

The powerful Hastings family held estates and advowsons in many parts of the county, several of the earls of Warwick, and was linked to some of the most intransigent Marcher families like the Bohuns, Mowbrays and Mortimers as well as to Thomas of Lancaster. Thomas Hastings himself was lord of nearby Shenington and Balscote, and could not have been unaware of the rival interests of the Arden, Clare and Despenser families in the immediate district as well as their deep involvement in the looming crisis in south Wales. The participation of several gentry wives in the violence and arson at Sugarswell, including Matilda Hastings and Isabel Hagley, would also suggest a planned operation rather than indiscriminate vandalism. Only weeks later – coincidence or not – it was the turn of the Hastings' estate at Shelfield, in Aston Cantlow, to be similarly attacked (Fig. 2).²⁶

With famine and inflation at a peak, and with Scots' invasions, a Welsh uprising, campaigning in Ireland and rebellion at Bristol, the years following Guy of Warwick's death were desperate ones. Lawlessness had marked Edward's reign from the beginning, but now the purely political climate was degenerating too, and locally there was near-anarchy as administration was breaking down. Repeatedly between 1316 and 1320, orders were re-issued forbidding unlawful assembly, guarding the ports to prevent suspects leaving the country, punishing those found guilty of spreading false rumours, prohibiting jousting (long feared by the authorities as a cover for potential subversion), checking illegal recruitment and instructing constables everywhere to garrison castles as a precautionary measure. Following the disturbances at Warwick already reported, the trusty Walter Beauchamp was ordered in 1317 to 'install thirty fencible men at the king's wages' in the castle and to repair its walls and, anticipating possible siege, its mill. Hugh Despenser himself was to act similarly at Guy's former castle at Elmley in Worcestershire. In 1318 alone, with more disturbances reported in Warwickshire, orders against tournaments were repeated, this time every few months, in January, April, July and December, with the king being forced to admit that these orders 'have been greatly infringed'.

²⁶ *CPR 1313-1317*, p. 675; *CChW 1244-1326*, i, p. 472; *CPR 1317-1321*, pp. 100, 174, 176; *VCH, Oxfordshire*, ix, p. 141 (the Clare connection). The influential Hastings family had very divided allegiance, and the fortunes of their many Warwickshire properties over this period would merit detailed research. Coventry, PRO, KB27/265, m. 12d.