

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 Pielerton, 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.

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 chambre en la sale ...'. Waugh, 'Profits of violence', pp. 849-50, gives examples of similar bullying and extortion in Gloucestershire.