

only encourage further turmoil; and to place local officialdom in a position of unrivalled power and therefore corruptibility. Estates everywhere were now left unprotected indefinitely pending the assignment of new custodians with many other duties elsewhere, tempting prey to covetous neighbours, common thieves and the many rebels still at large. Many were promptly raided, including some which had escaped so far, like the Beauchamp dowry ones at Beausale, Claverdon, Berkswell and Lighthorne and others in Worcestershire, which were now stripped of timber and emptied of deer by John Wyard, Robert Harley and others. A bonus for marauders was provided by estates conveniently lying vacant for other reasons, like the episcopal manors of Bishops Itchington, Bishops Tachbrook, Gaydon and Chadshunt, ravaged by arsonists during the six-month interim at the bishopric of Coventry and Lichfield following the death of William Langston in November 1321, leaving a trail of tenant vacancies. (see Fig. 3)

Impossible though it is to assess the scale of the economic damage caused by this mass scavenging at a time when the country had scarcely recovered from famine and stock epidemics, there is no lack of circumstantial evidence to suggest that it was severe and widespread. Poverty and dereliction are recorded on plundered Lancastrian manors in Staffordshire, great losses of cattle in Oxfordshire, the abandonment of land and homes everywhere. There was severe decline on the manors of the bishopric of Coventry and Lichfield in Warwickshire and the north Midlands, while the impoverishment of the Worcester Priory estates due to famine and plundering has already been noted. As always, heavy taxation added to the misery. Clerical absenteeism, long a cause for concern, combined with political agitation by incumbents, dismayed those like the virtuous Bishop Thomas Cobham at Worcester, who issued a stern warning to the dean of Warwick to arrest local clerics 'wandering about in your parts, bringing fear and threats to many inhabitants'.³⁹ In such a climate, the malicious trespassing and feuding

³⁹ 'Vacuum': Waugh, 'Profits of violence', p. 861. *CPR 1321-1324*, pp. 156, 165, 167; as noted previously, the Beauchamp dowry estates had been assigned to Guy's widow, Alice, but she had married William Zouche who, although a Herefordshire Mortimer, had fought for the king at Boroughbridge. At Alice's death in 1325, these estates remained vulnerable, and the king ordered them not to be 'further meddled with'. Episcopal manors: E.B. Fryde, *Peasants and Landowners in Later Medieval England, c.1380-c.1525*, Stroud 1996, p. 63; *Liber Albus*, pp. xl-xli; Kershaw, 'The great famine'; C. Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge 2002, pp. 180-81. Taxation: W. Childs, 'Finance and trade under Edward II', in J. Taylor and