the general turmoil: with more men being hastily mustered to march north to confront the Scots, orders were re-issued to pursue and arrest 'vagabonds and malefactors' there. The situation seemed hardly containable, going beyond the perennial feuding of rival barons; indeed, contemporary records recognise the political unreliability of not only magnates and gentry but of others much lower in the social scale, stressing

> *...alarming disorders in various parts of the kingdom, occasioned by the misconduct of persons who, being of small estate or wholly without any landed property, raise large bodies of men-at-arms, as well cavalry as infantry, to whom they promise gifts of lands and tenements and sums of money, while other persons of great estate enter into illegal confederations.*

State officials themselves were profiteering: bishops, nobles and ordinary people later complained to the king at Kenilworth that commissioners levying troops

> *...have oftentimes aggrieved the people by taking bribes to let sufficient men stay at home and sending insufficient men who had nothing to give the king... and practising other extortions and oppressions.*

In Worcestershire in January 1318 orders were given to 'arrest various vagabonds and malefactors, as well knights as others, who, collecting great multitudes, commit various depredations'. The authorities were powerless, local people complaining that of the two official peace-keepers one was so old and feeble that he could do nothing while the other lived outside the county. In Warwickshire things were no better: four commissioners were named, John Pecche, Henry Erdington, Peter Lymesey and Robert Stoke, to imprison offenders in the county gaol at the king's pleasure; but by 1320 new 'conservators of the peace' were being appointed everywhere – in Warwickshire on an almost monthly basis. Belatedly, Edward tried to face up to a rapidly deteriorating situation which would indeed have tried the skills of a much wiser and greater king, but complaints against his own officers were mounting while he himself remained as inconsistent as ever; in June 1319 he considered the country 'tranquil', and in October 1320 the bishop of Worcester, in a delightful throwaway remark buried in a long business letter to the Pope, reported that the king was much improved of late, and was even getting up in the morning. As it was, an improvised stick-and-carrot policy was tried as threats and pardons, equally ineffectual, alternated. It was in this curious phoney-war that the rebel magnates and

barons finally launched their devastating attack on the Despensers' power-base in south Wales, in the well-known events of the spring of 1321.[27]

The leading rebels, or 'Contrariants', were the notorious Marcher lords whom even the king's formidable father, Edward I, had failed to quell; they need little comment here, since apart from Thomas of Lancaster they had only marginal interests in Warwickshire and were themselves never, as far as can be ascertained, active in the county.[28] Thomas's own name was conspicuously missing from the roll-call when the Despensers presented their charges against them the following year: he had not been in Warwickshire since his residence at Kenilworth in June-July 1319 and remained in the north as the attacks in Wales developed, brooding Achilles-like in his tent at Pontefract. But his substantial midland possessions, centred on Tutbury and Kenilworth and staffed by devoted retainers, ensured his tacit and, there is little doubt, active encouragement when the barons turned their attacks on the Despenser possessions in the English shires in June 1321. Responsibility for the actual violence in Warwickshire and the midland counties lay rather with an assortment of a dozen or more substantial gentry allied to the magnates in one way or another, including Thomas of Lancaster's own retainers and sympathizers from the now leaderless Beauchamp camp, all of whose local interests were directly threatened by the consolidation of Despenser power in the Midlands. It was this thriving, restlessly ambitious group, bound to the magnates by ties of service, obligation and common interest, who, with their resources of local manpower and network of lesser allies, commanded operations on the ground they knew so well, safe in the knowledge that, given the impotence of the king to stem the general lawlessness, they could act with impunity or would be protected by their powerful overlords if the need arose. All were members of long-established families, the names of

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[27] The widespread unrest is illustrated month by month in the various *Calendars*, *Parliamentary Writs* etc.: *cf. CCR 1313-1318*, pp. 71, 505. Both Henry III and Edward I had distrusted tournaments as a dangerous threat to public order: B. Wilkinson, *The Later Middle Ages in England*, London 1969, p. 19. *CPR 1321-1324*, pp. 385-6; *CChW 1244-1326*, p. 453. King's behaviour: *Register of Thomas Cobham*, p. 97.

[28] In addition to Thomas of Lancaster, the often-repeated rebel roll-call invariably includes Humphrey Bohun, earl of Hereford, the two Roger Mortimers (of Chirk and Wigmore), Roger Damory, the Hugh Audleys, father and son, Robert and Roger Clifford, Thomas and Maurice Berkeley, John Giffard of Brimpsfield *etc.*

some reflecting pre-Conquest Norman ancestry, and were no strangers to earlier feuding; whatever their original territorial base, they were by now substantial local taxpayers eager to defend their interests. Many, of course, like Robert Holland, the Lancashire magnate and protégé of Earl Thomas, and Thomas Berkeley of Gloucestershire, relished fighting as a way of life. Berkeley, we are proudly informed by his biographer, had already 'been 28 times in arms in the field', so that he and his son Maurice, successively governor of Gloucester, crown custodian of many castles and High Steward of Aquitaine, lost no time in joining the rebels 'and laid waste all the Estates of both the Spencers (Despensers), and at the next Parliament caused them to be banished'.[29]

Among the most influential in Warwickshire were representatives from familiar baronial families, like the Hastings, Cliffords, Mowbrays and Zouches, together with the Lancastrian gentry already referred to: Hugh and Roger Cuilly, Peter and Richard Lymesey, Robert and Richard Holland, William Trussell and Roger Beler. Others were substantial local knights, like John Bishopsdon of Lapworth, where he had recently added a magnificent gatehouse and built a moated manor house at nearby Bushwood, Thomas Baddesley of Baddesley Clinton, and other similar figures, like John Wyard, Geoffrey Beaufoy and Thomas Blankfront from Worcestershire and Herefordshire, John and Nicholas Segrave from Northamptonshire, and John and Henry Wylington from farther afield, all of whom possessed estates in Warwickshire. (Fig. 2) Apart from these leading figures, however, was a large body of middling gentry whose precise level of active involvement in the rebellion remains uncertain but who were certainly sympathizers, since they were punished by having their land temporarily forfeited as 'adherents' before being later pardoned: John Grendon of Stretton-on-Fosse, William Grevil of Burmington, William and Margaret Keynes of Oxhill, Gilbert and Robert Marshall of Ilmington and Barton-on-the-Heath, the East Anglian immigrant Saer Rochford and his wife Elizabeth of Budbrooke, John Twyford, lord of Stretton Baskerville, and Richard Whitacre of Elmdon and Over Whitacre.

