

until Mortimer's return from France in 1326 no opposition leader emerged.⁴³

This is far from saying, however, that ordinary people were not involved at every turn, or that they did not react to events, often violently. Hunger sparked some of the violence, as at Bristol in 1316, and contemporaries were quick to blame the famine for the sharp upsurge in crime. But the kind of incident in which the rebel Roger Elmbridge's wife, Agnes, lost her horse and even her dresses at Tredington and Newbold, when gentlemen-bandits Malcolm Musard and Richard Barcheston were joined in their raiding by local troublemakers like the Genecoeks of Shipston, became commonplace too. Understandably, many must have decided that they had little to lose by lawlessness. During the famine in 1317, 'persons of small estate or wholly without any landed property' were condemned for agitation, and a plethora of cases of petty neighbourhood crime fill the court records with the names of those committing 'many transgressions or felonies', distrained by the overworked sheriff for not appearing to answer charges, their lives disrupted by being forced to flee the district. Some went further and joined outlaw gangs flourishing as never before, and not only in Sherwood Forest. Undoubtedly, the role of many ordinary people, those 'insufficient' men quoted earlier who were dragooned into musters by corrupt Commissioners of Array, must have been as unwilling pawns, like those coerced, bullied and cheated in village after village across the Warwickshire Feldon or made desperate by arson in their hamlets or random theft and damage on their manors. But others were politically motivated: the Lichfield masons swearing to defend their cathedral close against rebel attack, the parish clergy accused of making trouble, those named in the long lists receiving pardons, some described as 'having nothing in goods,...given security by oath and departed quit for God'. More tangible evidence of the local impact is needed to assess the scale of the dislocation caused to agricultural life, but the amount of litigation suggests that not only did crime increase during these years but peasant assertiveness too. The paradox is that the rancour and discord of these years co-existed with an intense spirituality which saw the high point of soaring gothic and remarkable intellectual debate. The piety of such as Thomas Pakington in founding chantries at

⁴³ Dugdale, *Antiquities*, p. 171. For discussion of the reasons for the failure of 1321-22, see Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster*, pp. 313-17.