

**POWER, AMBITION AND POLITICAL REHABILITATION:  
THE DESPENSERS, c.1281 – 1400**

Martyn John Lawrence

Doctor of Philosophy

University of York, Department of History

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# Abstract

This thesis is an archive-based study of the Despensers, one of the most (in)famous families in medieval England. Beginning with an account of their lives, marriages and connections, the bulk of the study provides a detailed reconstruction of the Despensers' service, retinues and estates, examining their volatile yet productive relationship with the crown in the light of fourteenth-century political change. It also looks at the impact on the Despensers' lives of religious culture – in particular, the way in which the family chose to represent themselves in their 'mausoleum' at Tewkesbury Abbey – and explores how they perceived their status as both barons and earls. The thesis concludes with an exploration of the popular image of the Despensers: namely, they were nothing more than royal favourites who gained access to the monarch by illicit and underhand means. It investigates the vocabulary used to condemn the favourite in general and the Despensers in particular, and analyses the way contemporaries constructed their criticism, judging whether or not such widespread disapproval was actually valid.

I have considered it important to shift the focus away from the 1320s, in order to understand the repeated successes of the family, which run contrary to their enduring reputation. Rather than concentrate only on the Despensers in the reign of Edward II, it is argued here that later generations of the family, restored to their estates by Edward III, more than proved their worth to the crown by consistent valuable service and deliberate good behaviour. It was loyalty, not rebellion, that was the Despensers' *raison d'être*.

# Acknowledgements

THE Arts and Humanities Research Board provided the funding for this thesis, and I would like to place on record my sincere gratitude. My greatest personal debt of thanks is to my supervisor at York, Mark Ormrod. Mark's support and friendship have been invaluable; if this study has any merit, it is due in no small part to his critical comments and advice. Several other scholars provided references or engaged in discussion on the Despensers, and I am grateful to Craig Taylor, Sarah Rees Jones, Gwilym Dodd, Anthony Musson, Seymour Phillips, Shelagh Mitchell, Adrian Bell, Andy King, James Bothwell, Amanda Lillie, Alan Forrest, Julian Luxford, Claire Valente and David Smith. The latter also furnished a motley crew of PhD students with marvellous food, tours of Yorkshire castles and infinitely tolerant palaeographical training. Jeff Hamilton kindly sent me advance copies of his articles on the elder and younger Despenser, now published in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

Staff at repositories in London, Oxford, Cambridge, Norwich, Taunton, Gloucester, Lincoln, Birmingham and York answered queries or provided copies of documents. I am especially grateful to Mr Adrian James of the Society of Antiquaries Library for his great generosity in lending me the Society's microfilm copy of manuscript 122.

The Centre for Medieval Studies at York is considered by many to be one of the friendliest places in which to research. Every doctoral student owes much to the inhabitants of the PhD workroom, as well as – perhaps even more so – to the coffee fumes that emanate from it. Although research projects, marriages and house-moves

ultimately took us in different directions, 'the gang' – Judy, Helen, Cath and Mark – deserve a hearty mention. At a critical juncture, Joanna reminded me that the arts are far more than just 'things scientists do at the weekend'. I must record my thanks to Paul, who informed my wedding guests that 'Five Guys Named Hugh' was hardly an appropriately academic title for a thesis; he will not believe that I was only pulling his leg, but I do hope he finds the alternative to be sufficiently erudite. Debbie, having started this thesis as a long-suffering girlfriend and ended it as a long-suffering wife, finally has something with which to prop open the kitchen door. I shall continue to argue, doubtless in vain, the superiority of a PhD (a 'real' doctorate?) over a medical doctor.

Finally, this work could never have been started, let alone finished, had not several members of my family been prepared to fund my Masters year at York in 2000-2001. As it happened, the Department of History very generously awarded me a studentship, but I would like to dedicate my work to, and in memory of, those who first offered their help.

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# Abbreviations

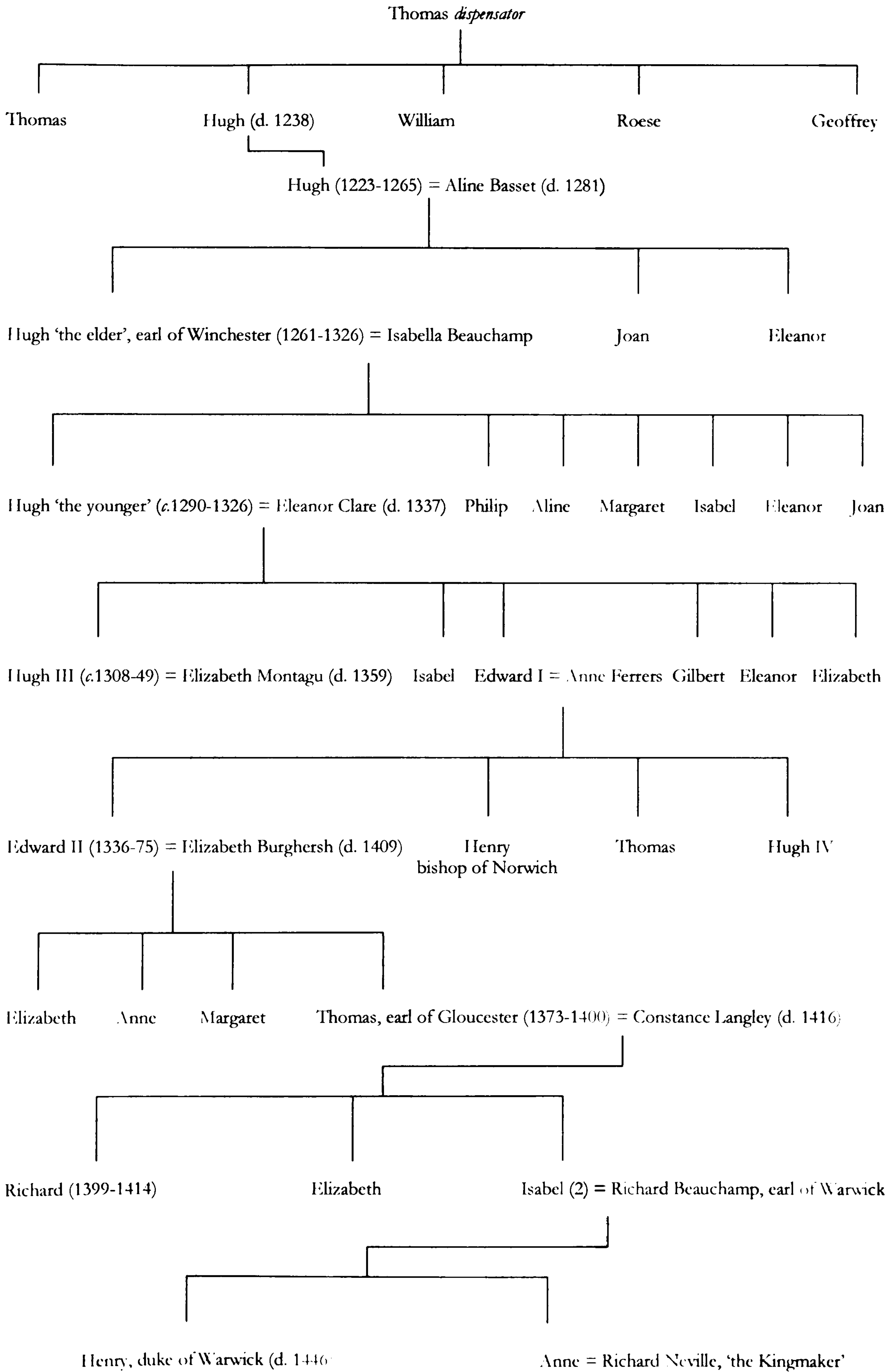
<i>AHEW</i>	<i>Agrarian History of England and Wales</i>
<i>AM</i>	H.R. Luard (ed.), <i>Annales Monastici</i> , RS 36 (London 1864-69)
<i>BGAST</i>	<i>Bristol and Gloucester Archaeological Society Transactions</i>
<i>BIHR</i>	<i>Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research</i>
<i>BJRL</i>	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands Library</i>
<i>BL</i>	British Library, London
<i>Bodl.</i>	Bodleian Library, Oxford
<i>Bothwell, Age of Edward III</i>	J.S. Bothwell (ed.), <i>The Age of Edward III</i> (Woodbridge 2001)
<i>CAC Wales</i>	J.G. Edwards (ed.), <i>Calendar of Ancient Correspondence Concerning Wales</i> (Cardiff 1975)
<i>CAD</i>	<i>Catalogue of Ancient Deeds</i>
<i>CAP Wales</i>	W. Rees (ed.), <i>Calendar of Ancient Petitions relating to Wales</i> (Cardiff 1975)
<i>CCbR</i>	<i>Calendar of Charter Rolls</i>
<i>CCR</i>	<i>Calendar of Close Rolls</i>
<i>CFR</i>	<i>Calendar of Fine Rolls</i>
<i>CIM</i>	<i>Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellaneous</i>
<i>CIPM</i>	<i>Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem</i>
<i>Clarke, Cartae</i>	G.T. Clarke (ed.), <i>Cartae et alia munimenta quae ad dominium de Glamorgancia pertinent</i> (Cardiff 1910)
<i>CPL</i>	<i>Calendar of Papal Letters</i>
<i>CPP</i>	<i>Calendar of Papal Petitions</i>
<i>CPR</i>	<i>Calendar of Patent Rolls</i>
<i>CYS</i>	Canterbury and York Society
<i>Davies, Lordship and Society</i>	R.R. Davies, <i>Lordship and Society in the March of Wales, 1282-1400</i> (Oxford 1978)
<i>DNB</i>	<i>Dictionary of National Biography</i> (London 1885-1900)
<i>Dugdale, Baronage</i>	W. Dugdale, <i>The Baronage of England</i> (London 1676)
<i>EcHR</i>	<i>Economic History Review</i>
<i>EHR</i>	<i>English Historical Review</i>
<i>Foedera</i>	T. Rymer (ed.), <i>Foedera, Conventiones, Literae et Cujuscunque Generis Acta</i> , Record Commission (London 1816-30)
<i>Froissart, Oeuvres</i>	K. de Lettenhove (ed.), <i>Oeuvres complètes de Froissart: Chroniques</i> (Brussels 1867-77)

- Fryde, *Tyranny* N. Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II* (Cambridge 1979)
- GCH T.B. Pugh (ed.), *Glamorgan County History III: the Middle Ages* (Cardiff 1971)
- GEC G.E. Cokayne, *The Complete Peerage*, revised by V. Gibbs *et al* (London 1910-59)
- Given-Wilson, *English nobility* C. Given-Wilson, *The English nobility in the late Middle Ages* (London 1996)
- Given-Wilson, *Royal Household* C. Given-Wilson, *The Royal Household and the King's Affinity* (New Haven and London 1986)
- Haines, *King Edward II* R.M. Haines, *King Edward II: Edward of Caernarfon, his life, his reign and its aftermath, 1284-1330* (Montreal 2003)
- HBC F.M. Powicke and E.B. Fryde (eds.), *Handbook of British Chronology*, 2nd edn. (London 1961)
- Holmes, *Estates* G.A. Holmes, *The Estates of the Higher Nobility in Fourteenth-Century England* (Cambridge 1957)
- JBS *Journal of British Studies*
- JMH *Journal of Medieval History*
- Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster* J.R. Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster 1307-1322* (Oxford 1970)
- McFarlane, *Nobility* K.B. McFarlane, *The Nobility of Later Medieval England* (Oxford 1973)
- Ormrod, *Edward III* W.M. Ormrod, *The Reign of Edward III*, 2nd edn. (Stroud 2000)
- Oxford DNB *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford 2004)
- P & P *Past and Present*
- Parl. Writs. Sir F. Palgrave (ed.), *Parliamentary Writs and Writs of Military Summons* (London 1827-34)
- Polychronicon J.R. Lumby (ed.), *Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden, monachi Cestrensis*, RS 41 (London 1882)
- Powell and Wallis, *House of Lords* J.E. Powell and K. Wallis, *The House of Lords in the Middle Ages* (London 1968)
- RO Record Office
- Rot. Parl. J. Strachey *et al* (eds.), *Rotuli Parliamentorum* (London 1767-83)
- RS Rolls Series
- SAL Society of Antiquaries, London
- Saul, *Richard II* N.E. Saul, *Richard II* (New Haven and London 1997)
- Statutes *Statutes of the Realm* (London 1810-28)
- Stubbs, *Chronicles* W. Stubbs (ed.), *Chronicles of the Reigns of Edward I and Edward II*, RS 76 (London 1882-83)
- Tout, *Chapters* T.F. Tout, *Chapters in the Administrative History of Medieval England* (Manchester 1920-33)
- TRHS *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*
- TV N.H. Nicolas (ed.), *Testamenta Vetusta* (London 1826)
- VCH *Victoria County History*
- Vita Edwardi Secundi* N. Denholm-Young (ed.), *Vita Edwardi Secundi* (London 1957)

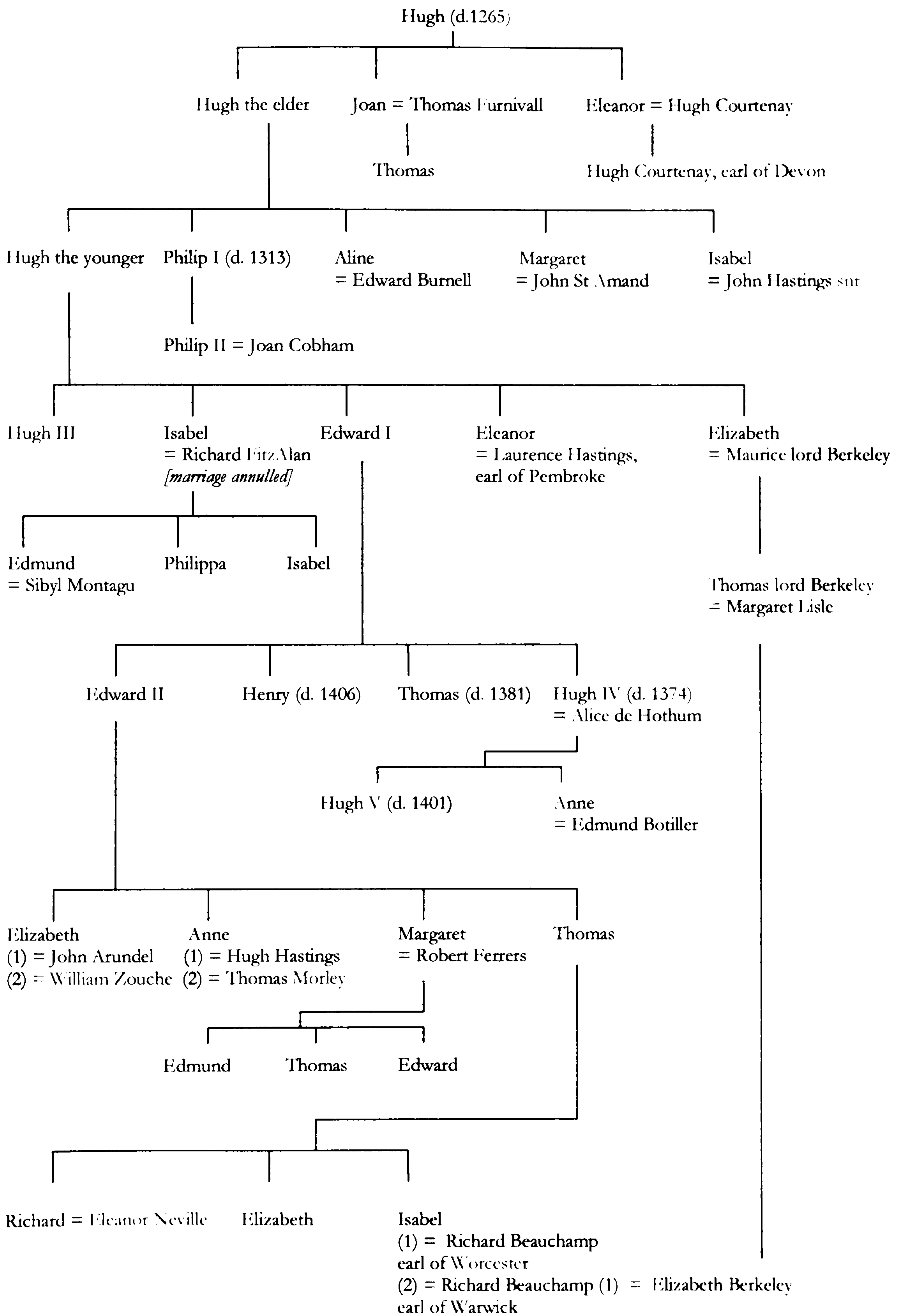
For ease of identification, other works are referenced in full each time they appear in a new chapter.

All documents cited are from The National Archives of the United Kingdom: Public Record Office unless otherwise indicated.

### Family Tree 1: Principle Descent of Despensors

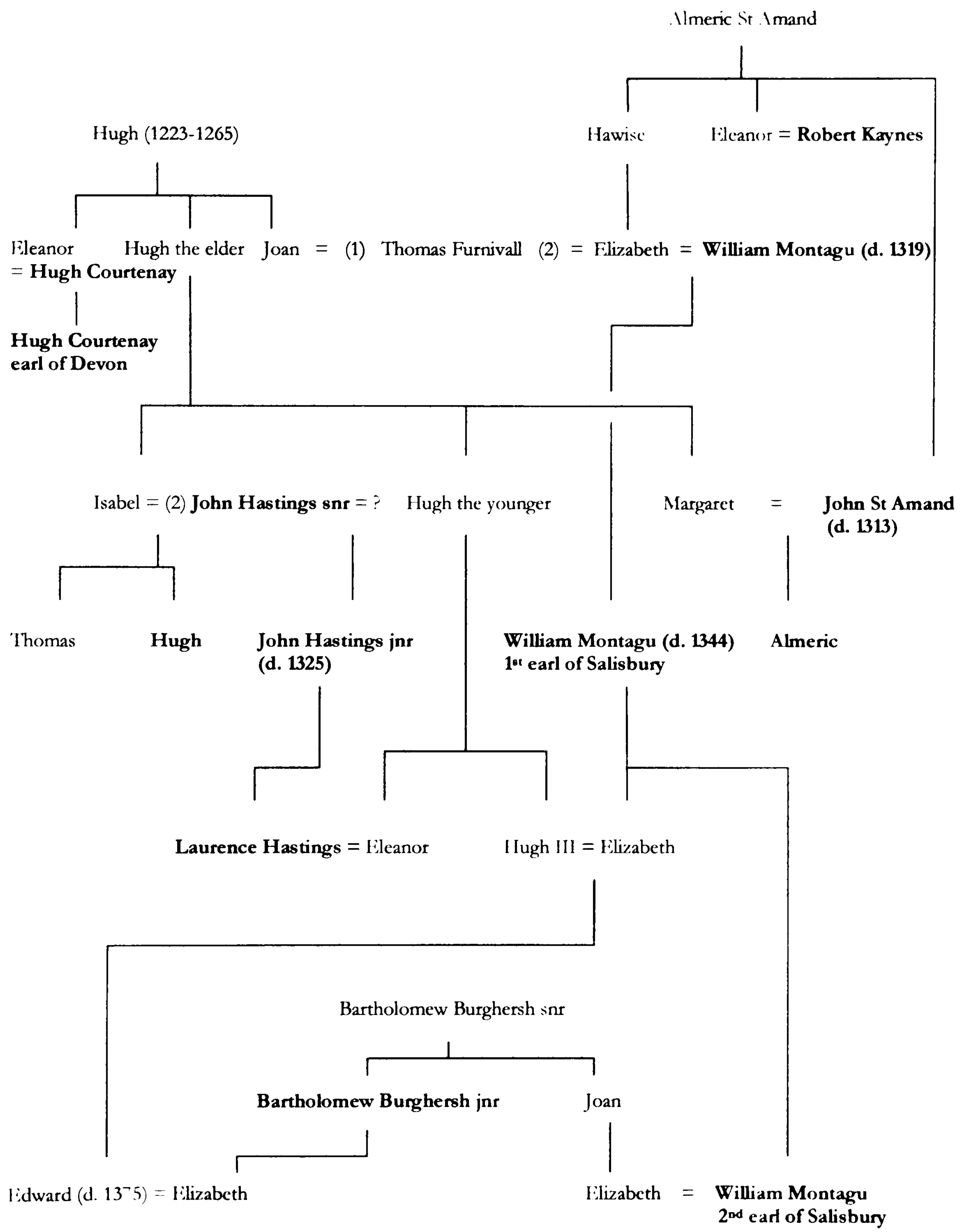


### Family Tree 2: Cadet Branches



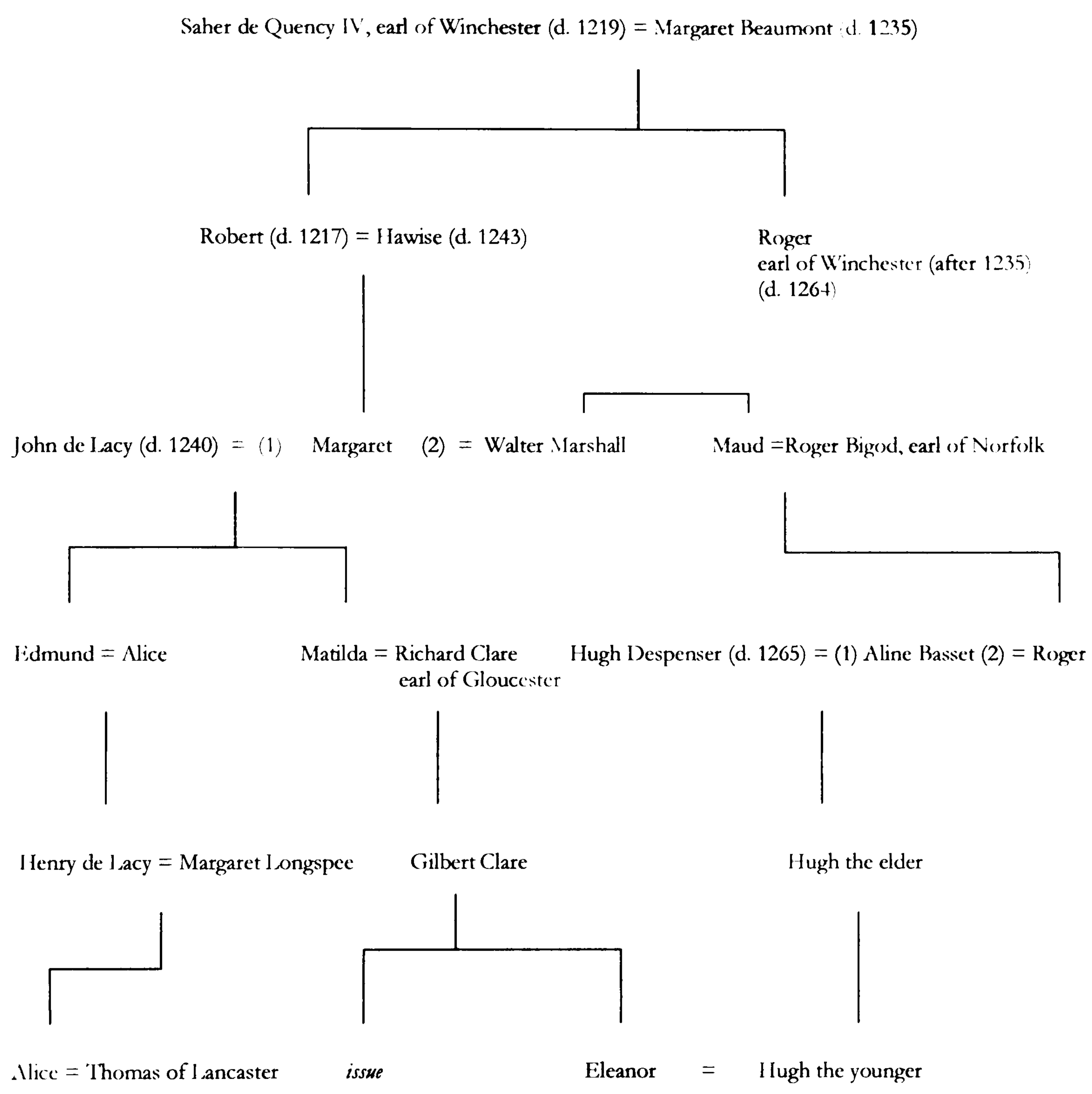
### Family Tree 3: Affinity Links

(showing connections with Courtenays, Montagus, St Amands, Hastings, Burghershes)



Key: names in **bold** have affiliation to the Despensers.