Finally, the list of contrariants would not be complete without the addition of one more prestigious name, that of the 'monstrously

[29] J.R. Maddicott, 'Thomas of Lancaster and Sir Robert Holland: a study in noble patronage', *EHR*, lxxxvi, 1971; McKisack, *Fourteenth Century*, pp. 50-1, 204; *John Smyth, the Lives of the Berkeleys*, ed. J. Maclean, 3 vols, Gloucester 1883, i, pp. 186, 221; R. Atkyns, *The Ancient and Present State of Glostershire*, London 1712, p. 264.

successful adventurer' Roger Mortimer of Wigmore. Already powerful in Worcestershire and having served the king well in Gascony, Wales and Ireland but linked by marriage to the Beauchamps and the Berkeleys and allied to rebel lords like Hugh Audley, Roger Damory and John Maltravers, Mortimer was soon to eclipse everyone in his meteoric rise to power, acquiring Beauchamp estates in Worcestershire and Warwickshire in the process. When the Despenser threat to his own Welsh interests drove him to rebellion, it was under his banner that many of the previously-named enlisted in the anti-Despenser campaign across the midlands.[30]

It is unclear to what extent the midland attacks were pre-planned or exactly how they were stage-managed; one crucial source, the invaluable Parliamentary Writs, has, perhaps significantly, an unaccountable gap for the summer of 1321 which has led historians either to ignore these several defining months, or even to assume that 'much of the summer passed without any further confrontation between the two camps'. But the Despensers themselves later claimed unambiguously that the rebels 'allied themselves together by oath and writings without the king's leave' before launching their attacks on St Barnabas's day, 11 June. Thomas of Lancaster had convened rebellious assemblies at his Pontefract headquarters in February and May, and an undated secret letter clearly refers to one of these: the magnates 'and all the others', it states, are assembled at Pontefract, ready 'to go with us in England and Wales ...and live and die with us in our quarrel'. The midland attacks began, therefore, if the Despenser petition is to be believed, between the Pontefract meeting of 24 May and the further, much-discussed one, at Sherburn-in-Elmet in Yorkshire on 28 June; and the seizure of Warwick Castle by the rebels, about 9 June, may have been intended as the opening signal. The Despenser petition was not enrolled until Parliament met at York in May 1322, some six weeks after the collapse of the rebellion at Boroughbridge and the prompt execution of its leader,

[30] The major barons figure prominently in all the *Calendars* etc, already cited, *The Complete Peerage*, and many also in the useful *Knights of Edward I*, ed. C. Moor, Harleian Society, lxxx-lxxxiv, 1929-32. A few are included in *The Dictionary of National Biography*, including Roger Mortimer for whom, remarkably, no biography yet exists. Those who forfeited lands are listed (incompletely) in PRO, *Lists and Indexes*, v, part 1, pp. 440-62. The more modest gentry have to be traced in the relevant volumes of *VCH*, the many local history publications and transactions, specialised historical studies and, with difficulty, medieval legal records at the Public Record Office (*e.g.*, Assize Rolls, King's Bench records etc.).

Thomas of Lancaster, and so recapitulates much earlier events going back over a year. The part of the text relating to the estates of Hugh Despenser the elder (formally restored to him on 7 May) provides graphic detail of their devastation in some fourteen counties, including most of the midland ones, on or about 11 June. It describes the theft of goods and chattels, crops, huge numbers of livestock, quantities of stored meat, wine and cider, weapons, farmyard implements and household utensils.

Little of value was spared, not even ivory and ebony chess sets and their delicately inlaid boards. Roofs were stripped of lead, doors, windows and fittings removed, items of little value destroyed and the houses themselves then wrecked or set on fire. The gangs apparently had time to collect rents from some hapless tenants and imprison others, sell stocks of wood, destroy fishponds, hedges and fences, round up 'wild beasts' in the parks and coerce villagers into submission. In addition to the physical damage inflicted, events at Stoneleigh Abbey are stressed: here, in a significant precedent for many subsequent social protests, not only were precious stones and gold and silver vessels taken but also charters from ransacked coffers in order to destroy the Despensers' legal rights. Read as a whole, the account, unfortunately not particularized by manor, makes clear that the campaign was both violent and thorough: everything, we are told in the French text, was accomplished *nettement* in what amounted to a Despenser cleansing operation.[31]

Clearly, a campaign spanning all of the midland counties and involving hundreds of participants could not have been confined to the single June day cited; the earlier attacks in south Wales had lasted a week, and the midland sequel must have been of at least equal duration. The Despenser account merges events spread over not only the lawless, turbulent summer weeks between early June and the kingly pardons granted to the rebels on 20 August but many others following their return from exile in the New Year. Naturally, their huge estimate of an overall financial loss of £32,000 must be viewed with some suspicion (though the figure is not totally implausible), but what is of more interest

[31] Fryde, *Tyranny*, p. 45; *CCR 1318-1323*, pp. 541-5, 551. The secret letter addressed to Ralph Nevill is known only by an undated transcript calendared in *CCR 1318-1323*, p. 526, clearly out of chronological sequnce. No mention is made of the Despensers by the only chronicler to refer to the meeting of 24 May, but it is inconceivable that they were not discussed there: see Wilkinson, 'Sherburn indenture'. Maddicott also discusses this in detail: *Thomas of Lancaster*, pp. 269-79.

is the nature of the events themselves and their likely impact on manorial life and on longer-term economic prospects at a time when famine, estate retrenchment and inflation were already biting hard on peasant communities. The precise impact of such turmoil on dozens of midland manors must remain conjectural until much more original source material has been sifted; though some midland contemporaries in a position to judge, like the prior of Worcester in 1322, were in no doubt that the effects of the late famine were made infinitely worse by the marauding followers of 'great men' stripping the country bare as they passed through.[32] Certainly, where further evidence is available for individual manors, the picture appears dramatic. The ancient royal manor of Brailes, for example, at the very heart of the region under discussion and a recent Despenser acquisition, was evidently comprehensively sacked. By far the most populous community in the district, it had enjoyed a thriving market for almost a century and presented a successful mixed economy reflected, perhaps unusually for the Warwickshire Feldon, in an almost equal division between arable and pasture. In particular, it appears already as a major wool-producing and stock-rearing manor, since it was one of only eight Warwickshire townships supplying Leicester merchants with wool in 1300. Enterprising husbandmen, like the upwardly-mobile West family of Chelmscote, were leasing distant pastures for their large flocks of sheep which Brailes alone, apparently, could not accommodate, and substantial numbers of horses and cattle were also pastured there and in its linked settlement of Tanworth-in-Arden, now also under Despenser control. Worth over £90 per annum – hardly less than Warwick, and twice any other ex-Beauchamp manor – Brailes was clearly a coveted prize for the king's elderly counsellor, Hugh Despenser, when he was granted its custody in 1317 in the circumstances already noted, as it would be also ten years later for Roger Mortimer.[33]

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[32] The pardons are listed in *PW*, ii, 2, p. 167. The king obtained the opinion of his clergy that the proceedings against the Despensers had been illegal and they were recalled early in February 1322 (*PW*, ii, 2, pp. 172, 177), becoming fabulously wealthy. *Liber Albus*, pp. 48, 73.

[33] J.B. Harley, 'Population and land utilization in the Warwickshire hundreds of Stoneleigh and Kineton, 1086-1300', Ph.D. thesis, Birmingham, 1960; J.B. Harley, 'The settlement geography of early medieval Warwickshire', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, xxxiv, 1964; *Records of Leicester*, I, p. 253. The almost equal division between arable and pasture is confirmed by the late Tudor estate map at Warwickshire County Record Office (illustrated in *Warwickshire History*, xi,

