

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

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.