### Family Tree 4: descent of the de Quency earls of Winchester (simplified)



## 1

## Introduction

OF all the English noble families in the late middle ages, the name of Despenser has perhaps carried the most contempt. In any standard work on medieval England, the elder and younger Hugh Despenser jump from the page as the greatest examples of greed, cruelty and injustice. Their deaths were among the most brutal in a brutal age, and have aroused comment from all quarters: one nineteenth-century antiquarian wrote that Hugh the younger was ‘executed with such barbarous aggravations of cruelty as would have disgraced a nation of the fiercest savages’.<sup>1</sup> The rest of the family hardly fared much better. In six generations, no fewer than three were executed (two without the law, one by a Bristol mob), another was slaughtered in battle and the remaining two fell victim to plague. With such a pedigree, survival alone could be considered an achievement. Yet survive they did, making powerful marriages, leading armies, holding earldoms and going on crusade. There were two Garter Knights among their number, they could claim connection to Edward I and Richard II and they were rarely far from the centre of politics. But for all this, no study hitherto exists of the family in their own right.<sup>2</sup> This thesis attempts to redress the balance by providing a wide-ranging archive-

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<sup>1</sup> Rev. T. Rees, *A Topographical and Historical Description of South Wales* (London 1819), 587.

<sup>2</sup> Natalie Fryde’s *Tyranny* is the fullest account of the Despenser ‘regime’ that lasted from 1321 to 1326. The standard works on the reigns of Edward II and Richard II also contain plenty about the Despensers, but none, with the partial exception of Alistair Dunn’s recent monograph, focus directly on the family: J.C. Davies, *The Baronial Opposition to Edward II* (Cambridge 1918); Tout, *Chapters*; id., *The Place of the Reign of Edward II in English History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (Manchester 1936); M. McKisack, *The Fourteenth Century, 1307-1399* (Oxford 1959); Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster*; J.R.S. Phillips, *Aymer de Valence, Earl of Pembroke* (Oxford 1972); M.C. Buck, *Politics, Finance and the Church in the Reign of Edward II* (Cambridge 1983); J.S. Hamilton, *Piers Gaveston, Earl of Cornwall 1307-1312: Politics and Patronage in the Reign of Edward II* (Detroit 1988); Haines, *King Edward II; Saul, Richard II*; A. Goodman and J.L. Gillespie, *Richard II: The Art of Kingship* (Oxford 1999); A.J. Dunn, *The Politics of Magnate Power in England and Wales 1389-1413* (Oxford 2003). J.L. Leland, ‘Richard



based study taking in six generations of the Despenser family. It makes a conscious effort to shift focus away from the reign of Edward II in order to assess their service, retinues, estates, religion and political achievements over the course of a century and a half.

Chapter 2 begins with a thorough history of the family, charting the main events of the principal male family members from c.1281 to 1400. (These dates have been chosen since they mark the beginning of the majority of Hugh Despenser the elder and the death of Thomas Despenser, after which no male member of the family ever reached his eighteenth year.) It lays the foundation in the Barons Wars of 1258-65, in which Hugh Despenser the justiciar governed, fought and died alongside Simon de Montfort. Examining the impact of periods of minority, the chapter stresses the achievements of the elder Despenser in the 1290s and his grandson, Hugh III, in the 1340s, each of whom returned the family to favour after forfeiture and disgrace. It also looks at the way in which the family consistently married upwards into the higher nobility, including the key alliance between the younger Despenser and Eleanor Clare, daughter of the earl of Gloucester.

The following two chapters deal with the family's interaction with others. Chapter 3 examines service performed to the crown, both at home and abroad, and chapter 4 deals with service performed by others to the Despensers. The consistency, depth and variety of means by which the family contributed to the governance of the realm through counsel, parliament and diplomacy are set against the damage and corruption of the 1320s. Assessment is made of the Despensers' martial legacy, together with their opportunities to provide service to a number of different monarchs who had varying strategies of rule. Chapter 4 provides what is to date the most comprehensive register of the Despenser affinity. Using both printed and unpublished material, it looks at the men with whom the family had contact and outlines the importance of the family's local power base in Glamorgan. It seeks to determine whether any families were continually loyal retainers of the Despensers over several generations, and to what extent the geographical scope of the affinity was sensitive to their political standing. For much of the fourteenth century, retaining proceeded quietly but successfully, and several leading

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II and the Counter-Appellants', unpublished PhD thesis (Yale University 1979), has a lot of detail on Thomas and Bishop Henry Despenser, but relies too heavily on published sources.

barons took advantage of a favourable political situation and successful foreign wars in order to make their fortunes with the Despensers. However, it is seen that, overall, the family's appreciation of local support was poor, and an inability to rally supporters to their banners during the reigns of Edward II and Richard II contributed greatly to their downfall.

This theme is carried over into chapter 5, which provides an analysis of the Despenser estates. It evaluates their achievements in the midst of the ongoing fourteenth-century 'crises', war, famine, plague and religious upheaval, and charts the means by which the elder Hugh built up substantial holdings in the west of England. This was massively increased after the death of Gilbert Clare at Bannockburn (1314), whereupon Hugh the younger inherited a third of the Clare estates from his late father-in-law. Father and son thus constructed an empire that ran almost unhindered from Herefordshire to the Irish Sea, possibly even coveting the patrimony of Wales itself, only to lose most of what they had gained in 1327. However, emphasis is placed upon the importance of the Welsh power-base throughout the fourteenth century, with particular focus on the tenacity of the Despenser women, especially Elizabeth, wife of Edward Despenser II, whose administration of the estates during two decades of minority proved remarkably successful. Despite Thomas Despenser's nonchalant efforts to maximise the financial assets available to him, even after a large windfall from the crown in 1397, the tireless work done by the long-living Elizabeth enabled her daughters to draw together all the family lands once more in the fifteenth century.

The final chapter is a more conceptual study, examining how a family on the very threshold of the higher nobility wished to portray themselves to the wider world. It looks at their consistent appeal to history as a means of legitimising and underscoring their lineage, and, through the Despenser 'mausoleum' at Tewkesbury, considers the aspirations of certain family members who expressed themselves through their religion. This use of sacred space to communicate intent is then set beside an assessment of the Despensers' contribution to fourteenth-century chivalry. Particular attention is paid to the crusades in the 1360s, when Edward Despenser fought in Milan against the Visconti, and in 1399, when Thomas Despenser sealed an indenture suggesting he too intended to take the cross. The second part of chapter 6 considers the family's place in the medieval nobility and their brief holding of the earldoms of Winchester (1322-26) and Gloucester

(1397-99). It is shown that Winchester was awarded for a specific reason, namely a disputed legacy dating back to the early 1200s, and that during Edward III's reign, the Despensers were consistently in line for further reward. Finally, the chapter examines the concept of the royal favourite. It looks at how the younger Hugh was portrayed by contemporary chroniclers and poets as sexually immoral, following in a literary tradition of witchcraft and sorcery that began as far back as the reign of William Rufus. The chapter suggests that rather than examine the *factual* relationship between Edward II and Hugh the younger, which is fraught with difficulty, it is much more appealing to consider the typology to which the writers alluded: a rupture of the traditional boundaries between the king and his subject. This intense vilification contributed to what I have called the 'Despenser legend' – the tendency of polemicists and politicians in later centuries, writing of men such as Buckingham, Essex and the duc d'Epemon, to use the Despensers as examples of vice and debauchery.

### Sources and Historiography

So how do we reconstruct the lives of a fourteenth-century noble family? Many recent nobility studies have recognised the importance of family archives, but unfortunately – unlike the chance survival of riches for the Beauchamps, Courtenays, Mortimers and Montagus – there is no Despenser cartulary or household book.<sup>3</sup> Although the marriage in 1422 of Isabella Despenser to Richard Beauchamp, earl of Warwick, ensured that a handful of Despenser manuscripts found their way into the Warwick records,<sup>4</sup> the crown archives contain the most valuable documents. This is hardly surprising, since so much of the medieval nobility's permanence was determined by their relationship with the king. The drawback with these royal records is that we are entirely dependent on the Despensers' 'visibility' to yield results. In other words, during periods of minority or disgrace they were less likely to appear. This has been one of the major deterrents to a study of the Despensers until this point, yet in itself it can be equally illuminating: what a family did when they were out of favour is often as important as their behaviour during other, more profitable times. Indeed, the great benefit of searching the central

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<sup>3</sup> See below, chapter 5.

<sup>4</sup> Gloucester RO, D 184/M15/1-6. M.A. Hicks, *Warwick the Kingmaker* (Oxford 2002), 31-63, contains further references.

repositories for material means that the oft-overlooked members of the family can be examined in greater detail.

Within the royal archives, there are certain series that yield particularly important information on English noble families, including the Despensers. The wardrobe books for our period, found in a number of repositories,<sup>5</sup> are mines of information that tell us of expenses for diplomatic missions, wages of war, *restauro equorum*, fees for bannerets and household knights and the king's New Year gifts. They are particularly useful for the Despensers' involvement in the Scottish and French wars that lasted, almost unbroken, from 1294 until 1360. The National Archives also hold a wide selection of other Despenser material. The Special Collections division contains the Ancient Correspondence (SC 1), Ministers' Accounts (SC 6) and Ancient Petitions (SC 8), which enable us to establish a network of Despenser acquaintances. This is especially relevant for the years immediately following 1326, when a deluge of complaints, some genuine, others not, flooded the chancery. The Ministers' Accounts, together with the Extents, Inquisitions and Valors (E 142 – E 143) allow an appraisal of the Despensers' landed estates. Again, these are most helpful in assessing the colossal holdings amassed by the elder and younger Hugh in the 1320s, particularly since their private records were seized by the crown in 1326 and never returned.<sup>6</sup>

The near-constant warfare has ensured the survival of a multitude of lists of protections, retinues and indentures in the Chancery division (C 61, C 67, C 71, C 76). Many of these are clarified in the wide-ranging and often bewildering Exchequer: Accounts Various (E 101), which contains a fascinating array of records enabling us to reconstruct the Despenser retinue and their association on campaign with other barons and earls. A series of receipts of purchase dating from the 1380s and 1390s allows a glimpse into everyday life and tastes.<sup>7</sup> The Exchequer division also provides the central treasury accounts: Pipe Rolls, Memoranda Rolls and the Patent, Close, Fine and Charter Rolls calendared by Her Majesty's Stationery Office. In the Receipt Rolls (E 401) and Issue Rolls (E 403) are recorded payments to and from the Despensers. The *Coram Rege*

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<sup>5</sup> The majority are in The National Archives and the British Library. Bodl. Tanner MS 197 (1311-12) and SAL MSS 119-21 (1299-1300, 1316-17, 1317-18) are the exceptions.

<sup>6</sup> Fryde, *Tyranny*, Appendix 1, contains further archival details.

<sup>7</sup> E 101/511/12; E 101/511/28; E 101/511/29.

rolls (KB 27) and Assize Rolls (JUST 1) provide an idea of the family's involvement in law and order.<sup>8</sup>

As we have already noted, it is hardly surprising that most of the surviving Despenser material is from the 1320s. The younger Hugh's position as chamberlain of the royal household and his effective control of Edward II's government after 1321 means that many royal records contain marks of his influence. A chamber account in the Society of Antiquaries, London, is a marvellous source of detail about the last few years of Edward's reign.<sup>9</sup> Entitled by a later hand 'the accounts of Edward II's chamber and his gifts to Hugh Despenser the Younger', it contains many examples of clothes, money and food lavished upon the king's favourite. It also acts as a journal by which we can trace the final flight of Edward and Despenser junior across England from London to South Wales.

One deterrent to an analysis of the Despensers has been the absence of more intimate accounts of their lives. For all the mass of government records, hardly any personal letters survive,<sup>10</sup> and the fourteenth-century chroniclers only infrequently refer to the family. Again, the obvious exception is the reign of Edward II, for which the best account is the *Vita Edwardi Secundi*.<sup>11</sup> The manuscript copies of the *Historia Roffensis*, the Ludlow Annal and a Canterbury chronicle also provide valuable commentary on the 1320s,<sup>12</sup> and several other narratives are published by the Rolls Series and the Camden Society. A number of these also continue into the reign of Edward III. Later chronicles mention the Despensers only infrequently (and then usually in connection with military campaigns), but the continuator of Ranulf Higden's *Polychronicon* made several positive comments about their activities in the 1360s and 1370s. This may well explain why two copies of the *Polychronicon* were commissioned at Norwich during Henry Despenser's

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<sup>8</sup> C. Valente, *The Theory and Practice of Revolt in Medieval England* (Burlington, VT 2003), 36-37, 39-40, 47, 127-59, contains much more substantial analysis of these records in relation to the elder and younger Hugh.

<sup>9</sup> SAL MS 122.

<sup>10</sup> P. Chaplais (ed.), *The War of Saint-Sardos*, Camden 3<sup>rd</sup> series, 87 (London 1954), is a selection of the Ancient Correspondence sent to the younger Despenser during the war of 1324-25.

<sup>11</sup> C. Given-Wilson, 'Vita Edwardi Secundi: Memoir or Journal?', in M.C. Prestwich, R.H. Britnell and R. Frame (eds.), *Thirteenth Century England VI* (Woodbridge 1997), 165-76; W.R. Childs, 'Resistance and Treason in the *Vita Edwardi Secundi*', in *ibid.*, 177-91. Generally on chronicles: A. Gransden, *Historical Writing in England, II: c. 1307 to the Early Sixteenth Century* (Ithaca, NY 1982); J. Taylor, *English Historical Literature in the Fourteenth Century* (Oxford 1987); C. Given-Wilson, *Chronicles: the writing of history in medieval England* (London 2004).

<sup>12</sup> BL Cotton MS Faustina B.V, BL Cotton MS Nero A.IV and Cambridge, Trinity College MS R.5.41.

time as bishop.<sup>13</sup> The chronicles of Thomas Walsingham and Jean Froissart are also valuable, provided that the former's acerbity and the latter's 'slipshod inaccurate writing' be taken into account.<sup>14</sup> Froissart received patronage from Edward Despenser during the 1360s and his fascination with the fate of Edward II ensured he wrote in detail of the downfall of the elder and younger Hugh. Finally, the *Chronicon de Theokesburie* provides a detailed, if somewhat mechanical, account of the Despensers' local importance and their bequests to Tewkesbury Abbey.<sup>15</sup>

Tewkesbury also provides the physical remains of the Despensers' world. Most family members were buried there and much can be learned from the tombs and chantries of six generations. The abbey became a locus for the Despensers to collectively legitimise their place in the English nobility and a place of sanctuary for individuals. Several wills are also extant, and these provide small glimpses as to the personalities of the people who wrote them: Edward Despenser II,<sup>16</sup> his wife Elizabeth,<sup>17</sup> and his daughters Elizabeth, lady Zouche<sup>18</sup> and Isabella.<sup>19</sup> In summary, by taking the wealth of government archives and smattering of private records together with the accounts of contemporaries and the sheer physical presence of the Tewkesbury tombs, we can paint a picture of one of the most infamous and misunderstood families of the middle ages.

To do so we must identify the historiographical process by which we proceed. For a long time the historiography of royal-baronial relations was dominated by a set of assumptions about the essential incompatibility between the two parties, their rivalry for

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<sup>13</sup> Bodl. MS Bodley 316 and Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS lat. 4922. Both have the pressmark of Norwich Cathedral Library, and the inscriptions and marginalia are strikingly similar to a copy of the *Flores Historiarum* known to have been owned by Henry: P. Lasko and N.J. Morgan (eds.), *Medieval Art in East Anglia 1300-1520* (Norwich 1973), no. 41; N.R. Ker, 'Medieval Manuscripts from Norwich Cathedral Priory', in *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society* 1 (1949-53), 18-19; L.F. Sandler, *Gothic Manuscripts 1285-1385: A Survey of Manuscripts Illuminated in the British Isles* (Oxford 1986), ii, 166; and below, chapter 2(c).

<sup>14</sup> T.F. Tout, 'The Study of Medieval Chronicles', in *The Collected Papers of Thomas Frederick Tout* (Manchester 1934), iii, 20.

<sup>15</sup> Copies survive in Bodl. MS Top. Glouc. d.2 (the so-called 'Founders' Book'), and BL Cotton MS Cleopatra C.III, ff. 220r-234v. The former is discussed in J.M. Luxford, 'The Founders' Book', in R.K. Morris and R. Shoesmith (eds.), *Tewkesbury Abbey: History, Art and Architecture* (Logaston 2003), 53-64, and the latter is printed in R. Dodsworth and W. Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum* (London 1655-73), ii, 59-65.

<sup>16</sup> Lambeth Palace, Reg. Sudbury, ff. 89v-90r, with a copy in Lincolnshire Archives Office, Reg. XII, f. 165r. Abstract in *TV*, i, 99-100.

<sup>17</sup> Lambeth Palace, Reg. Arundel, ii, ff. 108v-109r. Abstract in *TV*, i, 174-75.

<sup>18</sup> Lambeth Palace, Arundel MS 1, f. 253v; printed in P. Payne and C.M. Barron, 'The letters and life of Elizabeth Despenser, Lady Zouche (d. 1408)', *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 41 (1997), 144-45. Abstract in *TV*, i, 172.

<sup>19</sup> Printed in F.J. Furnivall, *The Fifty Earliest English Wills*, EETS, old series 78 (1882), 116-19. Abstract in *TV*, i, 239-40.

power, their intense competition for patronage and the tendency to push political debate into constitutional conflict. This approach is exemplified in the work of William Stubbs, J. Conway Davies and T.F. Tout, whose work was enormously influential on scholarship down to the middle of the twentieth century, particularly in relation to the Despenser regime in the 1320s.<sup>20</sup> Such obviously 'Whiggish' traditions of writing about the middle ages were, however, fundamentally challenged from the late-1930s onwards, by the work of K.B. McFarlane and his pupils. McFarlane proposed a paradigm shift in terms of the relationship between the crown and the nobility in late medieval England.<sup>21</sup> He exposed the myth which saw the nobility merely as uneducated thugs interested only in fighting and opposing the king, and instead provided evidence to show that most were literate and intelligent, and that their fundamental instinct was to support the institution of the crown.<sup>22</sup> McFarlane's greatest contribution was to demonstrate how the conflicts that occurred in political life between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries took place not as a consequence of major ideological difference between crown and nobility but because of the failure of certain kings to observe the deeply-rooted conventions of counsel, negotiation and consent.<sup>23</sup>

In the 1970s, a new generation of scholars, influenced by the McFarlanite agenda, adopted a biographical approach to the fourteenth century, and specifically to the reign of Edward II. In studies of two of the most powerful characters of the reign, John Maddicott and Seymour Phillips offered a further revision of the ideology espoused by Davies and Tout, both contending the need to understand history through the people who wrote it.<sup>24</sup> In offering a further way forward, Phillips argued that the 'middle party', long assumed to have wrested control of government from Edward II from 1315 to 1319, owed its existence entirely to the imagination of the Stubbsian agenda.<sup>25</sup> At the

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<sup>20</sup> W. Stubbs, *The Constitutional History of England* (Oxford 1880); Davies, *Baronial Opposition*; Tout, *Chapters*. For their influence, see B. Wilkinson, *The Constitutional History of Medieval England, 1216-1399* (London 1948); S.B. Chrimes, *An Introduction to the Administrative History of Mediaeval England* (Oxford 1952).

<sup>21</sup> McFarlane, *Nobility*; id. *England in the Fifteenth Century* (London 1981). McFarlane has been described as the twentieth century's 'most influential historian of late medieval English politics' ('Introduction', in R.H. Britnell and A.J. Pollard (eds.), *The McFarlane Legacy* (Stroud and New York 1995), xi). Further references may be found below, in chapter 4.

<sup>22</sup> This was primarily in the Ford Lectures of 1953, but began as far back as 1938 ('An Early Paper on Crown and Parliament in the Later Middle Ages', repr. *Nobility*, 279-297). It was partly in response to V.H. Galbraith's comment that the ruling classes were 'generally men of arrested intellectual development' (quoted by M.C. Prestwich, reviewing Phillips, *Aymer de Valence*, in *EHR* 89 (1974), 420).

<sup>23</sup> J.P.C., 'Introduction', in McFarlane, *Nobility*, vii-xxxvii; G.L. Harriss, 'Introduction', in McFarlane, *England in the Fifteenth Century*, ix-xxvii.

<sup>24</sup> Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster*, Phillips, *Aymer de Valence*.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, 136-77.

same time, Natalie Fryde's research on the tyranny of the 1320s took a different approach, by concentrating on the troubled years of Edward's reign and its financial repercussions.<sup>26</sup> In contrast with Maddicott and Phillips, who understood the need for a wider focus to set brief periods of crisis against many years of calm, Fryde could not advance the historiographical approach. The biographical approach has remained a strong feature of writing on late medieval politics, which for the most part have confirmed McFarlane's hypothesis.<sup>27</sup>

In the late 1980s, modification of McFarlane's work was made by a group of historians emphasising a 'new constitutional history'.<sup>28</sup> The thrust of this scholarship is to emphasise the structure of government rather than particular moments of political crisis, and to see matters of principle (including the principle of good counsel) as being equally important to those of patronage. This approach sees the king firmly wedded to the centre of politics, surrounded by a nobility who upheld his position, wished to take part in his government and had a real sense of their own political responsibilities. Subsequent work in this vein on the fifteenth century has taken this acceptance of a 'community of interests' further in an investigation of the public dimensions of government. Helen Castor has looked at the dichotomy of the public and private power

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<sup>26</sup> Fryde, *Tyranny*.

