

barons finally launched their devastating attack on the Despencers' power-base in south Wales, in the well-known events of the spring of 1321.²⁷

The leading rebels, or 'Contrarians', were the notorious Marcher lords whom even the king's formidable father, Edward I, had failed to quell; they need little comment here, since apart from Thomas of Lancaster they had only marginal interests in Warwickshire and were themselves never, as far as can be ascertained, active in the county.²⁸ Thomas's own name was conspicuously missing from the roll-call when the Despencers presented their charges against them the following year: he had not been in Warwickshire since his residence at Kenilworth in June-July 1319 and remained in the north as the attacks in Wales developed, brooding Achilles-like in his tent at Pontefract. But his substantial midland possessions, centred on Tutbury and Kenilworth and staffed by devoted retainers, ensured his tacit and, there is little doubt, active encouragement when the barons turned their attacks on the Despenser possessions in the English shires in June 1321. Responsibility for the actual violence in Warwickshire and the midland counties lay rather with an assortment of a dozen or more substantial gentry allied to the magnates in one way or another, including Thomas of Lancaster's own retainers and sympathizers from the now leaderless Beauchamp camp, all of whose local interests were directly threatened by the consolidation of Despenser power in the Midlands. It was this thriving, restlessly ambitious group, bound to the magnates by ties of service, obligation and common interest, who, with their resources of local manpower and network of lesser allies, commanded operations on the ground they knew so well, safe in the knowledge that, given the impotence of the king to stem the general lawlessness, they could act with impunity or would be protected by their powerful overlords if the need arose. All were members of long-established families, the names of

²⁷ The widespread unrest is illustrated month by month in the various *Calendars, Parliamentary Writs* etc.: cf. *CCR 1313-1318*, pp. 71, 505. Both Henry III and Edward I had distrusted tournaments as a dangerous threat to public order: B. Wilkinson, *The Later Middle Ages in England*, London 1969, p. 19. *CPR 1321-1324*, pp. 385-6; *CChW 1244-1326*, p. 453. King's behaviour: *Register of Thomas Cobham*, p. 97.

²⁸ In addition to Thomas of Lancaster, the often-repeated rebel roll-call invariably includes Humphrey Bohun, earl of Hereford, the two Roger Mortimers (of Chirk and Wigmore), Roger Damory, the Hugh Audleys, father and son, Robert and Roger Clifford, Thomas and Maurice Berkeley, John Giffard of Brimpsfield *etc.*