

Warwickshire shared in the general turmoil: with more men being hastily mustered to march north to confront the Scots, orders were re-issued to pursue and arrest 'vagabonds and malefactors' there. The situation seemed hardly containable, going beyond the perennial feuding of rival barons; indeed, contemporary records recognise the political unreliability of not only magnates and gentry but of others much lower in the social scale, stressing

*...alarming disorders in various parts of the kingdom, occasioned by the misconduct of persons who, being of small estate or wholly without any landed property, raise large bodies of men-at-arms, as well cavalry as infantry, to whom they promise gifts of lands and tenements and sums of money, while other persons of great estate enter into illegal confederations.*

State officials themselves were profiteering: bishops, nobles and ordinary people later complained to the king at Kenilworth that commissioners levying troops

*...have oftentimes aggrieved the people by taking bribes to let sufficient men stay at home and sending insufficient men who had nothing to give the king...and practising other extortions and oppressions.*

In Worcestershire in January 1318 orders were given to 'arrest various vagabonds and malefactors, as well knights as others, who, collecting great multitudes, commit various depredations'. The authorities were powerless, local people complaining that of the two official peace-keepers one was so old and feeble that he could do nothing while the other lived outside the county. In Warwickshire things were no better: four commissioners were named, John Pecche, Henry Erdington, Peter Lymesey and Robert Stoke, to imprison offenders in the county gaol at the king's pleasure; but by 1320 new 'conservators of the peace' were being appointed everywhere – in Warwickshire on an almost monthly basis. Belatedly, Edward tried to face up to a rapidly deteriorating situation which would indeed have tried the skills of a much wiser and greater king, but complaints against his own officers were mounting while he himself remained as inconsistent as ever; in June 1319 he considered the country 'tranquil', and in October 1320 the bishop of Worcester, in a delightful throwaway remark buried in a long business letter to the Pope, reported that the king was much improved of late, and was even getting up in the morning. As it was, an improvised stick-and-carrot policy was tried as threats and pardons, equally ineffectual, alternated. It was in this curious phoney-war that the rebel magnates and