

This period of tranquillity ended abruptly one summer's day in early June 1321. Following the destruction of the Despenser estates in Wales and his attack on Bristol at the end of May, Roger Mortimer of Wigmore, now sharing control with the magnates, under the earl of Hereford, of a much wider campaign, invaded many of the Despenser estates in Gloucestershire and Worcestershire while at the same time the king took direct control of the former Beauchamp manor of Elmley Castle from Hugh Despenser, ordering it to be 'safely guarded'. Shortly after, contingents of Mortimer's allies, like John Wyard and Robert Harley, fanned out to attack other Despenser manors throughout the Midlands, with one force under three prominent Worcestershire gentlemen, Wyard, Thomas Blankfront and Geoffrey Beaufoy moving via Tanworth to seize Warwick Castle from the king's sheriff on about 9 June. At some point, Wedgnock Park was damaged and the castle water-mill burnt down. The rebels then continued south to Brailes, where the gates of the manor were broken down, living quarters and outbuildings damaged and chests containing legal archives ransacked. Parks were broken into and a vast quantity of stock valued at £2,000 seized and driven away in what must have been a major and lengthy operation: 200 horses, 100 mares, 100 foals, 200 oxen, 400 cows, 400 pigs and no less than 3,000 sheep and 300 lambs. Trees were cut down, the warrens thoroughly scoured and many 'wild beasts' taken (hares, rabbits and partridge are specified), the Tanworth warrener, John Blake, being present to lend his expertise. Wyard and Beaufoy were pardoned shortly after among the long list of Mortimer's followers, but were subsequently punished again when, together with Blankfront and so many others, their estates were confiscated after continued aggression. Blankfront and Beaufoy were imprisoned, Blankfront along with Mortimer's wife Joan, while Beaufoy provided security for good conduct and was later

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no. 5, 2001) and modern aerial photography. The Wests of Chelmscote pastured 300 sheep thirty miles away at Lea Marston in 1322 (*CCR 1318-1323*, p. 440) and by 1327 Richard West was lord of Chelmscote ('Warwickshire Lay Subsidy Roll, 1327', ed. W.B. Bickley, *Midland Record Society*, vi, 1902), thus escaping Christopher Dyer's comment that no peasant farmer possessed more than 100 sheep in Warwickshire before the Black Death: *Warwickshire Farming, 1349-c.1520: Preparations for Agricultural Revolution*, Dugdale Society Occasional Paper, xxvii, 1981, p. 30. Sheep continued to be of major importance at Brailes under the Beauchamps. Mortimer acquired Brailes by 1327 (plus Lighthorne, Milcote and Berkswell in Warwickshire and much elsewhere: Holmes, *Estates of the Higher Nobility*, pp. 10-14).