<sup>27</sup> General studies include Given-Wilson, *English nobility*; W.M. Ormrod, *Political Life in Medieval England, 1300-1450* (Basingstoke 1995). County and regional studies abound, and the following is a selection of works on noble and/or gentry society: C. Rawcliffe, *The Staffords: Earls of Stafford and Dukes of Buckingham, 1394-1521* (Cambridge 1978); A.J. Pollard, 'The Richmondshire community of gentry during the Wars of the Roses', in C.D. Ross (ed.), *Patronage, Pedigree and Power in Later Medieval England* (Gloucester 1979), 37-59; M. Cherry, 'The Courtenay Earls of Devon: The Formation and Disintegration of a Late Medieval Aristocratic Affinity', *Southern History* 1 (1979), 71-97; N.E. Saul, *Knights and Esquires: the Gloucestershire Gentry in the Fourteenth Century* (Oxford 1981); S.M. Wright, *The Derbyshire Gentry in the Fifteenth Century*, Derbyshire Record Society 8 (1983); M.J. Bennett, *Community, Class and Careerism: Cheshire and Lancashire Society in the Age of 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight'* (Cambridge 1983); N.E. Saul, *Scenes from Provincial Life: Knightly Families in Sussex 1280-1400* (Oxford 1986); M.M.N. Stansfield, 'The Holand Family, Dukes of Exeter, Earls of Kent and Huntingdon, 1352-1475', unpublished D.Phil thesis (University of Oxford 1987); B.P. Vale, 'The Scropes of Bolton and of Masham', unpublished D.Phil thesis (University of York 1987); S.J. Payling, *Political Society in Lancastrian England: The Greater Gentry of Nottinghamshire* (Oxford 1991); M.W. Warner, 'The Montagu Earls of Salisbury circa 1300-1428: A Study in Warfare, Politics and Political Culture', unpublished PhD thesis (University College, London 1991); E. Acheson, *A Gentry Community: Leicestershire in the Fifteenth Century, c.1422-c.1485* (Cambridge 1992); M.C. Carpenter, *Locality and Polity: a study of Warwickshire landed society, 1401-99* (Cambridge 1992); R.L. Storey, 'The north of England', in S.B. Chrimes, C.D. Ross, and R.A. Griffiths (eds.), *Fifteenth Century England 1399-1509*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (Stroud 1995), 129-44; R.A. Griffiths, 'Wales and the Marches', in *ibid.*, 145-72; M.E. Simon, 'The Lovells of Titchmarsh: an English baronial family, 1297-148?', unpublished D.Phil thesis (University of York 1999).

<sup>28</sup> Harriss, 'Introduction', ix-xxvii; C.F. Richmond, 'After McFarlane', *History* 68 (1983), 46-60; E. Powell, 'After "After McFarlane": The Poverty of Patronage and the Case for Constitutional History', in D.J. Clayton, R.G. Davies and P. McNiven (eds.), *Trade, Devotion and Governance: Papers in Late Medieval History* (Stroud 1994), 1-16; G.L. Harriss, 'The Dimensions of Politics', in R.H. Britnell and A.J. Pollard (eds.), *The McFarlane Legacy* (Stroud 1995), 1-20; M.C. Carpenter, 'Political and Constitutional History: before and after McFarlane', in *ibid.*, 176-206; M.C. Carpenter, *The Wars of the Roses* (Cambridge 1997), 4-66.



wielded by the Lancastrian kings of England as lords of the Duchy of Lancaster,<sup>29</sup> and John Watts has used the constitutional ideas of politically active contemporaries in order to reinterpret the relationship between the king and his nobility.<sup>30</sup> Equally important alongside this structuralist approach is an appreciation of the values espoused in crown-noble relations. As Rosemary Horrox has shown, the medieval notion of service was deep-rooted.<sup>31</sup> Whereas men might serve for payment, a beneficial marriage contract or assistance in a legal case, they were also conscious of gaining reflected status from those whom they served. In the late middle ages, it was honourable to serve and honourable to be served.

It is in this historiographical framework that this thesis is set. It purports to be more than a biographical study on the Despenser family, giving due reference to the work done on Edward II's reign, but, by exploring the longer-term reverberations, moves away from the 1320s in order to look at the Despensers as a whole. It is argued here that, with the exception of the 1320s and a few months at the end of 1399, the Despensers were loyal servants of the crown who were prepared to conform to the existing culture of service.<sup>32</sup> In a century better known for its crises than its champions, it was their devotion to duty that marked them out.

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<sup>29</sup> H. Castor, *The King, the Crown and the Duchy of Lancaster: Public Authority and Private Power, 1399-1461* (Oxford 2000).

<sup>30</sup> J.L. Watts, 'Ideas, Principles and Politics', in A.J. Pollard (ed.), *The Wars of the Roses* (London 1995), 110-33; id., *Henry VI and the Politics of Kingship* (Cambridge 1996).

<sup>31</sup> R. Horrox, *Richard III: A Study in Service* (Cambridge 1989), 1-26; id., 'Service', in id. (ed.), *Fifteenth-century attitudes* (Cambridge 1994), 61-78. For a different approach: J.M.W. Bean, *From lord to patron: lordship in late medieval England* (Manchester 1989).

<sup>32</sup> See below, chapters 3-6.

## 2

## The Despensers and their World

THIS opening chapter identifies the key members of the Despenser family and their offspring. We see both the pivotal position held by Hugh Despenser the justiciar in the 1260s and the power wielded by the elder and younger Hugh during Edward II's reign, together with the swift political recovery of their descendants. The effect of this influence can be seen in the Despenser marriages, which at times acted as a barometer of family circumstances, and the various networks and cadet branches that resulted from such unions. The chapter is the most complete and detailed survey of the Despenser connections made hitherto, and serves as a point of reference for the rest of the thesis.

### (a) Beginnings

The exact origin of the Despensers is unknown. The family name is French, being a corruption of the Latin *dispensario*: from the late-twelfth century, members of the family held lands by the serjeantry service of serving as dispensers in the royal household.<sup>1</sup> This is most likely how the surname was adopted, also helping to explain the existence of a number of unrelated families sharing the same name. Although this thesis is primarily concerned with the main Despenser line, beginning with Hugh Despenser the elder, it is

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<sup>1</sup> D.M. Stenton (ed.), *The Chancellor's Roll for the eighth year of the reign of King Richard the First: Michaelmas 1196* (London 1930), 39; J.S. Moore, 'The Gloucestershire section of Domesday Book: geographical problems of the text, part 4', *BGAST* 108 (1990), 106. For one use of *dispensario*, see W. Dugdale, *The antiquaries of Warwickshire* (London 1656), 310.

important to outline the role of his father, also Hugh, during the Barons' Wars of 1258-65.<sup>2</sup> The latter's death at Evesham cast a long shadow over the family.

The first significant mention of this Hugh Despenser was his appointment by Henry III as constable of Horston Castle, Derbyshire, in 1255.<sup>3</sup> He had probably acquitted himself well in the king's long visit to Gascony (6 August 1253 – 29 December 1254). Having risen in reputation, in 1257 he was attached to the retinue of Richard, earl of Cornwall, and sailed from Yarmouth on 29 April. The fleet, consisting of fifty ships, docked at Dortrecht on the Rhine estuary, and the cavalcade travelled on to Aachen for the earl's coronation as King of the Romans.<sup>4</sup> Cornwall's retinue appears to have been for decoration alone: most of his men, Despenser included, only received protections until Michaelmas.<sup>5</sup> At the end of September, they were duly sent home.

With this background, it is a little surprising that the following summer, Despenser chose to side with the barons in the Oxford parliament. His stock had risen so far that in the Provisions of Oxford, he was named as one of the twelve barons responsible for reform.<sup>6</sup> Following the baronial split in the parliament of October 1259, Despenser sided with de Montfort and was rewarded in 1260 with office of chief justiciar of England.<sup>7</sup> The revival of the justiciarship had been one of the achievements of the Provisions of Oxford, and an annual salary of 1000 marks emphasised its importance.<sup>8</sup> From 1258 to 1265 the post was held variously by Sir Hugh Bigod, Sir Philip Basset and Despenser himself.<sup>9</sup> However, the split of 1259 divided the three men: Bigod and Basset

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<sup>2</sup> See family tree 1.

<sup>3</sup> GEC, iv, 259. Hugh and the king were apparently familiar: the Close Rolls record that after Despenser reached his majority, the king sent him two casks of wine on New Year's Day 1245 (*ibid.*, 260n).

<sup>4</sup> N. Denholm-Young, *Richard of Cornwall* (Oxford 1947), ch. 6.

<sup>5</sup> The retinue was very haphazardly chosen: of the seven retinue commanders (of whom Despenser was one), only John de Stuteville attested to any of the earl's charters. The rest appear to have been selected merely 'to make a brave show at the coronation' and nothing more (Denholm-Young, *Richard of Cornwall*, 90-91).

<sup>6</sup> R.E. Treharne and I.J. Saunders (eds.), *Documents of the Baronial Movement of Reform and Rebellion 1258-1267* (Oxford 1973), no. 5.

<sup>7</sup> He had already served as justiciar itinerant for three counties (C.H. Jenkinson and B.E.R. Formoy (eds.), *Select Cases in the Exchequer of Pleas*, Seldon Society 48 (1931), 109, 112) and held the justiciarship three times: October 1260 – June 1261; July – October 1263; May 1264 – August 1265 (*HBC*, 71).

<sup>8</sup> Tout, *Charters*, i, 295-96; C.H. Knowles, 'The Justiciarship in England, 1258-1265', in H. Hearder and H.R. Loyn (eds.), *British government and administration: studies presented to S.B. Chrimes* (Cardiff 1974), 16-26.

<sup>9</sup> Despenser was in exalted company, as both his companions had impressive legal pedigrees. Bigod was brother of the Earl Marshal, grandson of the great William Marshal, and distantly related to the king (GEC, ix, 586-93). Basset was descended from two chief justices of Henry I's reign, and his father and uncle had appeared on Magna Carta as King John's counsellors (W.T. Reedy, 'Basset, Alan (*d.* 1232)', in *Oxford DNB*, iv, 259). For Basset's justiciarship: R.M. Hogg, 'Philip Basset at the Court *Coram Rege*, 1261-63', *Irish Jurist* 21 (1986), 272-89.

were moderates, whilst Despenser was the only one to side with de Montfort, hence his appointment in 1260.

That same year Despenser made an important marriage to Aline, Basset's daughter. If there were political motives behind this, they are unclear, although it is obvious that the match came about through the justiciarship.<sup>10</sup> Despite their differences, father- and son-in-law acted as co-justiciars for a few months in 1261, before Henry III's clean sweep of the baronial administration dismissed Despenser and left Basset in sole charge. This pushed Hugh firmly into de Montfort's camp. For the rest of his life he was one of the earl's closest companions. In the summer of 1263, when the king's influence had weakened again, Hugh was re-appointed as justiciar. Any possibility of a lingering royalist allegiance must have been emphatically dispelled when he led the mob that raided and burnt the Isleworth palace of Richard of Cornwall, an episode which, wrote one chronicler, saw 'the beginning of grief and the birth of mortal war'.<sup>11</sup>

Shortly afterwards, Hugh fought for the barons at the Battle of Lewes. Opposing him, among others, was his father-in-law. Contemporary accounts describe how Basset fought with great gallantry and was badly wounded;<sup>12</sup> despite his refusal to submit while he could still stand, he was eventually captured by Despenser.<sup>13</sup> After the battle Hugh was entrusted with preparing the peace treaty and negotiating terms with the king, crossing to France for the Mise of Lewes.<sup>14</sup> He was appointed constable of the castles of Devizes, Oxford, Orford and Nottingham, although Thomas Wykes was of the opinion that he received scanty reward for his military achievement.<sup>15</sup> A number of royalist prisoners (not including Philip Basset, who was kept at the de Montfort stronghold of Dover) were given into his care. I.J. Saunders writes: 'All surviving evidence indicates that de Montfort and Despenser controlled the government; the power of the Council of Nine seems to have been nominal'.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> E 326/194 is a covenant of marriage between Henry de Lacy and Margaret Longspee, drawn up in December 1256, in which Hugh Despenser and Simon de Montfort were amongst the negotiators for the former and Philip Basset for the latter.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Denholm-Young, *Richard of Cornwall*, 126.

<sup>12</sup> 'Sir Philip Basset the gode knight worst was to ouercome / He hadde mo than tuenti wounde ar he were inome': W.A. Wright (ed.), *The metrical chronicle of Robert of Gloucester*, RS 86 (London 1887), ii, 750.

<sup>13</sup> 'Annales Prioratus de Wigornia', in *JM*, iv, 452.

<sup>14</sup> SC 1/47/5 i-iv.

<sup>15</sup> 'Chronicon Thomae Wykes', in *JM*, iv, 153. Devizes had been held by Basset.

<sup>16</sup> Treharne and Saunders (eds.), *Documents*, 297 n.7.

Despenser was killed in the slaughter at Evesham on 4 August 1265.<sup>17</sup> The chronicle accounts are unanimous that as Prince Edward's troops surrounded the town, de Montfort turned to his justiciar and offered him the chance to escape.<sup>18</sup> Unlike Thomas of Lancaster's men, who in 1322 deserted on the eve of Boroughbridge, Hugh refused to flee.<sup>19</sup> A recently discovered manuscript in the College of Arms recounted the conversation as follows:

And to Sir Hugh Despenser he said: 'My lord Hugh, consider your great age and look to saving yourself; consider the fact that your counsel can still be of great value to the whole country, for you will leave behind you hardly anyone of such great value and worth.' Straightaway Sir Hugh replied: 'My lord, my lord, let it be. Today we shall all drink from one cup, just as we have in the past.'<sup>20</sup>

This marked a loyalty that was to characterise following generations. According to Thomas Wykes, Despenser and Ralph Basset of Drayton, de Montfort's 'dearest friends', surrounded the earl until they fell.<sup>21</sup> The partisan author of 'The Lament of Simon de Montfort' accorded them their literary apotheosis:

Sire Hue le fer, ly Despencer, tresnoble justice,  
Ore est à tort lyvré à mort, à trop male guise.<sup>22</sup>

Evesham also saw the beginning of a family feud between the Despensers and the Mortimers of Wigmore. The treatment of de Montfort's body during the battle is well-known, as is the grisly fact that the earl's head was later sent to Maud Mortimer at Wigmore Castle as a gift.<sup>23</sup> The College of Arms account actually attributes the fatal

<sup>17</sup> BL Cotton MS Nero D.II, f. 177r, depicts the death of de Montfort with Despenser lying beside him, identifiable by heraldry (see Figure 1). I owe thanks to Dr Claire Valente for discussing this with me.

<sup>18</sup> A similar offer of escape was made to others: H.T. Riley (ed.), *Willelmi Rishanger, quondam monachi S. Albani, et quorundam anonymorum chronica et annales ...*, RS 28 (London 1865), 36-37.

<sup>19</sup> Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster*, 295-96.

<sup>20</sup> London, College of Arms MS 3/23B, m. 5d, transcribed and translated in O. de Laborderie, J.R. Maddicott and D.A. Carpenter, 'The Last Hours of Simon de Montfort: A New Account', *EHR* 115 (2000), 410. The reference to Despenser's age is puzzling, since he was only 42 in August 1265.

<sup>21</sup> 'Chronicon Thomae Wykes', 174. Despenser was stabbed with a dagger (*pugione confossus*).

<sup>22</sup> P.R. Coss (ed.), *Thomas Wright's Political songs of England: from the reign of King John to that of Edward II* (repr. Cambridge 1996), 126. W.H. Blaauw, *The Barons Wars*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (London 1871), 276, translated this in poetic form:

Despenser true, the good Sir Hugh  
Our justice and our friend  
Borne down with wrong amidst the throng  
Has met his wretched end.

<sup>23</sup> D.A. Carpenter, 'A Noble in Politics: Roger Mortimer in the Period of Baronial Reform and Rebellion, 1258-1265', in A.J. Duggan (ed.), *Nobles and nobility in medieval Europe* (Woodbridge 2000), 183-203; L.E. Mitchell, *Portraits of Medieval Women: Family, Marriage, and Politics in England 1225-1350* (New York and

blow to Mortimer himself.<sup>24</sup> Despenser's affinity with the earl, and their death together, must have had a considerable impact on later generations, nurtured on tales of martyrdom at Evesham. After 1314, when the younger Hugh began his empire-building in the Marches, he 'promised to avenge the death of his grandfather upon each of [the Mortimers]'.<sup>25</sup>

After the battle, it was fitting that the monks of Evesham buried Despenser and de Montfort together before the great altar in Evesham Abbey.<sup>26</sup> In the weeks that followed, Hugh's wife Aline, who had acted as guardian of the royalist nobles after Lewes, released her prisoners, as did Eleanor de Montfort at Dover. Left alone with a daughter and a three-year old son, Aline fled to her father in mourning as Pope Clement IV ordered the excommunication of all rebels.<sup>27</sup> Their lands were confiscated, although limited provision was made for widows.<sup>28</sup> Basset was instrumental in the wording of the Dictum of Kenilworth that granted a stay of execution to the remaining Montfortians, and there is reason to believe that it was this connection which allowed the rich Basset estates to continue to the next generation.<sup>29</sup> In 1271 Aline married again. Her second husband was none other than the son of Hugh Bigod, justiciar from 1258 to 1260 and companion of Philip Basset.

### (b) *Dramatis Personae*

Aline Despenser died in March 1281. Aged only twenty, her only son Hugh ('the elder') took livery of his late father's lands in May, and his mother's in August.<sup>30</sup> Although he fought in the second Welsh war (1282-83), it was not until the following decade that

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Basingstoke 2003), ch. 4 ('Heroism and Duty: Maud Mortimer of Wigmore's Contributions to the Royalist Cause').

<sup>24</sup> De Laborderie *et al*, 'Last Hours of Simon de Montfort', 411.

<sup>25</sup> *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, 109.

<sup>26</sup> 'Annales Monasterii de Waverleia', in *AM*, ii, 365. A late Evesham chronicle says they had been buried *minus honorifice propter metum* (De Laborderie *et al*, 'Last Hours of Simon de Montfort', 406n).

<sup>27</sup> 'Chronicon Thomae Wykes', 176; *CPL 1198-1304*, 431. For the surrender of Kenilworth Castle, including John Despenser, Hugh's cousin: *Annales Londonienses*, in Stubbs, *Chronicles*, i, 76.

<sup>28</sup> C.H. Knowles, 'Provision for the Families of the Montfortians disinherited after the Battle of Evesham', in P.R. Coss and S.D. Lloyd (eds.), *Thirteenth Century England I* (Woodbridge 1986), 124; P. Dobrowolski, 'Women and their Dower in the Long Thirteenth Century 1265-1329', in M.C. Prestwich, R.H. Britnell and R. Frame (eds.), *Thirteenth Century England VI* (Woodbridge 1997), 158-61.

<sup>29</sup> On 5 October 1265 Aline was granted manors previously belonging to her husband, 'because of the good service of Philip Basset': *CPR 1258-65*, 459; SC 1/8/16.

<sup>30</sup> *CCR 1279-88*, 88.

Hugh began to move on the national stage. Despenser had inherited his father's legal acumen, and was repeatedly appointed to diplomatic missions in Scotland, France, Italy and Germany between 1294 and 1306.<sup>31</sup> Edward I was highly impressed with the son of his former enemy, and his service even brought recognition with the future king Edward II, who in 1304 wrote letters to Hugh beginning *A son cher amy, salut, e bon amur*.<sup>32</sup> There is every suggestion that the excellent marriage procured in 1306 for Despenser's son, the younger Hugh, was the reward for these services. The king bought the marriage for £2000, probably as part-repayment for debts accrued in wartime.<sup>33</sup> Hugh junior's union with Eleanor Clare, eldest daughter of the 'Red Earl' of Gloucester, brought not only prestige but a connection to the royal family itself.<sup>34</sup>

However, even though Eleanor was a favourite at court, for the first few years of marriage there was nothing exceptional about the association to the Clares. The younger Despenser was nothing more than a moderately well-off baron. His father however, despite not holding comital rank, was in a position of great influence in the realm, a king's man in every sense of the word. He was now 46 years old, and it is not unreasonable to see him as something of a father figure to the new king Edward II, some twenty years his junior. Despenser senior accompanied the king to Paris for his wedding to Isabella of France, and was one of the two courtiers on the royal barge when the newly married couple arrived at Dover on 7 February 1308.<sup>35</sup> Later that month at Edward's coronation at Westminster, the elder Hugh, with the earl of Arundel, Thomas de Vere and Roger Mortimer carried the great *scaccarium*, upon which was laid the royal robes.<sup>36</sup> However, it was Edward II's friendship with Piers Gaveston that was made clear to all when the lowly Gascon, dressed in royal robes and carrying the crown, upstaged all those present. Because Despenser had been in Paris for the king's wedding, he had taken no part in the earls' discussions over the fate of Gaveston, nor had he put his seal to the written agreement made by the leading magnates. He was the most high-ranking

<sup>31</sup> See below, chapter 3(b).

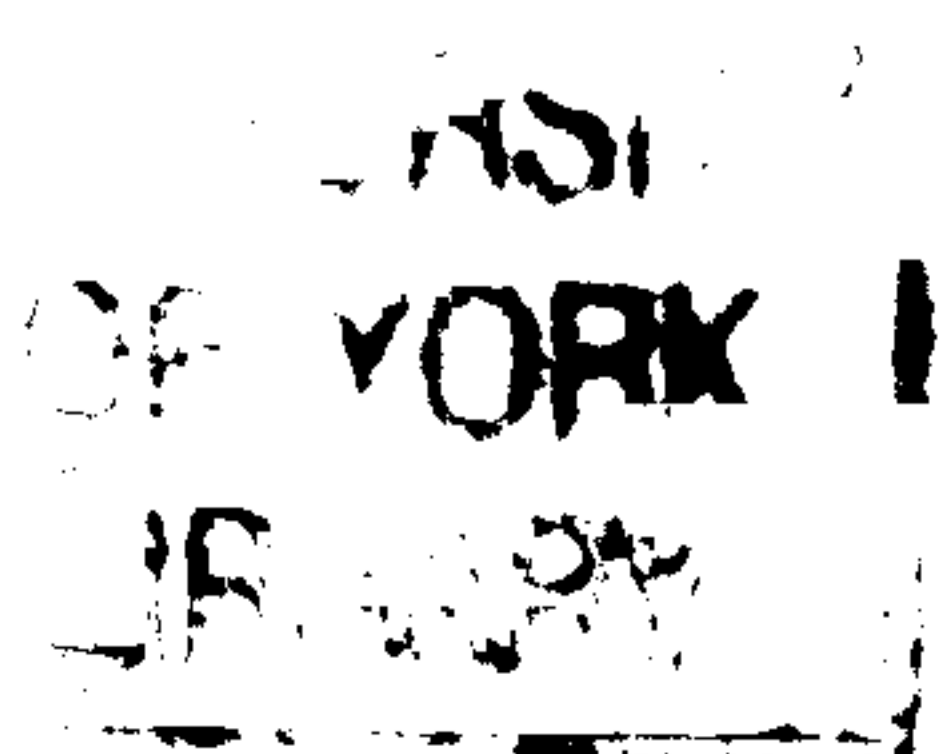
<sup>32</sup> H. Johnstone (ed.), *Letters of Edward, prince of Wales, 1304-1305* (Roxburghe Club 1931), 19, 81, 97, 123.

