

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

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.