

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:

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.