

discharged on condition that he serve the king in Gascony – a frequent proviso in such cases.³⁴

Such a dramatic catalogue of events raises a number of interesting wider issues, not least in questioning to what extent Brailes was a typical case in the Despenser wars and whether the Feldon was quite so totally plough-dominated at this date as has been supposed. It might rather suggest that successive earls of Warwick had developed here one of their most profitable ventures in animal husbandry – a policy confirmed by a later decision when reorganizing their estates to include Brailes in the list of manors to be kept in their direct control, and develop wool-production there on a scale soon to attract the major Cotswold merchant, William Grevil.³⁵ It is not being suggested that all the many midland Despenser estates were necessarily subjected to such a comprehensive ordeal, though further research would doubtless reveal that many were. But however well Brailes itself recovered later under the new young Earl Thomas, the immediate impact was evidently disastrous: six years later, shortly before a triumphant Roger Mortimer claimed it and several other Warwickshire manors for himself, it had been further looted and was valued at a mere £14, represented by sixteen oxen, three farm horses and some stored grain. Successive bailiffs' accounts would from now on refer to 'the site of the manor', as it took its place alongside other Warwickshire villages eventually to be categorized as 'shrunken'.³⁶

³⁴ *CPR 1318-1323*, p. 311; *CRF 1319-1327*, pp. 61, 74, 77. Warwick Castle: *Calendar of Memoranda Rolls (CMR) 1326-1327*, p. 246; *CCR 1318-1323*, p. 503; *CPR 1321-1324*, p. 161. Brailes attack: PRO, KB27/258, m. 24; *CFR 1319-1327*, pp. 169-70.

³⁵ Dyer, *Warwickshire Farming*, pp. 10, 12, 34; C. Dyer, 'Rural settlements in medieval Warwickshire', *TBAS*, c, 1996, p. 122. *CPR 1343-1345*, p. 251; *Warwickshire Feet of Fines, II*, 1284-1345, ed. E. Stokes and L. Drucker, Dugdale Society, xv, 1939, p. 200. The sheep figures at Brailes compare with those of other leading magnates like Thomas of Lancaster (over 5,000 in the Peak) etc: Miller and Hatcher, *Medieval England*, pp. 218-19; R. Trow-Smith, *A History of British Livestock Husbandry to 1700*, London 1957, pp. 137-8. By c.1397, sales of wool from Brailes were six times those of any Beauchamp manor and outstripped sales from all the Beauchamp estates combined: British Library, Egerton ms. 8769.

³⁶ PRO, E142/59, m. 3; E142/33, m. 15. Sixty years later Brailes was again highly profitable at £94 *per annum*: *Calendar of Inquisitions, Miscellaneous (Chancery)*, vi, p. 234 (Thomas Mowbray earl of Norfolk, 1398). The precise significance of the term 'site of the manor', used of Brailes and other Beauchamp manors in and after 1401, is unclear; but cottages were being built 'on' and 'outside' it, indicating expansion not on boundary waste but on land at the very heart of the manor: BRL, 167998, 167999, 168115, 168234 etc.