<sup>33</sup> GEC, iv, 262.

<sup>34</sup> Eleanor was granddaughter of Edward I through her mother Joan of Acre, and her father was the most powerful man in the realm after the king: 'Annales Monasterii de Osenia', in *AM*, iv, 323.

<sup>35</sup> *Parl. Writs*, II(ii), 9. The other was the lord of Castillione (Gascony): *CFR 1307-19*, 14. For the wider implications of the marriage: E.A.R. Brown, 'The Political Repercussions of Family Ties in the Early Fourteenth Century: The Marriage of Edward II of England and Isabelle of France', *Speculum* 63 (1988), 573-595; 64 (1989), 373-79.

<sup>36</sup> *Parl. Writs*, II(ii), 10; *CCR 1307-13*, 53. Walter of Guisborough remarked that ceremonial duties were given to the friends of the king, rather than to those who had the right to this honour: H. Rothwell (ed.), *The Chronicle of Walter of Guisborough*, Camden Society 89 (London 1957), 381-82.



dissenter to the exile of Edward's favourite, and his loyalty to the king in 1308 was to set in place a pattern which lasted until his death.<sup>37</sup>

Although the elder Hugh was isolated by his stance over Gaveston, Edward granted him custody of the castles of Devizes, Marlborough and Chepstow. He was also appointed justice of the forests south of the Trent, a position that held great authority.<sup>38</sup> It says much about their relationship that Edward II was not only prepared to fly in the face of baronial opinion over Gaveston, but over Despenser as well. It was loyalty well rewarded: Hugh similarly refused to set his seal to the Ordinances (1311), for which he was driven from the council.<sup>39</sup> After Gaveston had been summarily executed by Warwick in 1312, it was Despenser senior who acted as Edward's intermediary with the barons, beginning a period of intense hatred between the Despensers and Thomas of Lancaster, the king's cousin, which did not come to an end until 1322.<sup>40</sup>

It was the Battle of Bannockburn (1314) which demonstrated the full significance of the match between the younger Hugh and Eleanor Clare.<sup>41</sup> Earl Gilbert was killed in the battle, and, his only male heir having died in 1312, his lands were divided between his three sisters, Eleanor, Margaret and Elizabeth. It resulted in 'the most important territorial upheaval of the reign'.<sup>42</sup> Since Eleanor was the eldest sister, Hugh was destined for the best portion. His brutal attempts to ransack the remaining two-thirds of the estates were merely the precursor to his desire to establish an empire in south Wales and –

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<sup>37</sup> E.M. Thompson (ed.), *Chronicon Galfridi le Baker de Snynebroke* (Oxford 1889), 16-18. The *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, 4, said that Hugh deserted the barons 'more from a desire to please and a lust for gain than any creditable reason'. Despenser was in the king's chamber when Gaveston surrendered Knaresborough Castle and other lands before his exile, and witnessed the sealing of the letters patent which appointed him lord of Ireland: *Parl. Writs*, II(ii), 14-15. However, not even Despenser witnessed the charter which granted Gaveston the earldom of Cornwall: P. Chaplais, *Piers Gaveston: Edward II's Adoptive Brother* (Oxford 1994), 27-33.

<sup>38</sup> *CFR 1307-19*, 17; *CPR 1307-13*, 51, 183; T.F. Tout, *The place of the reign of Edward II in English history*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (Manchester 1936), 318-21. He was confirmed as justice for life in August 1309, and there are numerous references to his activities as justice scattered throughout the Patent Rolls.

<sup>39</sup> *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, 57-58. It is interesting to note that the criticisms of royal government which the Ordinances supposedly addressed were rooted in the 1290s, the same time that the elder Despenser's influence was first noticed: M.C. Prestwich, 'The Ordinances of 1311 and the Politics of the Early Fourteenth Century', in J. Taylor and W.R. Childs (eds.), *Politics and crisis in fourteenth-century England* (Gloucester 1990), 1-18.

<sup>40</sup> Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster*, 262.

<sup>41</sup> A.J.S. Nusbacher, *The Battle of Bannockburn 1314* (Stroud 2002), is the most recent account.

<sup>42</sup> N. Denholm-Young, 'Introduction', in *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, xii-xiii. The division was held up by the false pregnancy of Gloucester's widow (*Rot. Parl.*, i, 354), and not officially performed until summer 1317: *CPR 1313-17*, 660-61; *CFR 1307-19*, 350; M. Alschul, *A Baronial Family in Medieval England: the Clares, 1217-1314* (Baltimore 1965), 165-74.



according to a local chronicler – obtain the earldom of Gloucester.<sup>43</sup> As Michael Altschul has stated, ‘the partition not only brought [Despenser] to power, but also led directly to the civil wars which convulsed first the march and later the entire kingdom, and which eventually doomed not only Hugh, but the king himself.’<sup>44</sup>

Gloucester’s death meant that a powerful voice of moderation was lost. Over the next few years the younger Hugh moved into the king’s inner circle, and in 1318 was appointed chamberlain, with unparalleled access to the king.<sup>45</sup> If Hugh senior was a father figure, Hugh junior was Edward’s *alter ego*. The situation was almost identical to when Gaveston had been alive, but with the crucial difference that Despenser was more than capable of achieving his ambitions. Despite universal criticism from the magnates, Hugh and Edward were inseparable, prompting speculation of a homosexual relationship.<sup>46</sup> His ambitions in south Wales cut across the traditional rights of the powerful Marcher lords, who in 1321 seized the younger Hugh’s estates and castles in the area. Both Despensers were accused in parliament of misdeeds, but only the *Vita Edwardi Secundi* lays the blame on both men: most sources attribute the civil war to the evil of the younger Hugh.<sup>47</sup> In August, Edward II was compelled to agree to the exile of both Despensers, in much the same way that he had submitted over Gaveston. Hugh the elder retired briefly to the continent, but the king arranged for his favourite to remain protected in the Cinque Ports, where for two months he played the buccaneer in the Channel, terrorising shipping and attacking Southampton.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> BL Cotton MS Nero A.IV, f. 53v; this portion of the chronicle is also printed in Clarke, *Cartae*, 1088-89. Despenser is erroneously described as earl of Gloucester in *Chronicon Galfridi le Baker*, 22, the *Chronicon de Theokesburie* (Bodl. MS Top. Glouc. d.2, f. 21r), and BL Add. MS. 4206, ff. 12r, 14r. The error is still repeated by scholars (for example: D.S. Green, *The Battle of Poitiers* (Stroud 2003), index; C. Valente, *The Theory and Practice of Revolt in Medieval England* (Burlington, VT 2003), 127). The significance of the Clare inheritance is discussed in full in chapter 5, and the claim to Gloucester in chapter 6.

<sup>44</sup> Altschul, *A Baronial Family*, 174. From the Marchers’ point of view, the earl’s death was by far the biggest consequence of Bannockburn: Davies, *Lordship and Society*, 49.

<sup>45</sup> For events of 1316-21: Tout, *Place of the Reign of Edward II*, 100-122; Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster*, 190-317; Phillips, *Aymer de Valence*, chs. 3-5; M.C. Buck, *Politics, Finance and the Church in the Reign of Edward II* (Cambridge 1983), 127-30, Haines, *King Edward II*, 97-121.

<sup>46</sup> See below, chapter 6(c).

<sup>47</sup> *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, 114; Haines, *King Edward II*, 417 nn.234-37.

<sup>48</sup> ‘He became a sea monster [*belua marina*]’: *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, 115-16. In November 1321, Edward II thanked the men of the Cinque Ports ‘for keeping Hugh Despenser the son amongst them *at the king’s order* from the manifold toils prepared for him’ (*CCR 1318-23*, 506, my italics). In 1336, a Genoan merchant, Yvan Lucian, requested compensation from Edward III for loss of ships plundered off the Dune of Sandwich by Despenser, and as a goodwill gesture was released from 8000 marks customs duties (*Foedera*, II(ii), 941, 1011-12; *CPR 1334-36*, 328-29).

After their return from exile, the elder Hugh was created earl of Winchester, and the Despensers began their revenge. The Contrariants were exterminated almost to a man, Lancaster was defeated at Boroughbridge and summarily beheaded, and the Despensers were awarded vast tracts of confiscated land.<sup>49</sup> Together with their cronies, Robert Baldock and Walter Stapeldon, they effectively ruled England for the next four years. J.R. Lander wrote:

The Despenser dominance of government in the 1320s must have been one of the most bestial (if not the most bestial) regimes in English history. ... They pursued their victims with a vindictiveness hitherto unknown in English politics. ... The prolonged imprisonment of nobles and their families, including children and elderly relations, perpetrated quite a new brutality in political relationships. Devastation, plundering and the break-down of law and order in many parts of the country were ... far, far worse than anything that occurred during the Wars of the Roses.<sup>50</sup>

The younger Despenser's dominance of the court sidelined the queen, who took refuge at her father's court in Paris, refusing to return until the Despensers were removed from court. The pope congratulated Isabella for going abroad as an 'angel of peace', and repeatedly wrote to the Despensers, in turn imploring, urging and demanding that they help Isabella seek reconciliation with her husband.<sup>51</sup> The king ordered Isabella home, and requested that she return their son, the future Edward III, who had gone to France to pay homage for Aquitaine.<sup>52</sup>

Whilst in France, Isabella took Roger Mortimer of Wigmore, the Despensers' arch-enemy, as her lover.<sup>53</sup> They planned an invasion with one publicly proclaimed aim: the forcible removal of the Despensers. Although the king spent much of the summer organising the defence of the realm, Isabella and Mortimer faced almost no opposition when they landed on 24 September 1326. Edward and the Despensers left London on 2

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<sup>49</sup> KB 27/248, mm. 67-69d (reversal of exile); *Statutes*, i, 185 (pardon); *Gesta Edwardi de Carnarvan*, auctore canonico Bridlingtoniensi, in Stubbs, *Chronicles*, ii, 77-79 (executions). For estates, see below, chapter 5.

<sup>50</sup> J.R. Lander, reviewing Fryde, *Tyranny*, in *American Historical Review* 85 (1980), 869.

<sup>51</sup> *CPL* 1305-42, 462, 468, 475, 477, 478, 481.

<sup>52</sup> *CCR* 1324-27, 580.

<sup>53</sup> History has treated Isabella harshly, as typified by the title of Hilda Johnstone's article, 'Isabella, the She-Wolf of France', *History* 21 (1936), 208-18. As late as 1983 Mark Buck saw England 'delivered into the hands of Roger Mortimer and his whore': *Politics, Finance and the Church*, 223. Sophia Menache has since argued for a more balanced approach: 'Isabelle of France, queen of England – a reconsideration', *JMH* 10 (1984), 107-24. P.C. Doherty, 'Isabella, Queen of England, 1296-1330', unpublished D.Phil thesis (University of Oxford 1977), remains the only full-length study, some of which is published in *Isabella and the Strange Death of Edward II* (London 2003).

October and fled west, summoning armies as they went.<sup>54</sup> They reached Bristol on the 16th, where the king and Hugh the younger put to sea, leaving Hugh the elder to guard Bristol Castle.<sup>55</sup> Ten days later the queen arrived at Bristol, and Despenser was tried, convicted without reply and sentenced to death under martial law.<sup>56</sup> His fate was a gruesome one: he was hung, drawn and quartered, his body hewn in pieces and fed to dogs, and his head sent to Winchester.<sup>57</sup>

Meanwhile, Edward and the younger Hugh set sail for Lundy Island, a territory over which Despenser had been wrangling for years, possibly intending to sail from there to Ireland.<sup>58</sup> They paid nine shillings to Father Richard Bliton, a Carmelite friar and Despenser's confessor, to pray to St. Anne for a *bon vent*.<sup>59</sup> The ship, however, was driven not out to sea and safety, but into Cardiff bay.<sup>60</sup> This was Despenser heartland, yet the fugitives were almost entirely without assistance. Eventually, on 16 November they were captured at Neath Abbey, in the midst of a shattering storm.<sup>61</sup> The weather turned out to be an ominous portent, as Despenser was taken to Hereford in chains 'with great shame and hue and cry'.<sup>62</sup> The elder Hugh's death a month earlier proved merely a foretaste of Isabella's greatest act of revenge.<sup>63</sup> Tried without recourse to law, Despenser was mounted backwards on 'the smallest, scrawniest and most pathetic horse',<sup>64</sup> and

<sup>54</sup> *Parl. Writs*, II(i), 761-62. The most complete narratives of the invasion are in Fryde, *Tyranny*, 176-94; Haines, *King Edward II*, 177-86; also R.W.B., 'Caerphilly', *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, 5<sup>th</sup> ser., 3 (1886), 171-73.

<sup>55</sup> In 1970, tunnelled steps were discovered leading from the castle moat to the River Avon, down which they would have escaped: M. Sharp, 'Some Glimpses of Gloucestershire in the Early Fourteenth Century', *BGAST* 93 (1974), 10.

<sup>56</sup> *Annales Paulini*, in Stubbs, *Chronicles*, i, 317-18.

<sup>57</sup> G.J. Aungier (ed.), *Croniques de London, depuis l'an 44 Hen. III. jusqu' à l'an 17 Edw. III.*, Camden Society 28 (London 1844), 55; J.R. Lumby (ed.), *Chronicon Henrici Knighton, vel Cnitthon, monachi Leycestrensis*, RS 92(i) (London 1889), 432; F.W.D. Brie (ed.), *The Brut or The Chronicles of England*, EETS, old series 131 & 136 (1906-8), i, 240.

<sup>58</sup> *Chronicon Galfridi le Baker*, 22; *CPR 1327-30*, 18; G.S. Steinman, 'Some Account of the Isle of Lundy', *Collectanea Topographica et Genealogica* 4 (1837), 318-20; W.H. Stevenson, 'A Letter of the Younger Despenser on the Eve of the Barons' Rebellion, 21 March 1321', *EHR* 12 (1897), 755-61; P. Dryburgh, 'The Last Refuge of a Scoundrel? Ireland and the English Crown, 1321-27' (forthcoming).

<sup>59</sup> S.A.L. MS 122, f. 45v. Nine shillings is my reading: the amount of money is partially obscured by the binding. Richard Bliton was a popular preacher in England, frequently consulted by Edward II on matters of state: *ibid.*, f. 24v; M.E. Lack, 'The position and duties of the king's almoner, 1255-1327', unpublished MA thesis (University of London 1949), 128-34.

<sup>60</sup> There is a hint that the sailors themselves had a hand in this: in February 1327, Isabella awarded the ship to the mariners as reward for services rendered during the invasion (*CPR 1327-30*, 6).

<sup>61</sup> *Annales Paulini*, 318.

<sup>62</sup> W.R. Childs and J. Taylor (eds.), *The Anonimalle Chronicle 1307-1334*, Yorkshire Archaeological Society 147 (1987), 130-31.

<sup>63</sup> G.A. Holmes, 'Judgement on the Younger Despenser, 1326', *EHR* 70 (1955), 261-67; J. Taylor, 'The Judgement on Hugh Despenser the Younger', *Medievalia et Humanistica* 12 (1958), 70-77; B.D.H. Miller, 'A Primitive Punishment: Further Instances', *Notes and Queries* 208 (1963), 366-67.

<sup>64</sup> J. Viard and E. Déprez (eds.), *Chronique de Jean le Bel*, 2nd edn. (Paris 1977), 27.

made to wear a crown of nettles and a tabard with the Despenser arms reversed.<sup>65</sup> Horns were blown and men and women screamed insults in his ears. One even scrawled verses of a psalm denouncing arrogance on his clothes.<sup>66</sup> Four horses – rather than the customary two – dragged Despenser to the place of execution, where he was hanged on a gallows fifty feet high.<sup>67</sup> His genitals were cut off and burned before his eyes and he was beheaded; his head was then sent to London where it was put on a pike, paraded down Cheapside and set up over London Bridge.<sup>68</sup> His body was divided into four parts and dispatched to four major cities of the realm (Dover, Bristol, York and Newcastle) to warn against similar behaviour.<sup>69</sup> Despenser's companion, Simon of Reading, was executed beneath him; his closest associate, Robert Baldock, was incarcerated at Newgate Prison where he went insane and died on 28 May 1327.<sup>70</sup>

King Edward II, whose fate has been widely debated,<sup>71</sup> had left Hugh III, eldest son of the younger Hugh, and John Felton at Caerphilly Castle to guard the royal treasure which had been brought from London.<sup>72</sup> For nearly five months the castle was besieged by an army commanded by William Zouche, a close associate of Roger Mortimer.

<sup>65</sup> Cambridge, Trinity College MS R.5.41, f. 123v.

<sup>66</sup> *Knighton*, 436-37. R. Holinshed, *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Wales* (London 1586), iii(i), 338, recorded this as Psalm 52 (Vulgate Psalm 51), confirmed by Haines, *King Edward II*, 450 n.50:

Why dost thou glory in malice, thou that art mighty in iniquity? All the day long thy tongue hath devised injustice: as a sharp razor, thou hast wrought deceit. Thou hast loved malice more than goodness: and iniquity rather than to speak righteousness. ... The just shall see and fear, and shall laugh at him, and say, 'Behold the man who made God not his helper, but trusted in the abundance of his riches'. [vv. 1-3, 6-7]

<sup>67</sup> Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale MS Fr. 2643, f. 97v, depicts this grisly event. See Figure 3.

<sup>68</sup> In 1282, Llywelyn ap Gruffydd, prince of Gwynedd, suffered the same fate, having allegedly believed that he would be crowned in East Cheap. Despenser's appropriation of power in Wales makes the parallel an interesting one.

<sup>69</sup> Not until 15 December 1330 did Eleanor Despenser dare petition the crown for permission to remove Hugh's remains (*Foedera*, II(ii), 804), after which 'one of the quarters of hym was buried by the lavatory of the high altare in Twekesbyry' (L. Toulmin Smith (ed.), *The Itinerary of John Leland in or about the years 1535-1543* (London 1964), iv, 140). A transcript of the order to the Mayor of London to this effect is in London, Inner Temple Library, MS Petyt 533, xxii, f. 349. For comments on the political significance of the execution: J.G. Bellamy, *The Law of Treason in England in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge 1970), 49-55; A.J. Musson, *Medieval Law in Context* (Manchester 2001), 232. The execution of Hugh the younger is suggested as the inspiration of a mid-fourteenth century carving found in Hereford Cathedral: M. Jones, 'Folklore Motifs in Late Medieval Art II: Sexist Satire and Popular Punishments', *Folklore* 101 (1990), 76.

<sup>70</sup> *Annales Paulini*, 319-20; *Chronicon Galfridi le Baker*, 25-26; *Chroniques de London*, 56-57.

<sup>71</sup> T.F. Tout, 'The Captivity and Death of Edward of Caernarvon', *BJRL* 6 (1921-22), 69-114; Fryde, *Tyranny*, 195-206; G.P. Cuttino and T.W. Lyman, 'Where is Edward II?', *Speculum* 53 (1978), 522-43; R.M. Haines, 'Edwardus Redivivus: The "Afterlife" of Edward of Caernarvon', *BGIST* 114 (1996), 65-86; C. Valente, 'The deposition and abdication of Edward II', *EHR* 113 (1998), 852-81; Doherty, *Isabella*, 183-236; I. Mortimer, *The Greatest Traitor: the life of Sir Roger Mortimer, 1<sup>st</sup> earl of March, ruler of England, 1327-1330* (London 2003), 244-64.

<sup>72</sup> *Anonimale 1307-1334*, 132-33; W. Rees, *Caerphilly Castle and its place in the Annals of Glamorgan* (Caerphilly 1974), 78, 83. Edward had been accompanied by an exchequer official who carried at least £29,000: Fryde, *Tyranny*, 189.

Despite offers of free pardons, the garrison refused to capitulate until the life of Hugh III, heir to the lordship of Glamorgan and Caerphilly Castle itself, was guaranteed.<sup>73</sup> Eventually, on 20 March, the offer of free pardon was accepted.<sup>74</sup> The garrison was freed, and Hugh III's life was pardoned, although his lands remained forfeit.<sup>75</sup> He was imprisoned in Bristol Castle until June 1331, and was eventually released on 1 February 1332, having already received a yearly allowance of 200 marks from Edward III.<sup>76</sup> Curiously, in April Hugh was one of twenty men who received protection to go on pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela with William Zouche, who had since married his mother Eleanor, and in 1333 he fought in Scotland at Halidon Hill.<sup>77</sup>

Little more is known of Hugh III before the death of his mother Eleanor in 1337, when he took livery of her dower lands.<sup>78</sup> This was clearly a significant period of time when the family was out of favour. The estates were granted out to loyal followers of Edward III, and claims for restitution poured in from aggrieved parties claiming to have been terrorised by the elder and younger Despenser during the 1320s.<sup>79</sup> It was only the beginning of the Hundred Years War that enabled Hugh III – together with his younger brothers Edward I and Gilbert – to rebuild the family reputation through a combination of capable soldiering and pragmatic obedience to the crown.<sup>80</sup> Hugh won military acclaim at Morlaix and Crécy, and laid the foundation for the recovery of the family after the horrors of 1326. When he succumbed prematurely to plague in 1349 there is every reason to believe that the Despensers had fully returned to favour. Hugh III's heir was his teenage nephew Edward, son of Edward I who had been killed at Morlaix in 1342. Edward II was put in ward of his kinsman Bartholomew Burghersh the younger until 1357.

After a seven-year minority, Edward Despenser II travelled to France in the retinue of the Black Prince and fought at Poitiers. On his return he did homage for the family

<sup>73</sup> CPR 1324-27, 344 (4 January 1327); CPR 1327-30, 18 (15 February 1327).

<sup>74</sup> CPR 1327-30, 37-39. That Felton's capitulation was a move of political pragmatism rather than necessity is confirmed by the fact that the castle still held plenty of supplies: Rees, *Caerphilly Castle*, 84. He received full pardon for his part in the defence of the castle, as did the rest of the garrison.

<sup>75</sup> SC 8/42/2092.

<sup>76</sup> *Rot. Parl.*, ii, 61; CFR 1327-37, 289; CPR 1330-34, 246, 267.

<sup>77</sup> CPR 1330-34, 273-74, 277-78, 462. Dugdale wrote that Hugh received protection to fight in Gascony (*Baronage*, i, 394), but there are no further details to clarify this. For Eleanor's marriage to Zouche, see below, section (d).