This period of tranquillity ended abruptly one summer's day in early June 1321. Following the destruction of the Despenser estates in Wales and his attack on Bristol at the end of May, Roger Mortimer of Wigmore, now sharing control with the magnates, under the earl of Hereford, of a much wider campaign, invaded many of the Despenser estates in Gloucestershire and Worcestershire while at the same time the king took direct control of the former Beauchamp manor of Elmley Castle from Hugh Despenser, ordering it to be 'safely guarded'. Shortly after, contingents of Mortimer's allies, like John Wyard and Robert Harley, fanned out to attack other Despenser manors throughout the Midlands, with one force under three prominent Worcestershire gentlemen, Wyard, Thomas Blankfront and Geoffrey Beaufoy moving via Tanworth to seize Warwick Castle from the king's sheriff on about 9 June. At some point, Wedgnock Park was damaged and the castle water-mill burnt down. The rebels then continued south to Brailes, where the gates of the manor were broken down, living quarters and outbuildings damaged and chests containing legal archives ransacked. Parks were broken into and a vast quantity of stock valued at £2,000 seized and driven away in what must have been a major and lengthy operation: 200 horses, 100 mares, 100 foals, 200 oxen, 400 cows, 400 pigs and no less than 3,000 sheep and 300 lambs. Trees were cut down, the warrens thoroughly scoured and many 'wild beasts' taken (hares, rabbits and partridge are specified), the Tanworth warrener, John Blake, being present to lend his expertise. Wyard and Beaufoy were pardoned shortly after among the long list of Mortimer's followers, but were subsequently punished again when, together with Blankfront and so many others, their estates were confiscated after continued aggression. Blankfront and Beaufoy were imprisoned, Blankfront along with Mortimer's wife Joan, while Beaufoy provided security for good conduct and was later

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no. 5, 2001) and modern aerial photography. The Wests of Chelmscote pastured 300 sheep thirty miles away at Lea Marston in 1322 (*CCR 1318-1323*, p. 440) and by 1327 Richard West was lord of Chelmscote ('Warwickshire Lay Subsidy Roll, 1327', ed. W.B. Bickley, *Midland Record Society*, vi, 1902), thus escaping Christopher Dyer's comment that no peasant farmer possessed more than 100 sheep in Warwickshire before the Black Death: *Warwickshire Farming, 1349-c.1520: Preparations for Agricultural Revolution*, Dugdale Society Occasional Paper, xxvii, 1981, p. 30. Sheep continued to be of major importance at Brailes under the Beauchamps. Mortimer acquired Brailes by 1327 (plus Lighthorne, Milcote and Berkswell in Warwickshire and much elsewhere: Holmes, *Estates of the Higher Nobility*, pp. 10-14).

discharged on condition that he serve the king in Gascony – a frequent proviso in such cases.[34]

Such a dramatic catalogue of events raises a number of interesting wider issues, not least in questioning to what extent Brailes was a typical case in the Despenser wars and whether the Feldon was quite so totally plough-dominated at this date as has been supposed. It might rather suggest that successive earls of Warwick had developed here one of their most profitable ventures in animal husbandry – a policy confirmed by a later decision when reorganizing their estates to include Brailes in the list of manors to be kept in their direct control, and develop wool-production there on a scale soon to attract the major Cotswold merchant, William Grevil.[35] It is not being suggested that all the many midland Despenser estates were necessarily subjected to such a comprehensive ordeal, though further research would doubtless reveal that many were. But however well Brailes itself recovered later under the new young Earl Thomas, the immediate impact was evidently disastrous: six years later, shortly before a triumphant Roger Mortimer claimed it and several other Warwickshire manors for himself, it had been further looted and was valued at a mere £14, represented by sixteen oxen, three farm horses and some stored grain. Successive bailiffs' accounts would from now on refer to 'the site of the manor', as it took its place alongside other Warwickshire villages eventually to be categorized as 'shrunken'.[36]

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[34] *CPR 1318-1323*, p. 311; *CRF 1319-1327*, pp. 61, 74, 77. Warwick Castle: *Calendar of Memoranda Rolls (CMR) 1326-1327*, p. 246; *CCR 1318-1323*, p. 503; *CPR 1321-1324*, p. 161. Brailes attack: PRO, KB27/258, m. 24; *CFR 1319-1327*, pp. 169-70.

[35] Dyer, *Warwickshire Farming*, pp. 10, 12, 34; C. Dyer, 'Rural settlements in medieval Warwickshire', *TBAS*, c, 1996, p. 122. *CPR 1343-1345*, p. 251; *Warwickshire Feet of Fines, II*, 1284-1345, ed. E. Stokes and L. Drucker, Dugdale Society, xv, 1939, p. 200. The sheep figures at Brailes compare with those of other leading magnates like Thomas of Lancaster (over 5,000 in the Peak) etc: Miller and Hatcher, *Medieval England*, pp. 218-19; R. Trow-Smith, *A History of British Livestock Husbandry to 1700*, London 1957, pp. 137-8. By *c.*1397, sales of wool from Brailes were six times those of any Beauchamp manor and outstripped sales from all the Beauchamp estates combined: British Library, Egerton ms. 8769.

[36] PRO, E142/59, m. 3; E142/33, m. 15. Sixty years later Brailes was again highly profitable at £94 *per annum: Calendar of Inquisitions, Miscellaneous (Chancery)*, vi, p. 234 (Thomas Mowbray earl of Norfolk, 1398). The precise significance of the term 'site of the manor', used of Brailes and other Beauchamp manors in and after 1401, is unclear; but cottages were being built 'on' and 'outside' it, indicating expansion not on boundary waste but on land at the very heart of the manor: BRL, 167998, 167999, 168115, 168234 etc.

What makes it unlikely that such cases were exceptional is the continued deterioration of the situation throughout the Midlands during the autumn and winter of 1321-22, charted in page after page in contemporary record-keeping. By February 1322, however, the rebel cause was faltering and directionless: confronted by the king's unusual decisiveness and the return of the reinstated Despensers, Roger Mortimer had unexpectedly surrendered. Rebuffed in Leicestershire, where citizens told him that 'they despised his commands, and bore him no good will', Thomas of Lancaster set fire to Burton-on-Trent before disappearing north hoping to liaise with the Scots. His midland estates, now officially forfeited, were promptly looted by all and sundry: at his favourite Kenilworth, a hoard of £3,000 in coins and £40 in gold and precious stones disappeared even before his constable, Hugh Cuilly, surrendered the castle after an improvised blockade staffed partly by Coventry citizens. Shortly after, the stolen treasure resurfaced at Coventry Priory, where it was received by the prior himself, a harsh and unpopular associate of the Despensers. This whole tortuous affair, including a six-day siege of the priory, rankled for several years: one later climax came in a bizarre case of witchcraft involving a plot hatched in a cottage outside the city to kill the prior, the two Despensers and even the king, a plea to the Pope at Avignon and a general aura of hysteria. Such events capture the feelings of the times as well as the heavenly portents quoted earlier and the later fables of miracles produced by the corpses of executed rebels. The almost indiscriminate feuding would continue for several more years; but the violence at Burton marked the last flicker of anything resembling organized rebellion in the Midlands. It was followed a week or so later by the insurgents' decisive rout at Boroughbridge in Yorkshire, on 16 March 1322.[37]

Boroughbridge, followed six weeks later by the York Parliament dominated by the triumphant Despensers, might appear as a clear

[37] *CPR 1321-1324*, pp. 149 ff; *Historical Collections for a History of Staffordshire*, William Salt Archaeological Society, ix, 1888, pp. 95-8; Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster*, p. 309; *CCR 1318-1323*, pp. 511-13; S. Shaw, *The History and Antiquities of Staffordshire*, 2 vols, London 1798-1801, i, p. 17. Kenilworth: *CChR 1300-1326*, pp. 441ff; R. Somerville, *History of the Duchy of Lancaster*, London 1953, pp. 28-9; *CCR 1318-1323*, pp. 519-20, 525. Witchcraft: J. Röhrkasten, 'Conflict in a monastic borough: Coventry in the reign of Edward II', *Midland History*, xviii, 1993; *Select Cases in the Court of King's Bench under Edward II*, IV, ed. G.O. Sayles, Selden Society, lxxiv, 1955, pp. lix-lx; summary, *VCH, Warwickshire*, ii, p. 56.

