

*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

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