<sup>78</sup> CFR 1337-47, 25.

<sup>79</sup> See below, chapter 5.

<sup>80</sup> See below, chapter 3(b).

estates and was summoned to parliament. His domestic and military careers were extremely active,<sup>81</sup> and he appears to have been one of the most loyal of Edward III's barons. He and his uncle Gilbert both received payment as members of the king's household in 1360 (Gilbert remained in the household until at least 1369). In 1361 Edward was promoted to the Order of the Garter, aged just twenty-five.<sup>82</sup> He was a patron of Jean Froissart, with whom he toured the Welsh Marches in September 1366, and who described him – not without an element of necessary flattery – as *li plus jolis chevaliers, li plus courtois [et] li plus honnourables*, adding that the most noble ladies considered no social function perfect if the Lord Despenser was not present.<sup>83</sup> In *Le joli buisson de Jonece* (1373) Froissart described his patronage as follows:

Le grant seigneur Espensier  
 Qui de larghèce est despensier,  
 Que t-a-t-il fait? – Quoi? di-je, assés,  
 Car il ne fut onques lassés  
 De moi donner, quel part qu'il fust;  
 Ce n'estoient cailuel, ne fust,  
 Mès chevaux et florins sans compte.  
 Entre mes mestres je le compte  
 Pour seingnour, et c'en est li uns.<sup>84</sup>

Edward also had close connections with King Edward III's sons: having served in the retinue of the Black Prince, he was associated with both John of Gaunt and Lionel of Clarence. In 1368 he accompanied Lionel to Milan for his marriage to Violante, daughter of the Milanese duke Galeazzo Visconti. When Clarence died just three months after the wedding, suspicions were rife that he had been poisoned, and Despenser took up arms against the Milanese, eventually joining the papal armies in their crusades against the Visconti. He remained in Italy until 1372, winning 'a glorious name in the battles of Lombardy'.<sup>85</sup> On his return, he captained a force that ravaged Artois and Picardy, before his early death, possibly from plague, in 1375.<sup>86</sup> A deeply religious man, Edward's widow built a chantry in Tewkesbury Abbey, with a depiction of her husband kneeling at prayer.

<sup>81</sup> See below, chapter 3.

<sup>82</sup> GEC, ii, 536, says he was the thirty-eighth knight of the Order, replacing Henry, duke of Lancaster, who died in 1360.

<sup>83</sup> Froissart, *Oeuvres*, ii, 86, 106. For Froissart's tours of England, including his visit with Despenser to Berkeley Castle, scene of Edward II's demise: A.H. Diverres, 'Froissart's Travels in England and Wales', *Fifteenth Century Studies* 15 (1989), 107-22.

<sup>84</sup> A. Fourrier (ed.), *Le joli buisson de Jonece* (Geneva 1975), 56; Froissart, *Oeuvres*, xxii, 81.

<sup>85</sup> *CPL 1362-1404*, 28; E.M. Thompson (ed.), *Chronicon Angliae. 1328-1388*, RS 64 (London 1874), 64.

<sup>86</sup> Both Higden and Walsingham wrote of the intense heat during the summer of 1375, and the latter of a great pestilence that killed many: *Polychronicon*, viii, 382; H.T. Riley (ed.), *Thomae Walsingham Historia Anglicana 1272-1422*, RS 28 (London 1863-64), i, 319.

Edward's death was followed by a long minority, since his heir, Thomas, was only two years old. The family therefore 'missed' Edward III's last troubled years, Richard II's minority rule and the Appellant regime, but also the 'bursts' of peerage creation in 1377 and 1384. In 1388, Thomas served in the navy under the earl of Arundel, and was knighted on the island of Batz, off La Rochelle. However, he came to the fore in the last two years of the reign. It is not clear how or when he and Richard II became friends, but in the parliament of September 1397, Thomas was one of those who passed judgement on the Appellants. On the last day of the assembly he was made earl of Gloucester. It is notable that a minority of almost two decades made no difference to the family fortunes: so little, in fact, that the king granted a full reversal of the 1327 judgement on the Despensers.<sup>87</sup> For the next two years Thomas was one of Richard II's closest companions and by April 1399 had been made a Garter Knight.<sup>88</sup>

After Bolingbroke's invasion, Richard was imprisoned and Thomas compelled to read out the sentence of deposition in parliament. He and the remainder of the counter-Appellants were then tried; Thomas was demoted from his earldom and goods gained since September 1397 were forfeit.<sup>89</sup> He was sent to the Tower by Henry IV, but soon released and apparently considered going on crusade.<sup>90</sup> Instead he joined the revolt with the other earls who had lost their rank, Rutland, Kent and Huntingdon.<sup>91</sup> The rebellion of January 1400 was doomed, and Thomas was pursued into Wales. In a striking parody of 1326, he tried to flee from Cardiff but was ambushed on board ship in the Severn and taken to Bristol, where he was seized by a mob and beheaded without trial before the

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<sup>87</sup> *Rot. Parl.*, iii, 360-68. Michael Hicks has argued that minorities were far less disruptive than is commonly thought, citing the example of the Despenser descendant Henry, duke of Warwick: 'Between Majorities: the "Beauchamp Interregnum", 1439-49', *Historical Research* 72 (1999), 27-43; and see below, section (e).

<sup>88</sup> Bodl. MS Top. Glouc. d.2, f. 25v (the *Chronica de Theokesburie*), depicts Thomas Despenser with a badge of the Order displayed beside his left shoulder. The *Chronica* is discussed more fully in chapter 6(a), below.

<sup>89</sup> A.L. Brown, 'The Reign of Henry IV', in S.B. Chrimes, C.D. Ross and R.A. Griffiths (eds.), *Fifteenth Century England 1399-1509*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (Stroud 1995), 2-4. An update of this essay is D.L. Biggs, 'The reign of Henry IV: the revolution of 1399 and the establishment of the Lancastrian regime', in N.E. Saul (ed.), *Fourteenth Century England I* (Woodbridge 2000), 195-210.

<sup>90</sup> See below, chapter 6(a).

<sup>91</sup> The fullest account of the Epiphany Rising remains J.H. Wylie, *History of England under Henry the Fourth* (London 1884-98), i, 91-110. See also A. Rogers, 'Henry IV and the Revolt of the Earls, 1400', *History Today* 16 (1968), 277-83; D. Crook, 'Central England and the Revolt of the Earls, January 1400', *BIHR* 64 (1991), 403-10; J.L. Leland, 'The Oxford trial of 1400: royal politics and the county gentry', in J.L. Gillespie (ed.), *The Age of Richard II* (Stroud and New York 1997), 165-89. For the accompanying discontent in Richard's 'inner citadel' of Chester: P. McNiven, 'The Cheshire Rising of 1400', *BJRL* 52 (1970), 375-96.

high cross.<sup>92</sup> His head – like that of the younger Hugh – was spiked on a pole on top of London Bridge.<sup>93</sup> All estates were declared forfeit and the reversal of the sentence of 1327 was itself revoked.<sup>94</sup>

These executions saw the end of the Despensers as a political force in their own right. Thomas's son Richard was a minor in 1400: he was knighted on the eve of the coronation of Henry V but died in 1414.<sup>95</sup> The vast Despenser estates were left to his sister Isabel, who married, firstly, Richard Beauchamp of Worcester, and then his cousin, Richard Beauchamp of Warwick. If the *Balade made of Isabelle Countesse of Warr e~ Lady Despencer* is in any way accurate, Isabel and her second husband were very much in love.<sup>96</sup> He showered her with gifts, many of which are listed in his will,<sup>97</sup> doubtless grateful that she had provided him with a male heir and thus avoided what would have been an ironic twist of fate: the division of his estates amongst his three daughters. On Isabel's death in 1439, the inheritance passed to her (and Warwick's) teenage son Henry, who grew up at court with his near-contemporary Henry VI. After Henry's early death in 1446, the estates passed to his sister Anne and her husband, Richard Neville, 'the Kingmaker'. When the Yorkists gained power in 1461, Edward IV annulled the sentence passed on Thomas Despenser, in order to legitimise his cousin.<sup>98</sup> When Neville was killed at Barnet in 1471, the accumulated Beauchamp and Despenser lands passed to the crown. The Despenser arms are depicted in a cloister window in Fotheringhay church, Northamptonshire, close to the birthplace of King Richard III.

### (c) Younger sons and cadet branches

Primogeniture had evolved slowly since the Conquest, but by the end of the thirteenth century had become firmly entrenched in the common law of England. Elder sons followed their father as a matter of course, and were prepared for this from their youth

<sup>92</sup> G.B. Stow (ed.), *Historia Vitae et Regni Ricardi Secundi* (Philadelphia 1977), 164-65, is the best account; see also *Polychronicon*, viii, 512.

<sup>93</sup> C. Given-Wilson (ed.), *The Chronicle of Adam Usk 1377-1421* (Oxford 1997), 91.

<sup>94</sup> *Rot. Parl.*, iii, 459.

<sup>95</sup> W.A. Shaw, *The Knights of England* (London 1906), i, 129.

<sup>96</sup> BL Add. MS 16165, ff. 245v-46v.

<sup>97</sup> 'The Last Will and Testament of Richard Beauchamp, Earle of Warwicke and Aumade ...', in T. Hearne (ed.), *Historia Vitae et Regni Ricardi II. Angliae Regis* (Oxford 1729), 243.

<sup>98</sup> *Rot. Parl.*, v, 484. M.A. Hicks, *Warwick the Kingmaker* (Oxford 1998), 31-48, includes a discussion on the significance of the Despenser/Beauchamp inheritance.



up. Younger sons and daughters, who in normal circumstances had little chance of inheriting large tracts of land or making propitious marriages, had to make do as best they could. Having outlined the lives of the principal Despensers, it is now necessary to consider these younger members of the family. The additional networks created are not covered in detail in this study, but a brief examination is useful, as these marriages and connections often provide a different angle on the connections made at court.<sup>99</sup> This section therefore considers the children of Hugh the elder, Hugh the younger, Hugh III and Edward II (Thomas's having been discussed in section (b), above).<sup>100</sup>

Hugh the elder's marriage to Isabella Beauchamp produced at least seven children. In addition to Hugh junior, we know of another son, Philip, and five daughters, Aline, Isabel, Margaret, Joan and Eleanor. Philip was born between 1291 and 1294, but died in August 1313.<sup>101</sup> Nothing is known of his marriage, but his son, another Philip, was born shortly before his father's death in April 1313. Philip Despenser II reached his majority in 1334, and from 1336 onwards regularly took part in campaigns against the French, including, in 1338, fighting in the retinue of the earl of Derby.<sup>102</sup> This connection, coupled with the growing military reputation of his cousin Hugh III, probably had much to do with Philip's marriage to Joan Cobham in c.1339. Joan was sister of the veteran soldier John lord Cobham – described by Walsingham as *vir grandaevus simplex et rectus*<sup>103</sup> – and the resulting relationship provides an example of the camaraderie that grew up between those who fought in the French wars. On Philip's death from plague in 1349, Joan took a vow of chastity lasting until her own death in 1357, when her lands were granted to Ralph lord Neville of Raby to hold in trust.<sup>104</sup> Joan and Philip's surviving son was a third Philip, born in 1342. He fought in Gaunt's expedition to Brittany in 1378, regularly served as a justice of the peace in Lincolnshire and was summoned to parliament from 1387 to 1400, significantly surviving the deposition of Richard II

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<sup>99</sup> See below, chapter 4.

<sup>100</sup> See family tree 2.

<sup>101</sup> GEC, iv, 288-89; *CHD*, A3185; *CFR 1307-19*, 179.

<sup>102</sup> *Treaty Rolls 1337-39*, 134 (Derby's retinue 1338); E 36/204, f. 87r (Brittany 1342-43). His growing martial reputation was shown by an increase in horse values: A. Ayton, *Knights and Warhorses* (Woodbridge 1994), 216 n.89. He was one of the executors of Lady Margaret Thorpe, who died in 1347: York, Borthwick Institute for Archives, Archiepiscopal Register 10, f. 330r.

<sup>103</sup> L.C. Hector and B.F. Harvey (eds.), *The Westminster Chronicle, 1381-94* (Oxford 1982), 333. The phrase *simplex et rectus* has attracted much discussion in connection with the character of Henry VI: A. Gransden, *Historical Writing in England, II: c. 1307 to the Early Sixteenth Century* (Ithaca, NY 1982), 383 n.262, 497-98.

<sup>104</sup> BL Add. Charter 19846; GEC, iv, 289n.

unscathed, before his death in 1401.<sup>105</sup> He had the distinction of being the last of only four lay lords summoned during Richard's reign whose families had not previously been represented in the upper house in parliament.<sup>106</sup> His son, Philip IV, was the reluctant victim of another unique occurrence, being the only male heir in Henry IV's reign untainted by treason and yet ignored in all future parliamentary summons.<sup>107</sup> This Philip married Elizabeth, daughter of Sir Robert Tibetot, but died in 1424 leaving just a daughter, Margery.<sup>108</sup> Margery married twice: firstly John lord Roos of Helmsley, for which a papal dispensation was required;<sup>109</sup> and secondly a young squire, Roger Wentworth of North Emsall, Yorkshire, for which they were fined £1000 for 'dishonourably' failing to obtain the king's licence.<sup>110</sup>

Of Hugh the elder's five daughters, only Aline, Isabel and Margaret were wed. Aline, the eldest, married Edward Burnell, son of Philip Burnell of Castle Holgate in 1302, Despenser having paid the bishop of Durham 1000 marks for control of his wardship and marriage.<sup>111</sup> In 1313, he paid the same amount for Margaret's dowry when she married John St Amand, a member of the Despenser's 'inner circle' of followers.<sup>112</sup> Isabel married John Hastings senior, another close ally of the family, whose first wife, another Isabel, was sister to Aymer de Valence, earl of Pembroke.<sup>113</sup> Despenser's two remaining girls, Eleanor and Joan, were dispatched in a hurry to Sempringham nunnery after the executions of 1326.<sup>114</sup> In 1337 Edward III, probably at the instigation of Hugh III, granted them an annual pension of £20, which was still being paid to Eleanor as late as 1351.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> GEC, iv, 290. In 1376 Philip was due to receive delivery of some 'parcels' of money from the earl of Arundel (BL Harley MS 4840, f. 393v), but regrettably nothing more is known about this transaction. His will is extant in Lincolnshire Archives Office, Reg. XIII, f. 38r.

<sup>106</sup> Powell and Wallis, *House of Lords*, 436.

<sup>107</sup> J. Rosenthal, *Nobles and the Noble Life 1295-1500* (London and New York 1976), 29.

<sup>108</sup> Warwickshire RO, CR 26/1/11/K22 (partition of property, dated 10 December 1385).

<sup>109</sup> *CPL 1404-15*, 609.

<sup>110</sup> GEC, xi, 104.

<sup>111</sup> *CAD*, A6278; S.L. Waugh, *The lordship of England: royal wardships and marriages in English society and politics, 1217-1327* (Princeton, NJ 1988), 224-25.

<sup>112</sup> *CAD*, A10237; J.C. Ward, *English Noblewomen in the later Middle Ages* (Harlow 1992), 25-26. For further details on St Amand's connection with the family, see below, chapter 4.

<sup>113</sup> For the Hastings-Despenser connection, see below, chapters 3(b) and 4.

<sup>114</sup> In February 1327, the prior and convent received arrears of almost £40 for receiving and veiling Eleanor at their own cost: *Calendar of Memoranda Rolls (Exchequer) Preserved in the Public Record Office Michaelmas 1326 - Michaelmas 1327* (London 1968), no. 437.

<sup>115</sup> *CPR 1334-38*, 464; *CCR 1337-39*, 501; *CCR 1349-54*, 285. In 1345, Hugh III set his seal to a papal petition from Queen Philippa and the earls of Lancaster, Derby and Warwick, requesting confirmation of the privileges of the Sempringham order: *CPP 1342-1419*, 103.

Following his marriage to Eleanor Clare, Hugh the younger had seven children. In addition to his eldest son Hugholin (Hugh III), we know of Isabel, Edward, Gilbert, Eleanor, Elizabeth and Katherine, all of whom grew up during the 'tyranny' of the Despensers. Isabel, born around 1312, was betrothed to Richard FitzAlan, son of the earl of Arundel, in 1322.<sup>116</sup> Both Edward and Gilbert appear to have survived unscathed the events of 1326, suggesting that both were too young to have joined their elder brother in the defence of Caerphilly. In 1335 Edward married Anne Ferrers, daughter of Henry Ferrers of Groby, and until his death in battle in 1342 served with his father-in-law and brother in France.<sup>117</sup> Younger sons, deprived of the benefits of primogeniture, had to make their way entirely on merit, and Edward appears to have succeeded in this. Anne herself was still alive in 1367.<sup>118</sup> Despenser's third son, Gilbert, was more fortunate than his brother. He not only survived the French campaigns, but throughout the 1360s served as a bachelor of the king's household.<sup>119</sup> He received gifts of Christmas robes in 1366, and received mourning robes on the death of Queen Philippa in August 1369.<sup>120</sup> He was one of the veteran household knights who prepared to take part in John of Gaunt's campaign in 1369, and continued to receive his annuity following Richard II's accession.<sup>121</sup> Although it is likely that he married, there is no direct evidence for this, and he died in 1382 without children.<sup>122</sup>

Two of Hugh junior's remaining daughters made good matches with prominent Marcher lords. Eleanor married Laurence Hastings, son of John Hastings junior. It was the second time in two generations that the two families had been brought together by marriage, and Laurence became earl of Pembroke within a year. Elizabeth, the youngest, married Maurice Berkeley (d. 1368) in 1338, for which her brother Hugh III paid a thousand marks dower.<sup>123</sup> Elizabeth and Maurice had two sons, Thomas (d. 1417), and James (d. 1405). Thomas married Margaret Lisle and their daughter Elizabeth became

<sup>116</sup> This is discussed in section (d).

<sup>117</sup> Ferrers was married to Isabella Verdun, niece of Hugh the younger and Eleanor. He had been a companion of Henry of Lancaster in 1328-29, and his estates were declared forfeit by Mortimer and Isabella. He returned to favour after 1330, and was made chamberlain in 1337, an office he held until 1340: GEC, v, 344-47.

<sup>118</sup> CPR 1364-67, 383-84.

<sup>119</sup> E 101/393/11, f. 76r. For campaigns, see below, chapter 3(b).

<sup>120</sup> E 101/395/10 (printed in Given-Wilson, *Royal Household*, 281, where he is called 'Gilbert Spenser'); E 101/395/2/236.

<sup>121</sup> J.W. Sherborne, 'John of Gaunt, Edward III's Retinue and the French Campaign of 1369', in R.A. Griffiths and J.W. Sherborne (eds.), *Kings and Nobles in the Later Middle Ages: a tribute to Charles Ross* (Gloucester 1986), 59 n.39; CPR 1377-81, 404.

<sup>122</sup> CPR 1377-83, 303.

<sup>123</sup> Given-Wilson, *English nobility*, 158.

the first wife of Richard Beauchamp, earl of Warwick, who within two years of being widowed went on to marry Isabel Despenser. Of the remaining daughter, Katherine, nothing is known: she is mentioned in only one manuscript, dated 1352.<sup>124</sup>

In addition to Edward Despenser II, Edward I had three other children, all of whom followed in their father's military footsteps. We know least of all about Thomas, who fought in the Rheims campaign of 1359-60 and lived until 1381.<sup>125</sup> Second was another Hugh, who married Alice, daughter of John de Hothum. Hugh IV died in 1374 leaving a son, a further Hugh (V).<sup>126</sup> This Hugh went to Scotland with the king in 1385, where he captained the garrison at Berwick in 1386.<sup>127</sup> He was captured in Flanders in 1388 and ransomed by the French for £200, which the king immediately paid,<sup>128</sup> before returning to the continent the following year as deputy lieutenant of Brittany under the command of Sir John Holand, earl of Huntingdon.<sup>129</sup> Alison McHardy makes reference to his jousting ability in the Smithfield tournament of 1390,<sup>130</sup> and he held Kilkenny Castle in Ireland until 1393.<sup>131</sup> Hugh was retained for life as a chamber knight in 1391, and accompanied Richard II to Ireland in 1395-96.<sup>132</sup> However, unlike his cousin Thomas, he became disenchanted with the old regime, and accepted the Lancastrians with little fuss. In 1399, just weeks after the deposition of Richard II, Hugh was retained for life by Henry IV, who increased his annuity from 100 marks to £100 per year.<sup>133</sup> Almost immediately, he was sent on an embassy to Aquitaine,<sup>134</sup> and appears to have been made governor of the Prince of Wales (the future Henry V).<sup>135</sup> On 1 September 1401 he was

<sup>124</sup> L. Drucker (ed.), *Warwickshire Feet of Fines 1345-1509*, Dugdale Society 18 (London 1943), iii, no. 2065.

<sup>125</sup> C 76/38, m. 11.

<sup>126</sup> A.R. Bell, 'Anatomy of an Army: The Campaigns of 1387-88', unpublished PhD thesis (University of Reading 2002), 246-48, contains information about Hugh Despenser V. Whilst our interpretations differ in places (especially regarding Hugh's connection to the main Despenser line), I am extremely grateful to Dr Bell for a copy of these pages.

<sup>127</sup> C 71/65, m. 6; E 101/40/18; E 101/73/2/31; *Rotuli Scotiae* (London 1814), ii, 78a. GEC, iv, 478, erroneously applies this to Thomas.

<sup>128</sup> C 76/70, m. 32; G.H. Martin (ed.), *Knighton's Chronicle 1337-1396* (Oxford 1995), 390; F. Devon (ed.), *Issues of the Exchequer, Henry III to Henry VI*, Record Commission (London 1847), 234.

<sup>129</sup> M.M.N. Stansfield, 'The Holand Family, Dukes of Exeter, Earls of Kent and Huntingdon, 1352-1475', unpublished DPhil thesis (University of Oxford 1987), 85-87.

<sup>130</sup> A.K. McHardy, 'Richard II: a personal portrait', in G.J.A. Dodd (ed.), *The Reign of Richard II* (Stroud 2000), 25; *Westminster Chronicle*, 451 n.5.

<sup>131</sup> James, earl of Ormond, bought Kilkenny from him in 1393: GEC, x, 122.

<sup>132</sup> E 101/402/20, f. 33v; Given-Wilson, *Royal Household*, Appendix V.

<sup>133</sup> E 404/15/166, 470; Given-Wilson, *Royal Household*, Appendix VI.

<sup>134</sup> E 101/320/21-22; L. Mirot and E. Déprez, 'Les Ambassades Anglaises pendant la Guerre de Cent Ans', *Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartes* 61 (1901), 20. On 20 February 1400, he and his men were owed £227 10s: E 404/15/156.