watershed; yet these events meant no return to stability at local level. The king and his favourites now embarked on the wholesale seizure of those 'Contrariant' estates not already forfeited. In Warwickshire as elsewhere this was a major operation involving the properties of some two dozen disgraced barons, who met a variety of fates. The leading magnates were executed, including the leader, Thomas of Lancaster, and Henry Wylington, lord of Cherington, who had been active at both Bridgnorth and Burton and was said to have deployed troops openly, with unfurled banners. Roger Damory had been killed in action, while others had fled, ready to resume hostilities (John Wyard, Peter Lymesey, William Trussell). But for most of those captured or who had surrendered, the reprisals were not unduly harsh by the standards of the day: indeed, the king rebuked his chief justice early in 1323 for laxity in dealing with trouble-makers. Most of the rebels in Warwickshire were taken into custody for a time before being released after paying fines, swearing loyalty or accepting military service in France (John Bishopsdon, Thomas Baddesley, Richard Whitacre, Thomas Blankfront, Saer Rochford, John Wylington). Some, like William Grevil at Burmington, recovered their estate quite quickly, with the king's 'special grace', for reasons not immediately obvious. Those merely suspected of disloyalty could be fairly treated, as in the case of the parson of Chesterton, Nicholas Guildford, who had his goods returned to him from Stoneleigh Abbey, where they had been placed in custody, after he found friends willing to testify to his innocence. Finally, a conspicuous few, like Robert Holland, John Hastings, Roger Beler and, perhaps, the three-time former sheriff, John Dene, defected to the king at the eleventh hour, saving their estates and being handsomely rewarded: Beler received custody of the manors of his former lord, Thomas of Lancaster, was appointed justice charged with investigating the attacks against the Despensers, and eventually made baron of the exchequer – in which capacity retribution came when he was ambushed and murdered on the road near Leicester a few years later by unforgiving former associates.[38]

Whatever the fate of individuals, the overall result of the mass forfeitures was twofold: to create a vacuum of authority which could

[38] The fate of the rebels after Boroughbridge is conveniently summarized in G.L. Haskins, 'A Chronicle of the Civil Wars of Edward II', *Speculum*, xiv, 1939, pp. 74-5; *Select Cases in the Court of King's Bench, IV*, pp. 154-7. Guildford: CCR 1318-1323, p. 458; Beler: *PW*, ii, 2, pp. 282, 285; *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological Society*, xi, 1913-14, p. 460; *CCR 1318-1323*, p. 432 etc.

only encourage further turmoil; and to place local officialdom in a position of unrivalled power and therefore corruptibility. Estates everywhere were now left unprotected indefinitely pending the assignment of new custodians with many other duties elsewhere, tempting prey to covetous neighbours, common thieves and the many rebels still at large. Many were promptly raided, including some which had escaped so far, like the Beauchamp dowry ones at Beausale, Claverdon, Berkswell and Lighthorne and others in Worcestershire, which were now stripped of timber and emptied of deer by John Wyard, Robert Harley and others. A bonus for marauders was provided by estates conveniently lying vacant for other reasons, like the episcopal manors of Bishops Itchington, Bishops Tachbrook, Gaydon and Chadshunt, ravaged by arsonists during the six-month interim at the bishopric of Coventry and Lichfield following the death of William Langston in November 1321, leaving a trail of tenant vacancies. (see Fig. 3)

Impossible though it is to assess the scale of the economic damage caused by this mass scavenging at a time when the country had scarcely recovered from famine and stock epidemics, there is no lack of circumstantial evidence to suggest that it was severe and widespread. Poverty and dereliction are recorded on plundered Lancastrian manors in Staffordshire, great losses of cattle in Oxfordshire, the abandonment of land and homes everywhere. There was severe decline on the manors of the bishopric of Coventry and Lichfield in Warwickshire and the north Midlands, while the impoverishment of the Worcester Priory estates due to famine and plundering has already been noted. As always, heavy taxation added to the misery. Clerical absenteeism, long a cause for concern, combined with political agitation by incumbents, dismayed those like the virtuous Bishop Thomas Cobham at Worcester, who issued a stern warning to the dean of Warwick to arrest local clerics 'wandering about in your parts, bringing fear and threats to many inhabitants'.[39] In such a climate, the malicious trespassing and feuding

[39] 'Vacuum': Waugh, 'Profits of violence', p. 861. *CPR 1321-1324*, pp. 156, 165, 167; as noted previously, the Beauchamp dowry estates had been assigned to Guy's widow, Alice, but she had married William Zouche who, although a Herefordshire Mortimer, had fought for the king at Boroughbridge. At Alice's death in 1325, these estates remained vulnerable, and the king ordered them not to be 'further meddled with'. Episcopal manors: E.B. Fryde, *Peasants and Landowners in Later Medieval England, c.1380-c.1525*, Stroud 1996, p. 63; *Liber Albus*, pp. xl-xli; Kershaw, 'The great famine'; C. Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge 2002, pp. 180-81. Taxation: W. Childs, 'Finance and trade under Edward II', in J. Taylor and

Fig.3. Rebellion in Warwickshire, 1321-1322

- ● *Despenser estates sacked by rebels, 1321*
- ● *Rebel estates forfeited to King, 1321-1322*
- ▲ *Estates of Alice, Countess of Warwick, raided by rebels*
- ○ *Episcopal manors raided, 1321-1322*
- *Castles garrisoned, attacked or used as prisons*
- *King's itinerary, February - March 1322*

flourished more than ever; from the north of the county, where William Grendon was attacked on his manor of Bramcote by a veritable army of hostile locals, through the centre, where the prior of Coventry was reportedly ill-treating Coventry citizens and Thomas Waley, dubbed a 'notorious bandit' by the authorities, claimed that both his arms were broken in an affray, to the south-west, where along the Worcestershire-Warwickshire border 'persons wandering about and making confederacies' were plaguing the authorities. Criminal gangs roamed everywhere, swelled at times by rebel gentry still at large, so that the two became indistinguishable. John Wyard joined the notorious adventurer, Robert Ewer, for a time; Ewer himself was reported near Malvern in December 1322 'at large with an armed force of horse and foot'. The equally unscrupulous Roger Elmbridge and Malcolm Musard continued their vendetta, Elmbridge's goods being seized by Musard and Richard Barcheston at Newbold in Tredington before being finally captured by Musard at Chipping Campden and sent off to execution. Quantities of stolen goods and stock disappeared without trace, despite fruitless commissions of enquiry which could only report them to be 'in the hands of divers unknown persons'.

The actual task of organizing the forfeitures naturally fell to a large body of trusted local gentry, who were charged with collecting the dues from the rebels' estates and sending them not to the exchequer, but direct to the king.[40] They included activists such as John Pecche and Peter Mountford, who had fought for the king; current and former sheriffs and their deputies and clerks, like Robert Harthill, John Dene, Henry Duckworth, John Olney, Robert Morin, William Falconer, Henry Nottingham, John Hoby and William Chadshunt; tax assessors and collectors like Richard Harthill, Henry Erdington, John Langley and John Peyto; bailiffs of various hundreds, like John Andrew, Robert Atwood and John Persham; and experienced professional lawyers like William Jaunvill. Many, such as Thomas Rous of Walsall, Robert Stoke

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W. Childs, ed., *Politics and Crisis in Fourteenth Century England*, Gloucester 1990, p. 21; J.R. Maddicott, 'The English peasantry and the Crown, 1294-1341', in T.H. Aston, ed., *Landlords, Peasants and Politics in Medieval England*, Cambridge 1987, p. 290. *Register of Thomas Cobham*, p. 151.

