

Thomas of Lancaster, and so recapitulates much earlier events going back over a year. The part of the text relating to the estates of Hugh Despenser the elder (formally restored to him on 7 May) provides graphic detail of their devastation in some fourteen counties, including most of the midland ones, on or about 11 June. It describes the theft of goods and chattels, crops, huge numbers of livestock, quantities of stored meat, wine and cider, weapons, farmyard implements and household utensils.

Little of value was spared, not even ivory and ebony chess sets and their delicately inlaid boards. Roofs were stripped of lead, doors, windows and fittings removed, items of little value destroyed and the houses themselves then wrecked or set on fire. The gangs apparently had time to collect rents from some hapless tenants and imprison others, sell stocks of wood, destroy fishponds, hedges and fences, round up 'wild beasts' in the parks and coerce villagers into submission. In addition to the physical damage inflicted, events at Stoneleigh Abbey are stressed: here, in a significant precedent for many subsequent social protests, not only were precious stones and gold and silver vessels taken but also charters from ransacked coffers in order to destroy the Despensers' legal rights. Read as a whole, the account, unfortunately not particularized by manor, makes clear that the campaign was both violent and thorough: everything, we are told in the French text, was accomplished *nettement* in what amounted to a Despenser cleansing operation.³¹

Clearly, a campaign spanning all of the midland counties and involving hundreds of participants could not have been confined to the single June day cited; the earlier attacks in south Wales had lasted a week, and the midland sequel must have been of at least equal duration. The Despenser account merges events spread over not only the lawless, turbulent summer weeks between early June and the kingly pardons granted to the rebels on 20 August but many others following their return from exile in the New Year. Naturally, their huge estimate of an overall financial loss of £32,000 must be viewed with some suspicion (though the figure is not totally implausible), but what is of more interest

³¹ Fryde, *Tyranny*, p. 45; *CCR 1318-1323*, pp. 541-5, 551. The secret letter addressed to Ralph Nevill is known only by an undated transcript calendared in *CCR 1318-1323*, p. 526, clearly out of chronological sequence. No mention is made of the Despensers by the only chronicler to refer to the meeting of 24 May, but it is inconceivable that they were not discussed there: see Wilkinson, 'Sherburn indenture'. Maddicott also discusses this in detail: *Thomas of Lancaster*, pp. 269-79.