<sup>135</sup> C.T. Allmand, *Henry V* (London 1968), 19, 21; M.D. Legg (ed.), *Anglo-Norman Letters and Petitions from All Souls MS. 182* (Oxford 1941), nos. 215, 228, 247.

made justiciar of Wales, but died before 4 November, bringing a promising Lancastrian career to a somewhat sudden end.<sup>136</sup> His sister Anne married Sir Edward Botiller.

The remaining son of Edward I is one of the best known Despensers. Born in c.1341, as his father's career as a soldier was burgeoning, Henry Despenser has become renowned as the 'warlike bishop' who led an ill-fated crusade to Flanders in 1383. Henry had held a canonry at Salisbury from his early teens, and by 1364 had been made archdeacon of Llandaff.<sup>137</sup> He took part in the Italian crusades against the Visconti with his brother Edward, but it was due to Edward's favour with the pope that Henry was made Bishop of Norwich in 1370.<sup>138</sup> Henry was 'a proud, arrogant man, vigorous and martial in temperament, almost wholly unsuited to the cloth'.<sup>139</sup> Indeed, he shared definite character traits with his grandfather, Hugh the younger. In 1382, following a revolt in Ghent against the count of Flanders, Louis de Mâle, Henry seized the opportunity to suggest a crusade to the Low Countries, an idea initially raised in 1381 but sidelined due to the Peasants' Revolt.<sup>140</sup> Louis was loyal to the Avignon pope Clement VII, as were both the French and Scots, whereas the English were faithful to the Roman pope Urban VI. Ostensibly, the crusade would revive the English wool trade, strike a blow for the Urbanists and elevate Despenser's financial and political standing to unheard-of heights. Unfortunately, the expedition was a failure, and Henry the most convenient scapegoat. In October 1383 he was impeached on the grounds that he had broken his promises, failed in his duty and deceived Richard II into entrusting military affairs to a cleric.<sup>141</sup> Parliament found him guilty on all charges. However, Henry did not fall from favour, continuing to take part in other military campaigns (including the expedition to Scotland in 1385) and had rejoined the royal council by 1388.<sup>142</sup> He remained loyal to Richard II, but rumours that he had assisted his nephew Thomas

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<sup>136</sup> C 49/47/13; CPR 1401-5, 64; CIPM, xviii, 601-6. Chester RO, MS DLL 1/6 (dated 1401), contains a writ of summons for one Roger Jodrell to accompany Hugh V into Wales.

<sup>137</sup> CPP 1342-1419, 261, 490-91.

<sup>138</sup> *Polychronicon*, viii, 369. This was the same office held by Robert Baldock, the 'right eye' of the younger Hugh, in 1325 (*Annales Paulini*, 309).

<sup>139</sup> Saul, *Richard II*, 102.

<sup>140</sup> E. Perroy, *L'Angleterre et le grand schisme d'occident: Étude sur la politique religieuse de l'Angleterre sous Richard II* (Paris 1933), 166-209; M. Aston, 'The Impeachment of Bishop Despenser', *BIHR* 38 (1965), 127-48; N. Housley, 'The Bishop of Norwich's Crusade, May 1383', *History Today* 32 (1983), 15-20.

<sup>141</sup> Aston, 'Impeachment', 128-29.

<sup>142</sup> Housley, 'The Bishop of Norwich's Crusade', 20. Housley also states (using Froissart) that Henry joined Arundel's naval expedition of 1387-88. Dr Adrian Bell has advised me that Despenser does not appear on the muster rolls, and it is likely that Froissart confused 1383 with 1387-88.

Despenser in the Epiphany Rising of 1400 could not be proved.<sup>143</sup> A letter from Henry offering his condolences to Constance, Thomas's widow, remains a touching testament to the scale of the family tragedy.<sup>144</sup>

Edward Despenser II had at least seven children with his wife Elizabeth Burghersh. The first three all died young: Edward, who died at Cardiff aged twelve; Hugh, who died soon after birth; and Cecille. Then followed three surviving daughters, Elizabeth, Anne and Margaret, before the heir, Thomas, was born just two years before Edward died in 1375. All three daughters married men who experienced either the Appellant regime (1386-88) or Richard II's deposition. The eldest, Elizabeth, married and was widowed twice.<sup>145</sup> First, she married John, nephew of the earl of Arundel, in c.1384; neither party could have been older than twenty.<sup>146</sup> John died of plague in the summer of 1390, leaving Elizabeth with three sons, John, Edward and Thomas, and possibly a daughter, Margaret. This second John was styled Lord Maltravers and died in 1421; his son (another John) became earl of Arundel.<sup>147</sup> In 1392 or 1393, Elizabeth married Sir William Zouche of Harringworth, a royalist who had been expelled from court by the Appellants. Despite offspring from his first marriage, William and Elizabeth had no children together before his death in 1396.

The second daughter, Anne, was also married twice: to Sir Hugh Hastings (d. 1386), and Sir Thomas Morley.<sup>148</sup> The first marriage did not last long (Anne can not have been more than sixteen when she wed Hastings), but the second is more interesting. In 1390,

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<sup>143</sup> For Henry's denial of accusations against him: Legg, *All Souls MS. 182*, no. 64; *Adam Usk*, 92-93. Hints of his loyalty to the crown may be found in BL Cotton MS Vespasian E.VIII, a sumptuous manuscript at one time owned by Henry. On the opening folio, the twin portraits of the bishop and Richard II are set at the left and right corners of the page, a deliberate construct showing Despenser as crusader and papal warrior, but above all as servant of his king (L.A. Coote, *Prophecy and Public Affairs in Later Medieval England* (Woodbridge 2000), 151-53). Henry also owned copies of Matthew Paris's *Flores Historiarum* (BL Cotton MS Claudius E. VIII) and Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* (BL Arundel MS 74), as well as a collection of poetry (BL Add. MS 34114) (P. Lasko and N.J. Morgan (eds.), *Medieval Art in East Anglia 1300-1520* (Norwich 1973), nos. 41-42). For a warmonger like Despenser, the contents of the latter are fascinating, including such poems as *Le siege d'antioche ovesque le conquest de Jerusalem de Godfrei de Boilon* and *Le Siege de Thebes*.

<sup>144</sup> Legg, *All Souls MS. 182*, no. 62 (who dates the letter, rather unconvincingly, to 1406).

<sup>145</sup> P. Payne and C.M. Barron, 'The Letters and Life of Elizabeth Despenser, Lady Zouche (d. 1408)', *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 41 (1997), 126-56, from which the information on Elizabeth is taken.

<sup>146</sup> John was descended from Edmund earl of Arundel, executed with the Despensers in 1326. His mother, however, was the only surviving daughter of Sir John Maltravers, who was suspected of the murder of Edward II and Edmund of Kent. It appears to be a remarkable reversal.

<sup>147</sup> K.B. McFarlane, 'Parliament and "Bastard Feudalism"', repr. *England in the Fifteenth Century* (London 1981), Appendix, Table A, n.33.

<sup>148</sup> For Morley, see C. Richmond, 'Thomas Lord Morley (d. 1416) and the Morleys of Hingham', *Norfolk Archaeology* 39 (1987).

Pope Boniface IX wrote to Bishop Henry Despenser telling him to remove the sentence of excommunication on Anne and Thomas, and to legitimise their offspring.<sup>149</sup> Why this needed to be done is unclear: perhaps they were related, or had married without licence. The letter also mentioned that the couple held Henry to be suspect 'for a certain reason'. Investigation shows this to date back to the Peasants' Revolt. In 1381, Morley and others were captured by a gang of rebels in Norfolk, who demanded they go to London to plead the rebels' cause with Richard II. On reaching Stamford, captors and captives were met by Bishop Despenser, who beheaded the rebels and reproached the knights for their cowardice.<sup>150</sup> It would seem likely that this was the reason that the bellicose bishop was so disliked. In 1397, Morley, as lieutenant of the Marshal of England, was responsible for the execution of the earl of Arundel, but survived the deposition: in the first parliament of Henry IV's reign, he was amongst the nobles who assented to the imprisonment of Richard II.

Edward's youngest daughter Margaret married Sir Robert Ferrers of Chartley, great-nephew of Henry Ferrers of Groby. Ferrers was one of the few barons who stood up for Richard II in 1399,<sup>151</sup> although he chose not to follow his brother-in-law in the rebellion of January 1400. Robert and Margaret died within a year of each other, and were buried together in Merevale Abbey, Warwickshire.<sup>152</sup> Their marriage produced three sons, Edmund (born c.1387), Thomas and Edward. Edmund succeeded his father in 1413 and fought at Harfleur and Agincourt. Several generations later, their descendant by marriage, Robert Devereux, was made earl of Essex as the favourite of Queen Elizabeth I.

There is one final and rather surprising connection to mention. In a recent article by Barbara Harvey, it was pointed out that Nicholas Litlington, abbot of Westminster Abbey from 1362 to 1386, claimed to be a member of the Despenser family.<sup>153</sup> His parents, named Hugh and Joan, can not be identified with any certainty, but judging from Litlington's approximate date of birth (*bef.* 1315), his father, if indeed he was related to the Despensers, must have been either the elder or younger Hugh. The later Despensers

<sup>149</sup> CPL 1362-1404, 375.

<sup>150</sup> J. Taylor, W.R. Childs and L. Watkiss (eds.), *The St Albans Chronicle: the Chronica Maiora of Thomas Walsingham, I, 1376-1394* (Oxford 2003), 488-95, where Thomas Morley is mistaken for his father William.

<sup>151</sup> Given-Wilson, 'Richard II and the Higher Nobility', 115.

<sup>152</sup> Bodl. MS Top. Glouc. d.2, f. 24v. Sepulchral brasses of Lord and Lady Ferrers survive as BL Add. MS 32485, M.3-4; Add. MS 32490, L.22; Add. MS 34806, A.18-19.

<sup>153</sup> B.F. Harvey, 'Litlington, Nicholas (*b. before* 1315, *d.* 1386)', in *Oxford DNB*, xxxiv, 14.

happily associated with him: in 1371 and 1372 Litlyngton hosted meals at which Bishop Henry Despenser was present, and the following year he was appointed attorney for Edward Despenser who was fighting abroad.<sup>154</sup> The two men were sufficiently close enough for Edward, in his will, to bequeath Litlyngton a gilt hanaper and a ewer.<sup>155</sup> Litlyngton also appears to have used the Despenser heraldry without provoking a negative reaction. After becoming abbot of Westminster, he gave gifts to the abbey refectory of forty-eight trenchers and twenty-four salt-cellars, marked with his initials and the coronet of the Despensers.<sup>156</sup> Even more interesting is the famous Litlyngton Missal, made to the order of abbot Nicholas in 1383-84.<sup>157</sup> In this exquisite manuscript, which includes orders for coronations and directions for royal funerals, the Despenser arms are frequently featured in the decorated margins and may be seen on the outer edges of the pages when the book is closed.<sup>158</sup> It is difficult to see why Litlyngton would have emphasised this heraldry so heavily if there was no family affiliation (particularly since 1383 was the year of the Flanders crusade and Bishop Henry's disgrace), and equally surprising that, in a period when regular challenges were made in the Court of Chivalry for misappropriation of arms, that the main Despensers should have permitted it. Perhaps Litlyngton was kin of the younger Hugh, but in the absence of further information, this unfortunately remains a mystery.

#### (d) Marriage

Marriage in the late middle ages was a transaction of a financial and social nature intended to benefit both families. If noble families succeeded in gaining a foothold on the political ladder, more often than not it was 'the result of royal service and favour and advantageous marriages'.<sup>159</sup> The Despensers, like the Staffords, Nevilles and Percies all owed their rise to an propitious alliance (in this case, the Clares). Before examining the

<sup>154</sup> Westminster Abbey Muniments 9509.

<sup>155</sup> Lambeth Palace, Reg. Sudbury, f. 89v.

<sup>156</sup> B.F. Harvey, *Living and Dying in England 1100-1540: the Monastic experience* (Oxford 1993), 73.

<sup>157</sup> Westminster Abbey MS 37. Comprehensive descriptions may be found in L.F. Sandler, *Gothic Manuscripts 1285-1385: A Survey of Manuscripts Illuminated in the British Isles* (Oxford 1986), ii, no. 150; J.J.G. Alexander and P. Binski (eds.), *Age of Chivalry: Art in Plantagenet England 1200-1400* (London 1987), no. 714. For the context of the manuscript, see A. Simpson, 'English art during the second half of the fourteenth century', in *Die Parler und Der Schöne Stil 1350-1400: Europäische Kunst unter den Luxemburgern* (Cologne 1980), extra vol., 137-59.

<sup>158</sup> Westminster Abbey MS 37, ff. 9r, 21r, 111v, 122v, 157v, 225v, 249v, 263r, 277v, 286v, 289r.

<sup>159</sup> Ward, *English Noblewomen*, 16. See also S.J. Payling, 'The Politics of Family: Late Medieval Marriage Contracts', in R.H. Britnell and A.J. Pollard (eds.), *The McFarlane Legacy* (Stroud and New York 1995), in which it is argued that the marriage contract was the predominate issue for the landed family.



five main marriages – Hugh the elder to Isabel Beauchamp, Hugh the younger to Eleanor Clare, Hugh III to Elizabeth Montagu, Edward II to Elizabeth Burghersh and Thomas to Constance Langley – it is useful to highlight some general patterns.

*Table 1: Marriages*

Maiden name	Who married (date)	Magnate connection	First marriage or widow	Years outlived husband	Remarriage?
Isabel Beauchamp	Hugh the elder (c.1286)	daughter of earl of Warwick	widow of Patrick Chaworces	died 20 years before	–
Eleanor Clare	Hugh the younger (1306)	sister of earl of Gloucester; granddaughter of King Edward I	first	9 years	to William lord Zouche (1329)
Elizabeth Montagu	Hugh III (betw. 1339 and 1341)	daughter of earl of Salisbury	widow of Giles Badlesmere	10 years	to Guy lord Brian (1350)
Elizabeth Burghersh	Edward II (before 1354)	–	first	34 years	no
Constance Langley	Thomas (1384)	daughter of earl of Cambridge; granddaughter of King Edward III	first	16 years	no

Some of the facts outlined above are unsurprising: four of the five women outlived their husbands, one of them, Elizabeth Burghersh, by a third of a century. Two came to the altar as widows from a previous marriage, and two married again: Elizabeth Montagu married three times in all. The most striking detail is that four of the five women were from families of comital rank. Indeed, of these four, two were granddaughters of kings: Eleanor Clare was daughter of Gilbert ‘the Red’ of Gloucester and Joan of Acre, daughter of Edward I; Constance Langley was daughter of Edmund, third son of Edward III. Interestingly, however, at the time of the marriages, not one of the Despencers were of comital rank themselves. In other words, with the exception of Edward Despenser II, the eldest son in every generation married upwards. When set in the context of the principal aims of the medieval noble marriage – obtaining heirs, making alliances and acquiring new estates – these were significant achievements. It points to a family consistently on the cusp of the higher nobility, even though they held the rank of earl for less than eight years (1322-26, 1397-99).

In 1286, Hugh the elder married Isabel Chaworth, a connection arising after Isabel's father, William Beauchamp, was granted Hugh's marriage in 1281.<sup>160</sup> Since they married without royal licence Edward I confiscated their estates for eleven months and fined the couple 2000 marks, a sum that was later rescinded.<sup>161</sup> Despenser was already a major landowner in the Midlands through his mother's Basset inheritance, which had also made him a close neighbour and tenant of Thomas of Lancaster, and he now received considerable estates in South Wales and Gloucestershire through Isabel's late husband Patrick Chaworth.<sup>162</sup> However, it was the alliance with the Clares that was to prove the stepping stone to success. Aged fourteen in 1306, Eleanor Clare was Edward II's favourite niece, and the king was often prepared to clear her debts or lavish gifts on her, even going so far as to name his eldest daughter after her.<sup>163</sup> Eleanor bore the younger Despenser three sons and three daughters: Hugh (known as Hugholin, to distinguish him from his father), Edward (named after the king), Gilbert (named after Eleanor's father), Isabella (named after the queen), Eleanor and Elizabeth. After Bannockburn, Eleanor appears to have joined with her husband as he took over large tracts of South Wales and bullied her two sisters into submission for their estates.<sup>164</sup> She had been a member of the queen's household as early as 1311,<sup>165</sup> and in 1325 she was made chief lady-in-waiting, reputedly to spy on her.<sup>166</sup> Eleanor carried the queen's seal and appears to have controlled her contact with outsiders, much as Hugh the younger did with the king.

As the manner of the 1326 executions demonstrated, Isabella was determined to avenge herself on the Despensers. Eleanor herself was imprisoned in the Tower of London on 17 November, but her expenses continued to be paid and she was soon

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<sup>160</sup> CPR 1272-81, 439. In 1282 Despenser contracted to pay Beauchamp 1600 marks for his marriage: CCIR 1279-88, 184.

<sup>161</sup> E 159/60, m. 16; CCIR 1279-88, 462. The confiscation raised almost £1000 for the crown: S.L. Waugh, 'The Fiscal Uses of Royal Wardships in the Reign of Edward I', in P.R. Coss and S. Lloyd (eds.), *Thirteenth Century England I* (Woodbridge 1986), 54.

<sup>162</sup> Fryde, *Tyranny*, 29, confuses Patrick Chaworth with his older brother Payn, who was a Marcher royalist in 1264-65. For the family: M.T.W. Payne and J.E. Payne, 'The Wall Inscriptions of Gloucester Cathedral Chapter House and the de Chaworths of Kempford', *BGAST* 112 (1994), esp. 93-102. A late-thirteenth century effigy, possibly of Patrick Chaworth, is in the church of Neuville-en-Charnie, five miles west of Souches: E.F.F. Hucher, *Études sur l'histoire et les monuments de département de la Sarthe* (Paris and Le Mans 1856), 195-201.

<sup>163</sup> Bodl. Tanner MS 197, f. 12v; BL Add. MS 17362, f. 49r; BL Add. MS 35114, f. 7r; E 101/369/11, ff. 95r, 98r; SAL MS 122, ff. 1r, 4v, 13r, 14v, 15r, 20v, 22r, 23r-v, 26r, 33r, 38r, 46v. For a more sinister spin on this relationship (namely, that Hugh the younger 'gave' Eleanor to the king for sexual relations), see Doherty, 'Isabella, Queen of England', 138-39; Haines, *King Edward II*, 42-43.

<sup>164</sup> CPR 1317-21, 208, 257, 415, 456.

<sup>165</sup> BL Cotton MS Nero C.VIII, ff. 137v, 141r.

<sup>166</sup> H. Maxwell (ed.), *The Chronicle of Lanercost* (London 1913), 249. For Isabella's hatred of the Despensers, see below, chapter 3(a).

released.<sup>167</sup> Early in 1329 she was abducted from Hanley Castle by William lord Zouche, commander of the forces which had captured Caerphilly. It was by no means uncommon for rich widows to be treated in this way,<sup>168</sup> but Eleanor seems to have been fairly complicit. From 1326 to 1331, she ‘exhibited audacity and recklessness, and a firm resolve to maintain her Clare legacy by any means’.<sup>169</sup> She and Zouche were married soon afterwards, despite the prolonged efforts of John Grey of Rotherfield who maintained that he married Eleanor first.<sup>170</sup> By February 1329, Zouche was claiming the lordship of Glamorgan. However, this was refused because during Eleanor’s imprisonment in the Tower she had stolen certain of the family jewels, silver florins and ‘other goods of great value’ which had been confiscated in 1326. Payment of £50,000 was demanded before the estates were returned, but although the lands were eventually returned the enormous fine was not paid.<sup>171</sup> The couple had one surviving son, William, who, having few prospects for secular advancement, elected to become a monk at Glastonbury.<sup>172</sup> Eleanor died in 1337, and with her any chance that this vast sum would be paid off.

It might be expected that the generation following 1326 would be most likely to avoid the Despensers, but Hugh III procured a remarkable match to Elizabeth, daughter of William Montagu.<sup>173</sup> Montagu was one of Edward III’s greatest friends: it was he who encouraged the young king to overthrow the Mortimer-Isabella regime in 1330 and was later created first earl of Salisbury.<sup>174</sup> Elizabeth was first married to Giles Badlesmere, son of Bartholomew Badlesmere, the former steward of Edward II’s household who was executed for rebellion in 1321. After he died in 1338, leaving four daughters as co-heiresses, Elizabeth and Hugh III were married. A letter from Benedict XII to the

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<sup>167</sup> *CCR* 1323-27, 620.

<sup>168</sup> Ward, *English Noblewomen*, 40-42.

<sup>169</sup> F.A. Underhill, *For Her Good Estate: The Life of Elizabeth de Burgh* (New York 1999), 87. A seal of 18 February 1329 has Zouche on the obverse and Eleanor on the reverse: W. de G. Birch, *A History of Margam Abbey* (London 1897), opposite 301.

<sup>170</sup> This was not impossible as the elder Despenser had been awarded part of Grey’s wardship in 1312 (*CFR* 1307-19, 151) and on other occasions had demonstrated a preference for marrying his daughters to his wards (see below, and chapter 4). Grey took his case before Edward III and then appealed to the pope, but to no avail: *Rot. Parl.*, ii, 62, 65; *CPL* 1305-42, 394.

<sup>171</sup> *CPR* 1327-30, 492; 1330-34, 51, 53; SC 8/157/7801.

<sup>172</sup> Underhill, *Elizabeth de Burgh*, 87. The *Chronica de Theokesburie* calls this son Hugh: Bodl. MS Top. Glouc. d.2, f. 21v.

<sup>173</sup> L. Wilkinson, ‘Pawn and Political Player: Observations on the Life of a Thirteenth-Century Countess’, *BIHR* 73 (2000), 114-15, outlines the benefits of second marriages for widows. It may be posited that Hugh III’s rehabilitation was due in part to his mother’s marriage to Zouche. The Montagu-Despenser connection is discussed further in chapter 4, below.

<sup>174</sup> C. Shenton, ‘Edward III and the Coup of 1330’, in Bothwell, *Age of Edward III*, 13-34.

bishop of Worcester, dated 27 April 1341, granted dispensation for Elizabeth and Hugh to remain married 'in order to allay the strife between William and the late Hugh Despenser junior'.<sup>175</sup> It seems likely that the marriage was initially instigated by Edward III as a means of reconciling old enemies and healing old wounds. Given that it must have been arranged at just the time when Hugh III received his mother's estates and was summoned to parliament for the first time, it is not unreasonable to see this as a package deal given to Despenser, carrying the heavy caveat that reconciliation was not offered twice. However, the letter to the pope requesting dispensation was actually sent by Thomas de Lisle, who was in the service of William Montagu.<sup>176</sup> Remarkably, it seems Montagu too wished to put the past behind him.