[40] *CPR 1321-1324*, pp. 85, 160, 172, 216, 254, 377; *VCH, Warwickshire*, ii, p. 56; iv, p. 190; PRO, JUST1/1037, m. 3; KB27/258, m. 34; *CCR 1318-1323*, pp. 517-8; T.F. Tout, *Chapters in the Administrative History of Medieval England*, 2 vols, Manchester 1920, ii, pp. 338-40.

of Coventry, John Sotemay of Warwick and Thomas Blount, later steward of the king's household, had already served the king well in a variety of capacities. A few were high-profile servants of the Despensers, like the lawyer-soldier, Richard Foxcote, and the extraordinary gentleman-cum-professional brawler already mentioned, Malcolm Musard, lord of Saintbury; some, among them William Lucy of Charlecote, former Member of Parliament and peace-keeper, had preferred a somewhat lower profile.

Inevitably, their mandate was carried out in a spirit of opportunistic reprisal rather than pacification. The corruptibility of sheriffs, justices and crown officials had long been notorious, and had frequently prompted inquests in the recent past. Ignoring this, these undoubtedly highly competent administrators succumbed *en masse* to the obvious temptations of power, so that to the law's delays, in Hamlet's terms, was now added the insolence of office. By 1323 the king could no longer ignore the barrage of accusations against his officials and ordered three high justices, John Stonor, Robert Malberthorp and Robert Aylestone, to investigate charges, channelled through sworn jurors of hundreds and towns like Stratford, Kenilworth, Henley and Warwick, of 'malfeasances in dealing with cattle and divers other goods and chattels in the castles, manors, lands and tenements in the counties of Warwick and Leicester forfeited in the late rebellion'. The findings revealed much more than this: that with tensions still high everywhere, real or imagined rebel sympathizers had been harassed and whole communities, from sizeable towns like Tamworth in the north to hamlets like Whatcote and Idlicote in the south, become victims of serious fraud and theft. Foremost among the 'great offences' were cases where tax assessors accepted bribes to under-rate colleagues, or even exempt them entirely; at Tamworth William Badcock confessed to having been assessed at 2s.6d. rather than 8s.5d. while more than half a dozen other affluent neighbours had escaped completely. Bribery was lucrative and widespread: used to avoid confiscation of property; to escape imprisonment at Warwick or, once within its walls, to negotiate with the gaolkeeper, Philip Codleigh, for release; to ensure payment of personal expenses, as at Stratford, or of funds then used to entertain a co-operative lord, as at Long Itchington and Leamington Hastings; to avoid military service, as at Tysoe, where 'several powerful men were not called in the king's service'. Charges of illegal detention, sometimes by brute force, sometimes by fabricated evidence to give a veneer of legality, were common, as when the former

sheriff, Henry Nottingham, colluded with colleagues to deny Thomas Waley right of appeal against conviction, or, as in the case of William Lucy (acting, ironically, as a peace-keeper), conspiring with his clerk Robert Morin at Stratford to kidnap Nicholas Rolleston in August 1322 for an invented trespass at Bearley. Rolleston plausibly claimed that his health had been undermined by a six-month detention at Warwick before judgement was given in his favour and Lucy arrested, fined £30 damages and distrained. Opportunities were ingeniously exploited: at Kenilworth Priory one day, Peter Mountford forced Saer Rochford's wife Elizabeth to pay him a huge £6,000 debt owing to the crown; while at Shotteswell, the parson's sister Matilda was sent to prison at Warwick by the sheriff, John Olney, who then received ten marks for releasing her, concealing the matter by pretending that she had died in prison.

Predictably, the most recurrent charges concerned retention of rebel goods forfeited to the king, especially at major residences like the castles at Warwick and Kenilworth. Indoors, anything of value was taken: at Kenilworth even the wardrobe of Mary Sheppey, lady-in-waiting to the constable's wife, Joan Cuilly, was ransacked, and her travelling capes, coats, blankets, quilts and bed linen disappeared. Outdoors, hunting and fishing were merrily pursued and farm animals taken. The remit of the leading officials was so wide and all-embracing as to offer maximum temptation. The Staffordshire knight, Thomas Rous, for example, already powerful enough as an associate of John Somery and Ralph Bassett in north Warwickshire and sheriff during the critical period of 1321-1322, was charged in March 1322 with investigating

> *...all castles, manors, parks, lands and tenements...animals, stock and goods late of Contrariants found therein, and to enquire by oath...what were in the same at the date of their caption into the king's hands and whether any have been removed...and if so, when and by whom...*

He was also to try rebels gaoled at Warwick, pursue and arrest those still at large, and find and bring to the king Thomas of Lancaster's jewellery. He still had time to make profitable visits even to small villages where he extorted large sums of money from ordinary people, besides enjoying lucrative forays to Warwick and Kenilworth. At Kenilworth another official blamed him for appropriating a whole catalogue of the earl's goods, besides others belonging to Saer Rochford and John Lymesey, while taking deer and fish on the estate. At Warwick

he took much else, including grain, farmyard animals and a useful hawk worth £2, to be shared with John Pecche.[41]

This whole inglorious episode naturally reinforced widespread cynicism, and official corruption was to figure as a major theme a few years later in the contemporary poem already quoted. The king's damage-limitation exercise, however, was swift: following a mass plea by the guilty, a large collective fine of 800 marks was imposed, to be paid in instalments. These were carefully recorded by Justice John Stonor and revealed, in the inclusion of many obscure names missing from other sources, something of the true scale of the corruption practised in Warwickshire and Leicestershire alone. A happier epilogue was provided some years later by the diplomatic action of Edward III, in October 1331, in absolving the guilty of further payments of debt once the bulk of the original fine had been paid, citing specifically as extenuating circumstances the damage and grievances suffered by the community in the recent rebellion.[42]

The disasters of 1321-22 and their sorry sequel were far removed from the high ideals of Edward's coronation oath and the promise of his accession. But did they amount to a rebellion? The protracted misery of the famine, Guy of Warwick's death and Thomas of Lancaster's ineptitude deprived the growing undercurrents of discontent of any positive focus, and the return of the Despensers postponed any chance of constitutional or social reform. The barons themselves wasted their undoubted strength and never mobilized their resources effectively; short-term personal gain dominated thinking, not political reform. Although Dugdale blamed the Despensers for 'stirring up the giddy Multitude...to appear in Arms for any Design which savoured of Reformation', Marlowe's peasants' revolt never materialized, because

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[41] Willard, *Parliamentary Taxes*, pp. 170, 219-22; McKisack, *Fourteenth Century*, pp. 203-7; N. Saul, *Knights and Gentry: the Gloucestershire Gentry in the Fourteenth Century*, Oxford 1981, pp. 182-3. PRO, JUST1/1389. mm 20-23 (writ of 15 December 1323, part transcribed in *The Lay Subsidy Roll for Warwickshire of 6 Edward III*, 1332, ed. W.F. Carter, Dugdale Society, vi, 1926, App. D, pp. 96-9); for similar cases in Worcestershire, PRO JUST1/1036-8, passim; and Gloucestershire, Waugh, 'Profits of violence', pp. 864-6. The very detailed orders from the king enumerating the multiplicity of offences are given in *CFR 1319-1327*, pp. 224-6, 246-8 (July and November 1323). The cases cited are PRO, JUST1/1389, mm. 20-23.