This is particularly interesting when set against the 1344 petition by Richard, earl of Arundel, requesting the annulment of his marriage to Isabella, eldest daughter of Hugh the younger.<sup>177</sup> The couple had been betrothed in the early 1320s, aged eight and nine years respectively, when Arundel's father was seeking to consolidate his connection with the most powerful man in the land. By the 1340s, however, the family priorities had changed. Arundel claimed they had been 'compelled with fear and blows to cohabit', although three months later, when requesting dispensation for his secret marriage to the daughter of Henry of Lancaster, he alleged that they had been related in the second degree of consanguinity.<sup>178</sup> The children from his marriage to Isabella – a son, Edmund, and two daughters, Philippa and Isabel – were declared illegitimate and lost any right to inherit. Extraordinarily enough, by 1349, Edmund had married Sibyl, youngest daughter of William Montagu, thus forging another bond with the earls of Salisbury. The couple must have been impoverished by the pope's decision, as shown by Sibyl's decision the following year to sell a coronet, inlaid with jewels, to her brother.<sup>179</sup>

Arundel's petition has been used to demonstrate that in the 1340s association with the Despensers was still a hindrance.<sup>180</sup> To see how far this is accurate, we must look at the marriage between Edward II and Elizabeth Burghersh, which was, as shown above, the only match made to a baronial family. Edward Despenser I, who died in 1342, was

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<sup>175</sup> *CPL* 1305-42, 553.

<sup>176</sup> J. Aberth, *Criminal churchmen in the age of Edward III: the case of Bishop Thomas de Lisle* (Philadelphia 1996), 8.

<sup>177</sup> *CPP* 1342-1419, 81.

<sup>178</sup> *CPP* 1342-1419, 75. Of course, as it turned out, Arundel and Lancaster were themselves related, and a further dispensation had to be obtained (*ibid.*, 99).

<sup>179</sup> BL Harley Charter 53 E.II.

<sup>180</sup> *GEC*, 1, 244n; xi, 388n.

apparently unable to arrange a comital marriage for his son. This could have been due to his preoccupation with fighting in France, although this is unlikely since he had already taken steps to secure his estates in the event of his death.<sup>181</sup> It is also possible that as a younger son with little political clout, he was simply unable to find anyone else willing to ally to the Despensers. In the end, his son was placed in ward of Bartholomew Burghersh, a relative of the family through Elizabeth de Burgh, Eleanor Clare's sister.<sup>182</sup> It was not uncommon for a ward to marry the daughter of his guardian, and sometime before 1349, Edward II married Elizabeth.<sup>183</sup> So Burghersh saw no problem in marrying his daughter to Despenser. Had there been any lingering stigma attached to the family he would surely have enjoyed the profits and then dropped his young ward at the earliest opportunity. That he did not is significant. As for Arundel, he may well have wished to annul his marriage to Isabel Despenser because Henry of Lancaster was a greater political ally, yet even this should not be taken to mean that the Despensers were still tarred with the brush of rebellion. It was mere convenience for Arundel to use the 1320s as the reason for dissolving his marriage. The facts are clear: by the 1340s, the Despensers were back on the marriage market.

When Edward died in 1375, Elizabeth did not remarry, somewhat surprising for a rich widow who was only in her early thirties. She spent the rest of her life safeguarding the Despenser estates for her son Thomas, whose lengthy minority is discussed in the following section.<sup>184</sup> It is an indication of just how well-favoured Edward Despenser II had been that his son married a member of the royal family. But as events were to show, Constance, daughter of Edmund of Langley, was well-suited for a life with the Despensers. After Thomas's execution in 1400, she received goods and chattels worth £200, plus land worth a thousand marks annually as maintenance. At some point in the next four years Constance had a daughter, Eleanor, by Edmund Holland, earl of Kent, with whom – in Wylie's words – she was 'living in concubinage'.<sup>185</sup> In February 1405 she became entangled in a Ricardian plot to bring down the Lancastrian regime, masterminded by her brother, Edmund duke of York. Constance abducted the young Mortimer heirs at Windsor – it was they who had greatest claim to Richard II's throne in

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<sup>181</sup> See below, section (e).

<sup>182</sup> Underhill, *Elizabeth de Burgh*, 88-89.

<sup>183</sup> N. Orme, *Medieval Children* (New Haven and London 2001), 326-27, 334-35.

<sup>184</sup> For Elizabeth's estate management see below, chapter 5.

<sup>185</sup> Wylie, *Henry the Fourth*, ii, 39. Edmund would later marry Lucia Visconti, cousin of Violante Visconti who in 1368 had married Lionel of Clarence: H. Bradley, 'Lucia Visconti, Countess of Kent (d. 1424)', in C.M. Barron and A.F. Sutton (eds.), *Medieval London Widows, 1300-1500* (London 1994), 77-84.

1399 – and set out for Wales, presumably intending to link with the boys' father, an ally of the Welsh freedom-fighter Owain Glyn Dŵr.<sup>186</sup> However, the plot failed when they were captured at Cheltenham, and Constance was imprisoned in Kenilworth Castle.<sup>187</sup> She appeared before the king's council accused of treason: the *Chronicle of London* recorded how 'they seyden that the eldere chyld was trewe kyng'.<sup>188</sup> The Despenser lands were declared confiscate, although restored the following year. In essence, the plot was a failure, although it provides a fascinating insight into Constance's life after her husband's death. Perhaps most ironic of all was that a Despenser should have been attempting to place a Mortimer on the throne.

### (e) Minorities

It was no surprise in the late medieval period for a family to suffer loss. War was too common, disease too prevalent and life expectancy too short for it to be otherwise. In the event of a father's premature death, no male heir under the age of twenty-one or female heir under fourteen were permitted to administer the property. Both they and the estates passed temporarily to the king who, as superior lord, could bestow guardianship on whoever he chose. Whoever was granted custody had ultimate rights over the administration of property and often the marriage of the heir. Wardships could be granted for any number of reasons: to pay off debts, curry favour, compensate individuals for losses incurred in service or to encourage loyalty at court amongst ministers, political allies or favourites.<sup>189</sup>

The Despensers were no stranger to this method. Between 1307 and 1317 Edward II granted at least twenty-nine wardships to Hugh senior, many of which were passed on by Despenser to his friends or family members.<sup>190</sup> However, the table below shows that the

<sup>186</sup> *Calendar of Signet Letters of Henry IV and Henry V*, no. 936; Wylie, *Henry the Fourth*, ii, 40-50; R.R. Davies, *The Revolt of Owain Glyn Dŵr* (Oxford 1995), 176, 185.

<sup>187</sup> £10 was paid from the exchequer to Helmyng Leget for his expenses in conducting Constance to Kenilworth: Devon (ed.), *Issues of the Exchequer*, 300. The order to arrest Constance survives as BL Cotton MS Vespasian F.III, f. 4r.

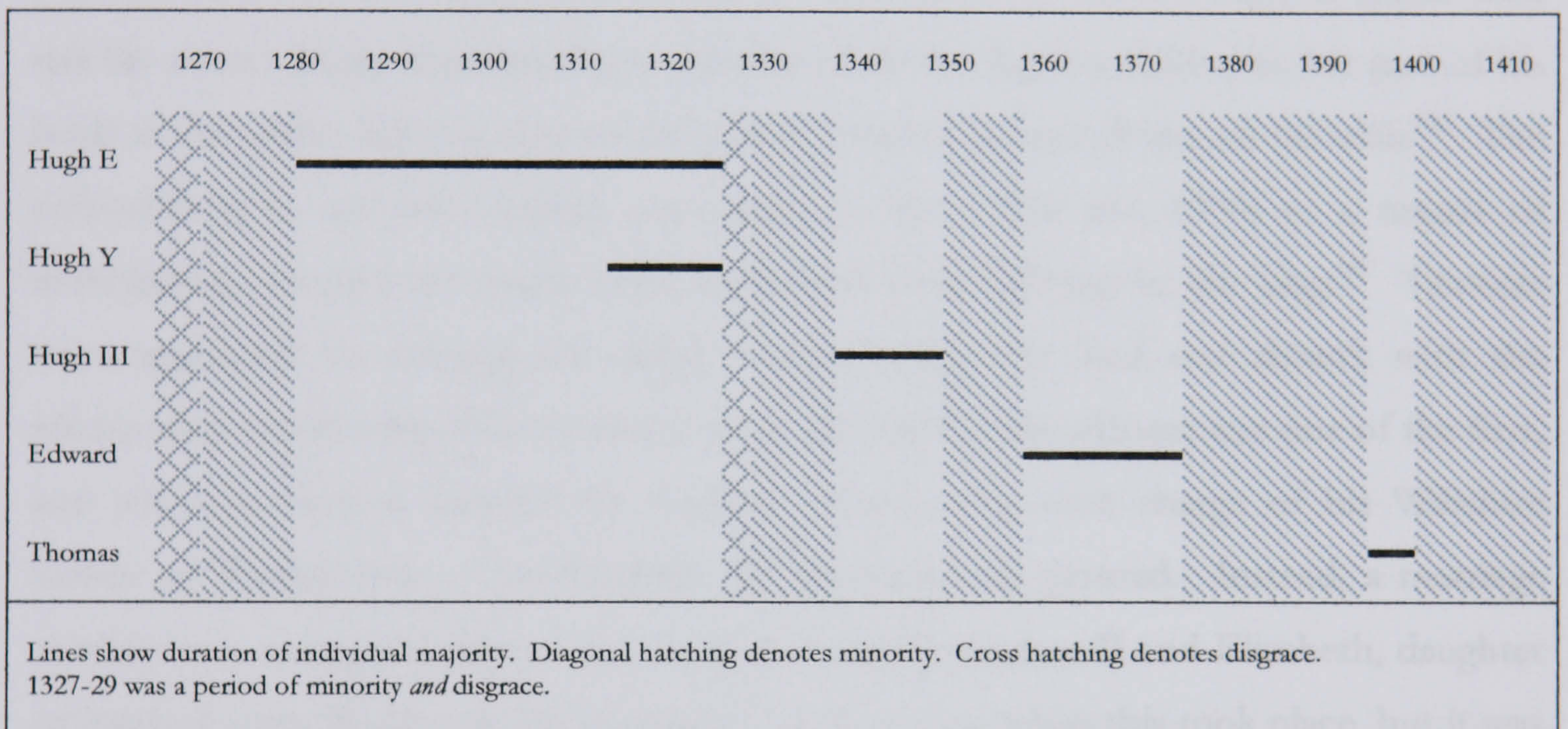
<sup>188</sup> Quoted in Bradley, 'Lucia Visconti', 79.

<sup>189</sup> J.M.W. Bean, *The Decline of English Feudalism 1215-1540* (Manchester 1968), 41-42; Waugh, *The lordship of England*, 146-56, 194-207; Orme, *Medieval Children*, 325-27. See also S.F.C. Milsom, 'The origin of prerogative wardship', in G. Garnett and J. Hudson (eds.), *Law and Government in Medieval England and Normandy: Essays in honour of Sir James Holt* (Cambridge 1994), 223-44.

<sup>190</sup> Waugh, *The lordship of England*, 226-28, 248-50. Hugh the elder: CPR 1292-1301, 451; 1301-7, 526-27; 1313-17, 32, 618, 628, 667; 1317-21, 14; CFR 1307-19, 151, 336; 1319-27, 347. Hugh the younger: CPR 1313-17, 20, 640; CFR 1307-19, 155, 242, 278. Eleanor Despenser: CFR 1319-27, 375, 389.

family itself spent a great deal of time without control of their estates. In this sense they were typical of many late medieval families – around a quarter of peers died leaving an underage heir<sup>191</sup> – but the Despensers were a particularly acute case. At the beginning of our period, the family was emerging from the disgrace of Evesham and a long minority; at the end, the Epiphany Rising marked further forfeiture and minority. During the fourteenth century, the family faced three additional periods without an mature male heir: two minorities (1349-57 and 1375-94) and a decade of disgrace (1326-37), and, as T.B. Pugh noted, the Despensers spent forty-one of the sixty-four years between 1349 and 1413 without a male head of the family.<sup>192</sup>

*Table 2: Periods of minority and disgrace*



Following the executions of 1326 and the imprisonment of Hugh III, the Despenser estates were declared forfeit and parcelled out first to the cohorts of Mortimer and Isabella, and then to followers of Edward III.<sup>193</sup> After 1330, the family's spell in political Siberia coincided with the beginning of Edward III's personal reign, and his attempts to shore up the throne left in tatters by his father and mother. For the crown, as for the Despensers, the 1330s were years of recovery. Over the course of the decade, a small number of privileges were granted to Hugh III, but it was the grant of his father's lands in 1337 that signalled the end of his disgrace. Even then, it was only when war against

<sup>191</sup> J. Rosenthal, *Nobles and the Noble Life, 1295-1500* (London and New York 1976), 63.

<sup>192</sup> *GCH*, 182.

<sup>193</sup> J.S. Bothwell, 'Edward III, The English Peerage, and the 1337 Earls: Estate Redistribution in Fourteenth-Century England', in id, *Age of Edward III*, 35-52.

France took a turn for the better that it eventually united the English baronage and fully restored Despenser to favour.<sup>194</sup> Edward III's policy of reconciliation with the victims of earlier regimes is well-known, and when Hugh III died aged 41, there was little indication that he had begun his majority in prison.

Minorities were 'profoundly troubling to families'.<sup>195</sup> For the Despensers, they occurred when the family were in a powerful political position. The first, however, was staggered. When Edward I, second son of the younger Hugh, died in 1342, his son Edward was just six years old. As a younger son with a modest inheritance, this was not an significant problem as far as the family was concerned, but when Hugh III died in 1349 without children, the Despensers were left without an adult heir. However, Edward I had learnt a valuable lesson in the aftermath of Isabella's regime: rather than risk his estates being fragmented and distributed to the highest bidder, he left part of his lands in fee whilst fighting abroad and jointly entailed the remainder on his wife.<sup>196</sup> The enfeoffment to use was coming into vogue in the 1330s and 1340s as a means of maintaining control over estates while lords were away fighting for the king.<sup>197</sup> Trustees were appointed to manage the family estates whilst the lord was absent, with the relationship terminating if he returned safely. Edward's enfeoffment was one of the first, and when he died at Morlaix his feoffees subsequently took charge of his Wiltshire manor of Wynterslewe. Consequently, no wardship was granted. Instead, a marriage contract was arranged between the young Edward Despenser II and Elizabeth, daughter of Bartholomew Burghersh the younger.<sup>198</sup> It is unclear when this took place, but it was probably before the death of Hugh III: for the king to grant the relatively insignificant marriage of Edward II to Burghersh before 1349 would have been fairly routine, whereas the vast Despenser estates left after 1349 may have attracted a more high-ranking recipient. As it happened, Hugh III made no enfeoffment – probably because he had no opportunity before the plague took hold in England – and on 6 February 1350, the crown awarded temporary control of the entire Despenser estates to Burghersh. In 1353

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<sup>194</sup> See below, chapters 3(b) and 5; and, more generally, Ormrod, *Edward III*, 17-22.

<sup>195</sup> Waugh, *The lordship of England*, 194.

<sup>196</sup> *CIPM*, viii, no. 395.

<sup>197</sup> For the development of the use: Bean, *English Feudalism*, 110-234; Holmes, *Estates*, 41-58; McFarlane, 'The Land and the Family', repr. *Nobility*, 61-82.

<sup>198</sup> Burghersh was a distant relative of the family through Eleanor Despenser's sister Elizabeth de Burgh, and there is evidence that the families were in frequent contact: Underhill, *Elizabeth de Burgh*, 89.



two-thirds of the lands were granted to the dowager Lady Anne to hold until her son came of age, the rest remaining to Burghersh.<sup>199</sup>

There is little doubt that Edward Despenser I's actions came about in part because the family had a heightened sense of their own mortality after 1326. Two decades later this was not at issue, although when Edward Despenser II died with a son aged two, he also left part of his lands in fee.<sup>200</sup> Such a lengthy minority could be dangerous, but it attests to Edward's close relationship with the royal family that his son Thomas was made a ward of Edmund of Langley, earl of Cambridge and fourth son of the king. Langley was a most useful guardian. Thomas married his daughter Constance, thus underscoring the importance of his father's political life, and cementing the relationship which Despenser had built up with the king's younger sons. If this can be viewed as a continuation of the crown's intent to consolidate its strength by marrying into the top families in the land,<sup>201</sup> Edward must be viewed in the same light as the families of Hastings, Bohun and Mortimer who became related by marriage to the crown at this time. It was an impressive way to show the favour in which the family were now held. A year after Thomas himself rebelled in 1400, Henry IV granted Constance all the Despenser estates which had not been forfeit in 1399. The transaction stressed that this was 'for her greater security' and was to hold true 'even if others shall offer more rent to the king or his heirs'.<sup>202</sup> It was rare for such immense tracts of land to remain in the family in this way, and should be seen as part of Henry's attempts to make the transition between regimes as smooth as possible. The estates were to be held until Richard Despenser's majority: on his premature death, they passed to his sister Isabel before her marriage to Richard Beauchamp.

<sup>199</sup> *CFR* 1347-56, 208, 378-79; and see below, chapter 5.

<sup>200</sup> *CIPM*, xiv, no. 209; Bean, *English Feudalism*, 318 (where the reference is incorrect). Two-thirds of the Despenser estates in Wales and a number of English manors were granted to the dowager lady Elizabeth in 1377, (valued at £700 per year): *CFR* 1377-83, 46; 1383-91, 346. The remainder was farmed out to be held as wardships: *CFR* 1368-77, 339-48.

<sup>201</sup> See W.M. Ormrod, 'Edward III and His Family', *JBS* 26 (1987), 398-422; and see below, chapter 6(b).

<sup>202</sup> On 17 February 1401: *CFR* 1399-1405, 104. She had been granted dower of 1000 marks on 19 February 1400: *CFR* 1399-1405, 48.

## Conclusion

It is not easy to sum up the Despensers. Their fortunes fluctuated greatly for a century and a half, and the controversial events of the 1260s and 1320s were balanced by later recoveries. This chapter has highlighted the importance of the elder Hugh in the 1290s and, later, both Hugh III and Edward II in shoring up the family after earlier tragedies. They established the family as a major political force whose impact continued long after the death of Thomas in 1400. Having identified this persistent involvement, we may proceed to examining the role played by the Despensers at the heart of political life.

## 3

## The Despensers and the Crown

‘SERVICE’, wrote Rosemary Horrox, ‘has some claim to be considered the dominant ethic of the middle ages’.<sup>1</sup> Everyone, from the king to the lowliest serf, was influenced by service, embodying the late medieval passion for order and deference to the divine hierarchy. This chapter seeks to understand the Despensers’ service to the crown, and to establish the extent to which they served in peace and war. It begins by exploring contemporary attitudes towards service and the relationship between the late medieval monarch and a family on the periphery of the higher nobility. Then the question of service is discussed in two discrete sections: domestic government (household, counsel and parliament), and overseas service (military and diplomatic). It demonstrates that pragmatic service to the crown was the means by which the Despensers built up political prominence. Ultimately, the chapter argues their deliberate conformity to the culture of service, not merely as a means of survival after the 1320s, but a mode of advancement in the years that followed.

The concept of service was deep-rooted. Any task could be considered honourable, from pouring the king’s wine to bearing regalia at his coronation. Horrox makes a distinction between ‘honourable’ and ‘menial’ service, based upon the status of the servant.<sup>2</sup> Those who performed ‘honourable’ service inhabited the same social world as those they served, adding a cohesion to the personal nature of the tasks involved.

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<sup>1</sup> R. Horrox, ‘Service’, in id. (ed.), *Fifteenth-century attitudes* (Cambridge 1994), 61. See also id., *Richard III: A Study in Service* (Cambridge 1989), 1-26. Horrox’s work inspired a further collection of essays: A. Curry and E. Matthew (eds.), *Concepts and Patterns of Service in the later Middle Ages* (Woodbridge 2000). Criticisms of her approach are considered at the beginning of chapter 4, below.

<sup>2</sup> Horrox, ‘Service’, 63.

Service, above all, was based on mutual benefit. On one hand, a lord gained the obedience and loyalty of his servant, as well as a degree of prestige by proving he could attract important men into his service. How far this prestige stretched would depend on what the job actually was, and on the influence of the individual lord. Any lord unable to command a following was no real lord, and society knew this. His influence would be fleeting, ephemeral. The king, as the most important lord in the realm, was in a different situation again: since all men were his servants, he demanded their loyalty and service, just as they required him to fulfil his traditional duties as fount of justice and defender of the realm.<sup>3</sup> But if a king could not command loyalty and service, it was much more serious. When Edward I was on the brink of war in 1297, his inability to command a following for the venture led to a crisis with his nobility. When rebellions rose against Edward II and Richard II, defence was impossible because neither could rally their subjects for support.

On the other hand, men served for a number of reasons. They might serve for payment (as exemplified in surviving indentures of retainer), or other benefits such as promotion to office, grants of land, assistance in arranging a marriage or influence in settling a law suit. Military service held great appeal since the almost continual warfare of the fourteenth century yielded many an opportunity for personal advancement.<sup>4</sup> McFarlane noted that there were three sources of profit for the soldier: his pay, his prisoners and that which he could plunder from the enemy.<sup>5</sup> *The Boke of Noblesse* describes how young men in noble households were trained in horsemanship and armed combat from their youth upwards, 'so that when the realm in time of need had their service in deeds and enterprises of arms, they might be the more apt to do honourable service'.<sup>6</sup> The elder Despenser often attended tournaments and jousts, such as the one at Compiègne in 1278, three years before he came of age.<sup>7</sup> Yet despite glorious descriptions of voluntary chivalric feats of arms found in contemporary works, it is almost impossible

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<sup>3</sup> The following studies discuss the responsibilities of the late medieval monarch: G.L. Harriss, 'The king and his subjects', in Horrox (ed.), *Fifteenth-century attitudes*, 13-28; G.L. Harriss, 'Introduction: the exemplar of kingship' and 'The king and his magnates', in id. (ed.), *Henry V: the Practice of Kingship* (Oxford 1985), 1-29, 31-51; W.M. Ormrod, *Political Life in Medieval England, 1300-1450* (Basingstoke 1995), 61-83; M.C. Carpenter, *The Wars of the Roses* (Cambridge 1997), 27-33.

<sup>4</sup> For development of military service: M.R. Powicke, *Military Obligation in Medieval England* (Oxford 1962), esp. 166-81; M.C. Prestwich, *Armies and warfare in the Middle Ages: the English experience* (New Haven and London 1996), 57-81; P.R. Coss, *The Knight in Medieval England 1000-1400* (Stroud 1993), 30-99.

<sup>5</sup> McFarlane, 'The Nobility and War', repr. *Nobility*, 23-35.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in M.H. Keen, *England in the Later Middle Ages* (London 1973), 22.

<sup>7</sup> Coss, *The Knight in Medieval England*, 85.

to separate these from the more discernible lures of war: promotions, financial rewards and booty.