[42] *CMR 1326-1327*, p. 370 gives an interim report for 1327, when 680 marks out of the original fine of 800 had been paid; *CCR 1330-1333*, p. 268.

until Mortimer's return from France in 1326 no opposition leader emerged.[43]

This is far from saying, however, that ordinary people were not involved at every turn, or that they did not react to events, often violently. Hunger sparked some of the violence, as at Bristol in 1316, and contemporaries were quick to blame the famine for the sharp upsurge in crime. But the kind of incident in which the rebel Roger Elmbridge's wife, Agnes, lost her horse and even her dresses at Tredington and Newbold, when gentlemen-bandits Malcolm Musard and Richard Barcheston were joined in their raiding by local troublemakers like the Genecocks of Shipston, became commonplace too. Understandably, many must have decided that they had little to lose by lawlessness. During the famine in 1317, 'persons of small estate or wholly without any landed property' were condemned for agitation, and a plethora of cases of petty neighbourhood crime fill the court records with the names of those committing 'many transgressions or felonies', distrained by the overworked sheriff for not appearing to answer charges, their lives disrupted by being forced to flee the district. Some went further and joined outlaw gangs flourishing as never before, and not only in Sherwood Forest. Undoubtedly, the role of many ordinary people, those 'insufficient' men quoted earlier who were dragooned into musters by corrupt Commissioners of Array, must have been as unwilling pawns, like those coerced, bullied and cheated in village after village across the Warwickshire Feldon or made desperate by arson in their hamlets or random theft and damage on their manors. But others were politically motivated: the Lichfield masons swearing to defend their cathedral close against rebel attack, the parish clergy accused of making trouble, those named in the long lists receiving pardons, some described as 'having nothing in goods,...given security by oath and departed quit for God'. More tangible evidence of the local impact is needed to assess the scale of the dislocation caused to agricultural life, but the amount of litigation suggests that not only did crime increase during these years but peasant assertiveness too. The paradox is that the rancour and discord of these years co-existed with an intense spirituality which saw the high point of soaring gothic and remarkable intellectual debate. The piety of such as Thomas Pakington in founding chantries at

[43] Dugdale, *Antiquities*, p. 171. For discussion of the reasons for the failure of 1321-22, see Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster*, pp. 313-17.

Brailes and Chelmscote did not deflect him from pursuing endless litigation to defend more worldly interests, while Geoffrey Beaufoy could enjoy a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostella one minute and join Roger Mortimer to attack the Despensers the next.[44]

Nan Clifton

We record with great sorrow, tempered by many happy memories, the death of Nan Clifton on Wednesday 19th November 2003.

Nan joined the Society's Committee in 1974, and her first contribution to *C&CH*, 'Shenington: The Village on the Shining Hill' appeared that autumn (**6**.1). Although she grew up at Burland Farm in Oxhill, where her family, the Gardners, had been settled since enclosure, even then she had been living in Shenington for thirty years following her marriage to Harold Clifton. Despite his local government commitments (he was Chairman of both the then newly formed Cherwell District Council and later Oxfordshire County Council) he accompanied Nan to many of the Society's meetings, followed by enjoyable pub suppers. Nan herself became Hon. Secretary of the Society in 1979, and continued as such until 1985, remaining on our committee until 1990.

The following year she published a booklet with the same title as her earlier article, and in 1995 *Shenington: A Pictorial Heritage*, as its name implies a book of photographs but with very informative captions.

After Harold's death she moved to a smaller house in Shenington, and in recent years lived in sheltered accommodation. Her interest in the Society never waned.

J.G.

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[44] *Johannis de Trokelowe*, pp. 89, 92-6, 104. B.A. Hanawalt, 'Economic influences on the pattern of crime in England, 1300-1348', *American Journal of Legal History*, xviii, 1974, pp. 281-97, argues convincingly for a 60 per cent rise in crime for 1315-17 and 1322-25; *cf.* also her 'The peasant family and crime in fourteenth century England', *Journal of British Studies*, xiii, 1974. C. Dyer accepts this 'rising tide of crime': *Standards of Living*, p. 181. Tredington: PRO, JUST1/1037, mm. 2d, 4, 5d; countless similar cases are given in JUST1/968-9 etc. and KB27/247, 263-6 etc. For criminal gangs (less conspicuous in Warwickshire than in adjacent counties): J.G. Bellamy., 'The Coterel Gang: an anatomy of a band of fourteenth century criminals', *EHR*, lxxix, 1964; E.G. Stones, 'The Folvilles of Ashby-Folville, Leicestershire, and their associates in crime', *TRHS*, 5th series, 1957; R.H. Hilton, *A Medieval Society*, London 1966, pp. 255-8 etc. Lichfield: J. Harvey, *Gothic England*, London 1948, App. 2, p. 172 (quoting Lichfield Chapter Acts, Bodleian ms. Ashmole 794). Pakington: PRO, KB27/243, m. 35d; 263, m. 8; 265, m. 63; 266, m. 10 etc. Chantries: Castle Ashby ms. 386; PRO, E301/53 etc. Beaufoy: *CPR 1313-1317*, p. 220.

Lecture Reports

Brian Little

Thursday 9th October 2003.
***Place Names, Landscape and Settlement in the Banbury Region* –**
Deborah Hayter.

This was the first meeting held at the Museum and some sixty members were richly rewarded with an excellent lecture.

Pioneers in the study of place names were linguists who may well have been attracted by the developments in language over the very long Anglo-Saxon period. Today we need to look to historians like Deborah Hayter who have concentrated on landscape analysis.

Her presentation revolved around a series of well-drawn maps on which were plotted places whose origins can be examined, in relation to important suffixes like 'tun' and 'wic'. She revealed that 'tuns' are abundant in the Banbury region and include a proportion of personal names such as Alkerton.

Cross-sections as well as maps demonstrated that there was great awareness of landscape advantages from very early times. This is manifested in topographical names even if such locations did not have associated settlement. It is also revealed by investigations of Anglo-Saxon responses to river valley areas. Here the attraction was land already cleared for farming.

Woodland areas were highlighted on several of her maps. In some cases these have developed into managed resource sub-regions and overall have persisted in the vicinity of boundaries. Deborah referred to several examples of woodland-related settlements in Northamptonshire. Sulgrave had its specific coppices and Evershaw was linked to woodland inhabited by boars.

Shining through the whole lecture was that familiar Banbury area theme of the marginality of this part of the country. An important consequence is a diversity of place name origins which is a major reason why the study of place names, landscape and settlement is such a compelling one.

Thursday 13th November 2003.
***Our Canal in Oxfordshire: its construction, its wealth and its people* –**
Hugh Compton

This lengthy and well-illustrated talk was all about people and places. The former included prime movers such as Brindley, Newdigate and Durell but also lesser known figures such as the wharfingers concerned the commercial contents of boats and the workers who actually dug out the canal in the first place. This involved a wide range of features like bridges and the inter-connecting tramways, which came from ironstone quarrying locations.

Hugh's account was comprehensive to the extent that he was able to take stock of such unusual points as the one time closure of the canal locks at night, which encouraged boat people to ensure they got through places like Banbury in time. Cold weather would concern them in case it led to a frozen water surface. Another hazard was excess mud necessitating dredging activities using a special machine.

Oxford was journey's end but not the end of the story in which our speaker reminded us of the intention to revive a terminal basin which today is Worcester Street carpark.

The canal and its environs has had and still does have many curious characteristics, Hugh was determined to ensure that we did not miss any of these.

IN MEMORIAM – CHENEY'S OF BANBURY

Brian Little

Publications about Banbury and district owe much to the works of local printers. Cheney's rank high amongst these. Their printed items have given a great variety of insights into local history.

Cheney's always did the race cards for Crouch Hill Steeplechases. With great pride John Cheney said to me that these were produced on the day of the event in order to achieve greatest accuracy. The cards are memorabilia now and, sadly, so too are the affairs of Cheney and Sons, who have recently closed their doors.

The first John Cheney and founder of the company became landlord of the Market Place Unicorn Inn in 1765. It is here that he began printing in 1767. Four years later he was busily engaged on a wide range of items that embraced summonses, warrants, sale catalogues, turnpike tickets, ballads, hymns and posters.

Cheney left the Unicorn in 1788 and took a shop in Red Lion Street (part of the High Street) where he became known as a bookseller and stationer as well as printer. This was a good decision and he prospered to the extent of supplying newspapers to the gentry. His proud boast was that the printing of items was effected in 'the neatest manner within the shortest period of notice and on the most reasonable terms'.

Subsequent locations for the firm were Fish Street (now George Street) and Butchers' Row, but in 1895, encouraged by the need for larger premises, the company came to Calthorpe Street. Here their wide range of business activities virtually underpinned the whole of Banbury society.

In a nostalgic moment, the present John Cheney decided to make a film about the firm. This showed great vision. The video is a gem; there can be no better epitaph to such a wonderful old company.

An article by Professor C.R. Cheney, 'Cheney & Sons: Two Centuries of Printing in Banbury' appeared in *C&CH*, **3**, 9 (Autumn 1967).

Book Review

Banbury – A History, by Brian Little (132pp., 151 illustrations including 24 maps + endpapers, bibliography and index). Phillimore, Chichester. Available at Banbury Museum / Tourist Centre, Ottakar's, W.H. Smith and other local bookshops, £15.99.

For a relatively small town, a great deal has already been written on Banbury's history. This began with Alfred Beesley's outstanding *The History of Banbury*, published in 1841 (still the first port of call for serious Banbury historians), but was followed by William Potts' *A History of Banbury* (1958, with a much enhanced second edition edited by Ted Clark in 1978) and the even more important Volume Ten of the *Oxfordshire Victoria County History, Banbury Hundred*, ed. Alan Crossley, 1972.

Quite apart from these detailed and authoritatively researched histories, we have had a plethora of publications whose chief merit has been their illustrations, often accompanied by informative captions. The first was W.P. Johnson's *The History of Banbury* (*c.*1863), whose frontispiece has the same rôle (unacknowledged) in this book, and whose engravings (together with those from Beesley) have enhanced the covers of *C&CH* over the years. In the past few decades we have had Marjorie Lester's *Memories of Banbury* (1986) and *These Golden Days* (1992), illustrated by her wonderful 'Grandma Moses' pictures, Ted Clark's *Banbury: History and Guide* (1992), various editions of 'postcards', Brian Little's own three 'Changing Faces' books on *Banbury* (1998), *Grimsbury* (1999) and *Easington* (2000); and last, but not least, our reviewer Christine Bloxham's *The Book of Banbury* (1975). Into this latter category Brian's new book, with its lavish illustrations, must fall. **Jeremy Gibson**

Writing a new book on Banbury must be a daunting proposition, as earlier works, as described above, are numerous. Views on history have changed over the years, but it is not easy to find a new slant, particularly within the constraints of size of this book, which has approximately fifty percent of its space devoted to photographs and maps.

One new aspect which Brian Little has included is information gleaned about the history of the town from the excavations over recent decades, beginning with those on the site of the castle in the 1970s. However, even now information about the Saxon origins of the town is elusive. Most of the section on early Banbury is illustrated with the wonderful nineteenth century engravings used by Alfred Beesley (and others are found throughout the book); it would have been good to see their origin acknowledged to help those wanting to delve further into Banbury's history.

The chapters are allocated according to date range, so the second chapter covers the medieval period from 1100-1500, emphasizing the pervading influence of the bishopric of Lincoln over Banbury. The town, formerly presumably a minor river-crossing settlement, was created by Alexander, Bishop of Lincoln from 1123 to 1148; he rebuilt the church, authorised a market place and raised the castle. The development of the town is thus put into the national context. There is interesting information about the development around the market place (apparently Cuttle Brook, which formed a boundary to the market place, was described by archaeologists as three metres wide and three metres deep, though in medieval times this would have been three yards wide and deep!) and about the development of Grimsbury, which has often been neglected in the past.

It was during the Tudor period that the town came under secular rather than religious control, and was given its first formal charter by Queen Mary in 1554 [26 January 1553/4]. Religious turmoil led, around 1600, to the destruction of the town's medieval crosses, which are described; but the fascinating story of the destruction of the main cross in the market place is glossed over, and there is no mention of the dispute it caused between the Puritans and traditionalists, and how their case was taken to Star Chamber and the town told to rebuild the cross (which it ignored for three centuries). The percentages of different trades in the town in the sixteenth century are given, when thirty-four percent of men in the town were leatherworkers; it would have been useful to see this theme carried through into later centuries. Fascinating information has been culled from local wills and inventories (these, 1590-1650, have been published as Records Volumes 14 and 15 of the Banbury Historical Society).

The chapter on the seventeenth century details changes in the town's boundaries and in the Corporation under a new charter of 1608. Puritanism became predominant in the town – Brian has used the story about the Puritan hanging his cat on a Monday for committing the crime of killing a mouse on the Sunday, but has not mentioned the equally lovely story in Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* of the baker, Zeal-of-the-land-Busy (said to have been based on Banbury baker Richard Busby) who stopped baking Banbury Cakes because they were served at parties such as bride ales. In fact there are scant references in the book to the cakes synonymous with Banbury.

One of the snags of a chronological arrangement is the hazard of either repeating information about the same subject in different chapters, or omitting bits when a subject is more relevant in one place. This has happened to the story of the plush industry, one of the most important trades in the town, which does not rate a mention at all in the chapter on the eighteenth century, although it was well established by then, and supported many spinners and weavers working in surroundimg villages. Even in the nineteenth century chapter there is no reference to the wonderful uses to which plush was put, or to its wider use

throughout the world, to put flesh on the bones. The chapter on the eighteenth century has information on care of the poor and the burgeoning road system and the building of the Oxford Canal. This had a great influence on the town as it enabled coal to be brought from the Midlands coal fields rather than by sea from the north of England, halving the price of coal overnight. This must have had a great impact on local industry.

This chapter also covers the Blue Coat School and the printers Cheney and Rusher, and horse-racing in the town. We find a brief reference to the Banbury Cross rhyme. The explanation given for cock-horse is that 'it applied to hobby horses which were mounted by two persons, the man in front and the lady on a pillion behind'. According to my dictionary a hobby horse is one on a wooden stick used as a child's toy, rather than a real horse, which is not the meaning suggested in the book, although I would agree with the explanation that cock-horse meant riding pillion. At least on this occasion Brian debunks the myth that it was a 'Fiennes lady' referring to Celia Fiennes, a determined lady, daughter of a Saye and Sele, though never living near Banbury, whose now famous accounts of tours of England between 1690 and 1710 were not in fact published until the 1880s, a century after the rhyme was first recorded in print.

The chapter on the nineteenth century has a worthwhile section on Banbury Gaol, although one caption, for illustration 55, a page from the 'Articles and Rules of the Felons' Association', is amusingly misleading. The text lists various crimes such as varieties of vandalism, theft *etc.*, with sums of money beside them, and the caption reads: 'Extract from the list of rewards offered by the Association', suggesting, I hope incorrectly, that rewards were being offered for committing the crimes! There are references to the coming of the railways, and the increasing importance of industries, particularly Samuelson's agricultural engineeering works.

Banbury underwent many changes in the twentieth century, with much development and an influx of population. Shops from national chains replaced some of the local names, and the town expanded greatly. Its character has changed even over the past couple of decades, as the chief shopping area has shifted from the High Street and Market Place to the new Castle Quay Shopping Centre. No doubt the town will continue changing as, if it fossilises, it will die.

Banbury's history is unique, as is its distinct identity – so are many of our historic towns. This book gives a concise overview, with some new information, and an interesting selection of photographs and graphics, but the lack of space for text means that many of the fascinating details which add charm to its history have had to be omitted. For this reason it needs to be read in conjunction with other books about the town. Because of the diverse material included in each chapter it would have been easier to read if sub-headings had and been included within these. But at least there are a bibliography and useful (if selective) index.

Perhaps this is the place to plead with publishers to allow authors a freer rein to write more, particularly as books go out of print so quickly today, and many previous books may not be readily available [though presumably are in the Centre for Banburyshire Studies, the Centre for Oxfordshire Studies, and legally in the Bodleian Library, Oxford].

Christine Bloxham

Note. Beesley's *The History of Banbury* (1841) had 684 pages of text, and 26 plates. Even the Potts/Clark second edition of *A History of Banbury* had 358 pages (including 72 illustrations). The Banbury Historical Society has published 27 records volumes and approaching 150 issues of *Cake & Cockhorse*, some 500 articles on 'Banburyshire'. No present Banbury historian can do more than select. **J.G.**

Notices

Recently received publications. We hope to review some in our next issue.

Banbury during the Great War, by Kevin Northover (card covered, 172pp., many illustrations). Prospero Publications, 260 Colwell Drive, Witney, Oxon. OX28 5LW, 2003, £9.95.

This is 'amateur' history at its best – and of course 'amateur' implies 'love'. It involves dedicated research in obvious and less obvious places. It goes into great detail and lists so many names and places that it is understandable that there is no index, which would have covered many more pages. It does not pretend to great writing, but it will provide invaluable information to our multiplying family and local historians keen to find out and add to our knowledge of the relatively recent past. It is an example of what modern technology makes publishable.

The Lost Architectural Landscapes of Warwickshire: Vol. 1 – The South, by Peter Bolton (hardback, 160pp., many illustrations). Landmark Publishing, Ashbourne Hall, Cokayne Ave., Ashbourne, Derbyshire DE6 1EJ, 2003, £19.95.

This is an horrific book: horrifying in what it tells us of worthwhile buildings that now would be subject to conservation orders being needlessly demolished. The words of Councillor Bob Hall, in 1962, sum up the then prevailing attitude: 'One of the ugliest houses in the village. It would be impossible to do anything with a building of this sort. When this corner of the village has been developed it will be a nice high class area.' He was talking about a medieval manor house.

Brailes History: Episodes from a forgotten past: 1 (32pp.). Two articles: 'The experience of Civil War' by Philip Tennant, and 'A Century of Smallpox', by Alan Tennant. Published by A.J. Tennant, 49 Hawthorn Way, Shipston on Stour, Warws. CV36 4FD, 2003, £1.80 incl. p&p.

Northamptonshire Past and Present, No. 56, 2003, 104pp., Northamptonshire Record Society, Wootton Hall Park, Northampton NN4 8BQ. £3.00. Includes an article on 'King's Sutton: An early Anglo-Saxon estate?' by Deborah Hayter.

BANBURY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Banbury Historical Society was founded in 1957 to encourage interest in the history of the town of Banbury and neighbouring parts of Oxfordshire, Northamptonshire and Warwickshire.

The magazine *Cake and Cockhorse* is issued to members three times a year. This includes illustrated articles based on original local historical research, as well as recording the Society's activities. Well over a hundred issues and some three hundred articles have been published. Most back issues are still available and out-of-print issues can if required be photocopied.

Records series:

Wigginton Constables' Books 1691-1836 (vol. 11, with Phillimore).
Banbury Wills and Inventories 1591-1650, 2 parts (vols. 13, 14).
Victorian Banbury, by Barrie Trinder (vol. 19, with Phillimore).
Aynho: A Northamptonshire Village, by Nicholas Cooper (vol. 20).
Banbury Gaol Records, ed. Penelope Renold (vol. 21).
Banbury Baptism and Burial Registers, 1813-1838 (vol. 22).
Oxfordshire and North Berkshire Protestation Returns and Tax Assessments 1641-1642 (vol. 24).
The 'Bawdy Court' of Banbury: The Act Book of the Peculiar Court of Banbury and Cropredy 1625-38, ed. R.K. Gilkes (vol. 26).
King's Sutton Churchwardens' Accounts 1636-1700, ed. Paul Hayter (vol. 27).

Current prices, and availability of other back volumes, from the Hon. Secretary, c/o Banbury Museum.

In preparation:

Banbury Chapbooks, by Dr Leo John de Freitas.
Turnpike Roads to Banbury, by Alan Rosevear.
Selections from the *Diaries of William Cotton Risley, Vicar of Deddington 1836-1848*, ed. G.W. Smedley-Stevenson.

The Society is always interested to receive suggestions of records suitable for publication, backed by offers of help with transcription, editing and indexing.

Meetings are held during the autumn and winter, normally at 7.30 p.m. on the second Thursday of each month, at Banbury Museum, Spiceball Park Road, Banbury. Talks are given by invited lecturers on general and local historical, archaeological and architectural subjects. Excursions are arranged in the spring and summer, and the A.G.M. is usually held at a local country house.

Membership of the Society is open to all, no proposer being needed. The annual subscription is **£10.00** including any records volumes published, or **£7.50** if these are not required; overseas membership, **£12.00.**

BANBURY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Winter 2003/2004 Programme

Meetings for at least an experimental period are to be held at Banbury Museum, Spiceball Park Road. Entrance from Spiceball Park Road, not the canal towpath or the bridge from Castle Quay Shopping Centre. Location and parking areas are shown on the programme card.

Thursday 11th December. 7.30 p.m.
The history of duelling with pistols. *Hugh Hinde.*

Thursday 8th January, 2004, 7.30 p.m.
The Gunpowder Plot, 1605. *Graham Sutherland.*

Thursday 12th February. 7.30 p.m.
Oxfordshire Churches. *Richard Lethbridge* (Author and Member of the Oxfordshire Historic Churches Trust).

Thursday 11th March. 7.30 p.m.
The Theory and Practice of Medicine from Medieval Times to the Scientific Revolution. *Steve Bacon.*

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