Connection with a high-ranking noble, or even the king, made a public statement on a person's abilities. Often this was simply by being visible: Hugh Despenser senior carried Edward II's regalia at his coronation,<sup>8</sup> and as we shall see, the younger Despenser deliberately engineered situations where he could be seen as the king's confidante. But usually service manifested itself as a reciprocal commodity: it did not need to bring visible, material reward in order to be worthwhile. Nor was it seen as providing a specific duty to a specific office, but involved a personal relationship with one's overlord. Every time a lord gave an opportunity for service, it enhanced the standing of the person called to act. This is vital in understanding why the great magnates were prepared to serve the king. There was rarely any financial necessity, and only a few chose to involve themselves in the day-to-day business of government. Yet those who did serve recognised the endorsement it gave to their own power, because service to the great – especially if performed by the nobility to the crown – conferred honour by association and gave powerful backing in any dispute. Men gained status from those whom they served, and many of the nobility had risen to power on the back of their willingness to conform to this pattern. They understood that social mobility was acceptable because they themselves had profited by it.

Different families had risen from different origins. The Bohun earls of Northampton and Montagu earls of Salisbury both owed their success to military prowess, distinguishing themselves in the wars against Scotland and France, as did Guy Brian, Walter Mauny and Oliver Ingham.<sup>9</sup> Montagu also became one of Edward III's closest friends, a relationship established by his involvement in the overthrow of Mortimer and Isabella. The de la Poles owed their spectacular rise from merchant to nobility in one generation to William de la Pole's financial acumen.<sup>10</sup> Others benefited from a legal background. From the latter half of the fourteenth century, the offices of state were dominated by families with judicial pedigrees: the Scropes, Bourghiers and, later, the Stonors and Pastons all developed skills that were in demand at exactly the right time,

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<sup>8</sup> *Parl. Writs*, II(ii), 10.

<sup>9</sup> William Bohun, who led the second army at Crècy, was in the field continuously for 579 days at the beginning of the Hundred Years War: Prestwich, *Armies and Warfare*, 8.

<sup>10</sup> Ormrod, *Edward III*, 170-72; E.B. Fryde, *William de la Pole, Merchant and King's Banker* (London 1988), esp. 25-40.

although not all reached the same political heights.<sup>11</sup> A further example is Edward Despenser, whose administrative skills, as we shall see, were highly valued in the 1360s. Despite this, not all the nobility chose to get involved in politics. Thomas of Lancaster, who stayed in the north of England for much of the 1310s, is one of the best known examples of a magnate who stayed largely aloof from the machinations of court life.<sup>12</sup> Others were unable to maintain the status they sought. The Courtenay earls of Devon, influential men at court until the 1390s, were hamstrung at the beginning of the fifteenth century by a series of mishaps. The lengthy blindness of one earl was followed by the premature death of the next and the long minority of a third, effectively removing the family from political life for almost three decades.<sup>13</sup> By the late 1420s, the political map of England was transformed from that which the Courtenays had known before, and they never regained prominence. Countless other families died out, the Braoses, Bigods, Clares and Warennes for want of a male heir; others, such as the Hastings, by pure misfortune. Yet the ranks were constantly replenished by families whose skills were in demand. While the longevity of a noble family depended on its ability to produce heirs, success increasingly came from a willingness to conform to the patterns of service. As Philip Morgan has written, 'medieval elites did not exist in a global nowhere; everybody, in the end, had to be somewhere, and that somewhere was frequently a central place, most often a castle, hall or house'.<sup>14</sup>

Nevertheless, those who exploited the paradigm and rose too far, too fast, were actively disliked.<sup>15</sup> The concept of the royal favourite currently in vogue in early-modern circles has received little attention from medievalists,<sup>16</sup> but relationships between a king and an intimate caused frequent problems. The Savoyards and Poitevins, Piers Gaveston

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<sup>11</sup> B.P. Vale, 'The Scropes of Bolton and of Masham', unpublished D.Phil thesis (University of York 1987); McFarlane, 'Extinction and Recruitment', repr. *Nobility*, 164-67; L. Clark, 'The Benefits and Burdens of Office: Henry Bourghier (1408-1483), Viscount Bourghier and Earl of Essex, and the Treasurership of the Exchequer', in M.A. Hicks (ed.), *Profit, piety and the professions in later medieval England* (Gloucester 1990), 119-36; M.C. Carpenter, 'The Stonor Circle in the Fifteenth Century', in R.E. Archer and S.K. Walker (eds.), *Rulers and Ruled in Medieval England: essays presented to Gerald Harriss* (London and Rio Grande 1995), 175-200.

<sup>12</sup> Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster*, 331-32.

<sup>13</sup> M. Cherry, 'The Courtenay Earls of Devon: the Formation and Disintegration of a Late Medieval Aristocratic Affinity', *Southern History* 1 (1979), 71-97; Given-Wilson, *English nobility*, 163-64; Holmes, *Estates*, 32-35.

<sup>14</sup> P. Morgan, 'Ranks of Society', in R.A. Griffiths (ed.), *The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* (Oxford 2003), 82.

<sup>15</sup> R.V. Turner, *Men raised from the dust: administrative service and upward mobility in Angevin England* (Philadelphia 1988), 1-19; K. Mertens, 'Aristocracy', in R. Horrox (ed.), *Fifteenth-century attitudes*, 48-49.

<sup>16</sup> See below, chapter 6(c).

and the Despensers, Richard II's *duketti*, and Edward IV's Woodville relatives all brought the wrath of the magnates upon themselves and their respective monarchs. Yet by contrast, Henry II's 'men raised from the dust' and Edward III's 1337 peerage creations were successful, perhaps because the new men knew they owed their good fortune to the king and proved their worth through dedicated service. Richard FitzAlan, earl of Arundel, was restored to his father's forfeited lands in 1351 with the statement that the king, 'wishing to give grace to all who deserve it, had great hope of the good in the said Richard'.<sup>17</sup> Here, in S.L. Waugh's words, was 'healing language'.<sup>18</sup> It was also a transparent reminder that the earl's father had been executed for treason with the Despensers in 1326, and consequently better things were expected of FitzAlan himself. Such moves were not for personal ostentation, nor a 'down-payment' of patronage: a man was always intended to place his obedience to the king far above his own desires.<sup>19</sup> This was how families survived in the late middle ages, when a more clearly defined understanding of crown authority, growth of royal government and increased political dialogue meant families were much more reliant on the king's favour than their Norman forebears had been.<sup>20</sup>

Since each monarch had different ideas about the nobility, each generation needed to prove its worth.<sup>21</sup> Sometimes this relationship could be quantified, but more commonly it was dependent on politics of personality. Sir William Montagu, first earl of Salisbury, distinguished himself on the battlefield and as an advisor to Edward III. He had been awarded vast tracts of land belonging to the Mortimers as a reward for his involvement in the coup of 1330. However, within a decade of his death, Montagu's young son was removed from control of the lordship of Denbigh which was returned to Roger Mortimer's grandson, who meanwhile had become a companion-in-arms of the Black Prince.<sup>22</sup> It emphasised the precarious position in which each generation found itself.

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<sup>17</sup> *Rot. Parl.*, ii, 225.

<sup>18</sup> S.L. Waugh, *England in the reign of Edward III* (Cambridge 1991), 212.

<sup>19</sup> Horrox, 'Service', 66.

<sup>20</sup> R. Frame, *The Political Development of the British Isles 1100-1400* (Oxford 1990), 142-68; J.A. Green, *The aristocracy of Norman England* (Cambridge 1997), 254-326; S. Reynolds, *Fiefs and Vassals: The Medieval Evidence Reinterpreted* (Oxford 1994), 323-95; S.D. White, 'The Politics of Exchange: Gifts, Fiefs, and Feudalism', in E. Cohen and M.B. de Jong (eds.), *Medieval Transformations: Texts, Power, and Gifts in Context* (Leiden 2001), 169-88.

<sup>21</sup> McFarlane, 'Had Edward I a 'Policy' towards the Earls?', repr. *Nobility*, 248-67; M.C. Prestwich, 'Royal Patronage under Edward I', in P.R. Coss and S.D. Lloyd (eds.), *Thirteenth Century England I* (Woodbridge 1986), 41-52; C.P. Scriber, 'Edward II and the Tactics of Kingship', *Journal of the Rocky Mountain Medieval and Renaissance Association* 13 (1992), 1-23; C. Given-Wilson, 'Richard II and the Higher Nobility', in A. Goodman and J. Gillespie (eds.), *Richard II: the Art of Kingship* (Oxford 1999), 107-28.

<sup>22</sup> *Rot. Parl.*, ii, 255-56; Holmes, *Estates*, 14-16, 26-29.

When promotion depended on the whim of the monarch, family ties alone could never guarantee success. Consequently, late medieval England saw the increased development of a 'serving nobility': ambitious men who were prepared to fit their aspirations into the prevailing culture of the time. The nobility were changing in the fourteenth century: previously a military elite, they needed to work harder to protect their position in society from the perceived threat from below. As such, it is possible to trace an administrative-conscious nobility evolving in parallel with the increased demands placed on them by the crown.<sup>23</sup> By looking first at domestic royal government, household, counsel and parliament, and then moving to examine foreign service and warfare, this chapter will demonstrate the degree to which the Despensers themselves were part of this development.

### **(a) Domestic service: household, counsel and parliament**

#### Household

If service was at the heart of medieval life, the household was at the heart of medieval service. Characterised by early scholars as a place where plots were hatched and seeds of discord sown to discredit the crown, recent studies have underlined the fact that the household was the 'nerve-centre' of late medieval political life.<sup>24</sup> It was where business was carried out, accounts were settled, and where the king took the advice of his followers and friends, many of whom were of great political and administrative importance. Service in the household was 'one of the most prestigious and lucrative forms of personal service' and an effective method of social advancement.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Given-Wilson, *English nobility*, 29-83, *passim*.

<sup>24</sup> Early work: J.C. Davies, *The Baronial Opposition to Edward II* (Cambridge 1918), esp. 116-32; Tout, *Chapters*, *passim*. More recently: J.O. Prestwich, 'The Military Household of the Norman Kings', *EHR* 96 (1981), 1-35; id., 'The place of the royal household in English history, 1066-1307', *Medieval History* 1 (1991), 37-52; D. Starkey, 'The age of the household: politics, society and the arts c.1350-c.1550', in S. Medcalf (ed.), *The Later Middle Ages* (London 1981), 225-90; Given-Wilson, *Royal Household*, esp. 1-75; D.A.L. Morgan, 'The house of policy: the political role of the late Plantagenet household, 1422-1485', in D. Starkey (ed.), *The English Court: from the Wars of the Roses to the Civil War* (London 1987), 25-70.

<sup>25</sup> Given-Wilson, *Royal Household*, 57.



Four of the male Despensers at one time or another received payment in the household, although Edward Despenser II appears to have been only briefly connected.<sup>26</sup> Gilbert and Hugh V were household knights formally on the payroll of the king, the former during the 1360s and the latter straddling the Lancastrian revolution.<sup>27</sup> Both men owed their elevation to their military success and provide good examples of the machinery of social advancement. Despite an extensive administrative career, Hugh Despenser the elder never performed service in the household, although he held the office of justice of the forests for almost thirty years.<sup>28</sup> The most prominent (and best documented) involvement in the household was that of Hugh Despenser the younger. On 18 November 1317 he was awarded custody of the castle and town of Dryslwyn and the lordship of Cantref Mawr in west Wales.<sup>29</sup> This grant had a total value of 500 marks per annum and appears to have been made to fulfil the terms of a life indenture between the king and the younger Hugh.<sup>30</sup> Despenser was then appointed chamberlain of the royal household in July 1318,<sup>31</sup> ushering in a period of power politics and corruption which led to civil war, national unrest and, ultimately, the downfall of Edward II.

The chamberlain held the most important position in the king's household and had enormous political influence.<sup>32</sup> Firstly, he held responsibility for all the treasure and jewels which were stored in the chamber and exercised considerable control over the king's expenditure.<sup>33</sup> This was especially significant in 1322 when the confiscation of the Contrarians' lands resulted in a colossal financial windfall. Despenser was on hand to orchestrate the partitioning of profits, and from records of his possessions at Caerphilly

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<sup>26</sup> He received payment in 1360, perhaps in conjunction with his role in the Treaty of Brétigny (see below, part (b)).

<sup>27</sup> See above, chapter 2(c).

<sup>28</sup> First appointed 12 February 1297 (CFR 1272-1307, 382); confirmed for life 28 August 1309 (CPR 1307-1313, 183). This was rescinded when the Ordinances were sealed, but he was reconfirmed for life on 11 December 1313 (CFR 1307-1319, 187).

<sup>29</sup> CPR 1317-21, 56.

<sup>30</sup> J.R.S. Phillips, *Amyer de Valence, Earl of Pembroke* (Oxford 1972), 314.

<sup>31</sup> W.R. Childs and J. Taylor (eds.), *The Anonimalle Chronicle 1307-1334*, Yorkshire Archaeological Society 147 (1987), 92-95; *contra* Fryde, *Tyranny*, 36. J.C. Davies was convinced that Despenser was 'thrust' into office against the king's will by a 'middle party', and only afterwards became a 'royal partisan' (*Baronial Opposition*, 215), but the very existence of this clique has been comprehensively rebutted by Seymour Phillips (*Amyer de Valence*, 136-77). After the civil war Despenser received payment as a banneret of the household in winter 1322: BL Stowe MS 553, ff. 65r, 66r.

<sup>32</sup> Given-Wilson, *Royal Household*, 71-73. This was particularly true at the beginning of the fourteenth century when there was no chief chamberlain in England.

<sup>33</sup> Edward II began his reign £200,000 in debt, but in November 1325 there was over £69,000 in the Tower: E 101/332/18. Fryde, *Tyranny*, 209, calculates a total transfer of £78,156 to the new regime.

he appears to have creamed a large amount of money and jewels off the top.<sup>34</sup> Edward even ordered a ship to be built and named *La Despenser*, at a cost of £130.<sup>35</sup> Secondly, the chamberlain was physically present with the king for much of the time and controlled both written and personal access to the monarch. Unsurprisingly, the process was open to abuse and it was entirely feasible to isolate the king from those whom the chamberlain disliked. Together with Robert Baldock, his ally in the household, the younger Hugh endorsed or rejected all access to Edward II. The Lanercost chronicler saw him to be ‘the right eye of the English king’,<sup>36</sup> and the *Anonimale* author recorded that

no one was able to approach the king without the consent of sir Hugh, and even then only through making large gifts. And if anyone wished to speak with the king he would not dare do this in any way except only in the said sir Hugh’s presence.<sup>37</sup>

Despenser developed a stranglehold over the household which made him the most powerful man in England. Such power put him in a different sphere from Piers Gaveston, who had raised such antipathy in the magnates a few years previously. Hamilton comments that ‘unlike Despenser, Gaveston seems to have preferred to exercise his power through the king, rather than in his stead’.<sup>38</sup> By contrast, between 1322 and 1326, Despenser appears to have almost taken over the government. M.C. Buck has written of the reforms in Edward II’s exchequer which led to his inordinate wealth, and remarks that many of the demands for revenue were led by the younger Hugh.<sup>39</sup> Yet contrary to Tout’s conclusions, this did not make Despenser a reformer.<sup>40</sup> He was no visionary. Nor was he cowed by the events of 1321-22 into conforming to

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<sup>34</sup> E 101/383/8, f. 5r-v; W. Rees, *Caerphilly Castle and its place in the Annals of Glamorgan* (Caerphilly 1974), 109-21. Other examples of the king’s profligacy towards the Despensers abound in SAL MS 122, which a later hand has entitled ‘the accounts of Edward II’s chamber and his gifts to Hugh Despenser the younger’.

<sup>35</sup> E 372/171, m. 41d.

<sup>36</sup> J. Stevenson (ed.), *Chronicon de Lanercost* (Edinburgh 1839), 241.

<sup>37</sup> *Anonimale Chronicle 1307-1334*, 92-93.

<sup>38</sup> J.S. Hamilton, *Piers Gaveston, Earl of Cornwall 1307-1312: Politics and Patronage in the Reign of Edward II* (Detroit 1988), 45.

<sup>39</sup> M.C. Buck, ‘The Reform of the Exchequer, 1316-1326’, *EHR* 98 (1983), 251; citing *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, 136 (‘the king’s meanness [*duritia*] is laid at Hugh’s door’). Fryde, *Tyranny*, 99-105, prefers to see the impetus coming at all times from the crown. J.S. Bothwell, *Edward III and the English Peerage: royal patronage, social mobility and political control in fourteenth-century England* (Woodbridge 2004), 78-92, points to this increased efficiency as allowing Edward III crucial flexibility in his use of annuities to endow his ‘new nobility’ in the 1340s and 1350s. A.J. Musson, ‘Edward II: the Public and Private Face of the Law’ (forthcoming), points out the difficulty in identifying any systematic corruption of justice by the Despensers, in the light of the vitriolic nature of the 1321 articles of exile, but R.W. Kaeuper, ‘Law and Order in Fourteenth-Century England: The Evidence of Oyer and Terminer’, *Speculum* 54 (1979), 744-45, has argued that ‘once the single-minded control of an openly partisan regime was established ... it is unlikely that petitions contrary to [the Despensers] wishes had any hope of success’.

<sup>40</sup> Tout, *Chapters*, ii, 314-60; also B.P. Wolffe, *The Royal Demesne in English History* (London 1971), 71.

chamber service and limiting his ambition to that which was attainable. As his bullying, intimidation and outright theft showed, streamlining the exchequer merely happened to be the best way to speed the money to his own coffers. Consequently, many of the changes made to the exchequer in the second half of Edward II's reign were necessary not because they held any long-term promise, but because of the reluctance of both laity and clergy to commit funds to a Despenser-led administration.

The chamberlain's monopolisation of the king was a major factor behind the deep hatred between Hugh the younger and Queen Isabella. Despenser ridiculed the queen in public and drove her from her place beside her husband. A substantial reduction in chancery petitions handled by the queen after 1321 indicates how she was cut off from the king, either at the instigation of Despenser or as a result of his exile.<sup>41</sup> In September 1324, under the pretext of a possible French attack over the Saint-Sardos affair, Hugh confiscated her lands and two months later took over the running of her household, having already infiltrated his wife Eleanor as a spy.<sup>42</sup> At least one of the royal children, John of Eltham, was taken and placed under Eleanor's guardianship.<sup>43</sup> In 1325, after she fled to Paris, Isabella wrote from the French court to the pope, explaining that Despenser's involvement in government was the reason she refused to return to England.<sup>44</sup> The *Vita Edwardi Secundi* recorded Isabella's thoughts as follows:

I feel that marriage is the joining together of man and woman ... and that someone has come between my husband and myself trying to break this bond; I protest that I will not return until this intruder is removed, but, discarding my marriage garment shall assume the robes of widowhood and mourning until I am avenged of this Pharisee.<sup>45</sup>

Despite her vilification as the 'she-wolf' of France, Isabella was initially loyal to her husband and hardly deserved the treatment she received. Yet her situation is indicative of the power the chamberlain could wield. The king's willingness to allow his favourite

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<sup>41</sup> J.C. Parsons, 'The Intercessionary Patronage of Queens Margaret and Isabella of France', in M.C. Prestwich, R.H. Britnell and R. Frame (eds.), *Thirteenth Century England VI* (Woodbridge 1997), 155.

<sup>42</sup> See above, chapter 2(d).

<sup>43</sup> E 101/382/12; *Calendar of Memoranda Rolls (Exchequer) Preserved in the Public Record Office Michaelmas 1326–Michaelmas 1327* (London 1968), no. 2133.

<sup>44</sup> CPL 1304-42, 475; *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, 135. Details of Isabella's expenses in France are in SAL MS 543, and part of her itinerary in P. Chaplais (ed.), *The War in Saint-Sardos (1323-1325)*, Camden 3rd ser., 87 (London 1954), Appendix III.

<sup>45</sup> *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, 143. Eleanor referred to Isabella as *nostre treschere dame la Roine* in 1326 (M.C. Carpenter (ed.), *Kingsford's Stonor Letters and Papers, 1290-1483* (Cambridge 1996), 3), leading Haines (*King Edward II*, 43) to conclude that the two women were still on good terms.

free reign and Isabella's determination to avenge herself of the treatment she received at Despenser's hand led directly to the downfall of the regime.

While the public forum of parliament was developing as an important place of business, it was often in the privacy of the chamber that men who had the ear of the king could be heard. Consequently, the chamberlain had significant influence over unofficial decision-making. It was this that gave Despenser his great authority. Not since Peter des Roches nearly a century earlier had any one man wielded such control over the king, his accounts and his policies. It is difficult to view him performing service to the crown; it is more accurate to interpret him as performing service for his own ends. Nevertheless, however misguided Edward II may have been, his appointment of the younger Hugh shows the immense amount of trust he placed in his favourite. It is interesting to examine other members of the household and consider their allegiance to Despenser. Did he infiltrate his own men to do his bidding?

It is hardly surprising to see an overlap between Edward II's household and the retinues of the Despensers.<sup>46</sup> The key is to ascertain whether other members of the household were the chamberlain's 'placemen', which is not easy to distinguish. Hugh junior's most well-known associate was Robert Baldock, archdeacon of Middlesex, whom Tout described as 'the brain and the hand of the younger Despenser'.<sup>47</sup> An experienced negotiator, Baldock was keeper of the privy seal and controller of the king's wardrobe from 1320 to 1323, after which he was promoted to the chancellorship, a post he held until his imprisonment at Newgate in 1326.<sup>48</sup> Most contemporaries saw him to be as corrupt as the Despensers themselves, a fact that resulted in his denunciation in 1321 and doubtless led to his 'gross ill-treatment' in prison in 1326.<sup>49</sup> Baldock and Hugh junior together exploited their positions to enormous financial gain.<sup>50</sup> A response to a petition from the prior of Holy Trinity, Norwich, outlines the 'great violence' that the younger Despenser and Robert Baldock did to the bishop and priory of Norwich, and their

<sup>46</sup> N.E. Saul, 'The Despensers and the downfall of Edward II', *EHR* 99 (1984), 10-11.

<sup>47</sup> T.F. Tout, *The place of the reign of Edward II in English history*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (Manchester 1936), 123. Letters from Despenser to Baldock survive as SC 1/36/124, 126, 128.

<sup>48</sup> SAL MS 120, f. 26r; BL Add. MS 17362, ff. 9r-v, 12r; SC 8/196/9762; *Annales Paulini*, 320; Tout, *Chapters*, ii, 301-4.

<sup>49</sup> *Bridlington*, 66-67; R.M. Haines, 'Looking Back in Anger: A Politically Inspired Appeal against John XXII's Translation of Bishop Adam Orleton to Winchester (1334)', *EHR* 116 (2001), 397.

<sup>50</sup> E 142/33 is a list of the estates held by Baldock, the Despensers and the earl of Arundel in 1326, valued at over £10,000.

urgent need for financial assistance.<sup>51</sup> Another prominent figure in the household was Walter Stapeldon, bishop of Exeter, who served twice as treasurer. Since he was removed from office shortly after the exile of the Despensers and returned in 1322, it seems at first glance that he was inextricably linked to the regime.<sup>52</sup> His abandonment of the queen in Paris, which left Isabella incandescent with rage, further hints at his allegiance to the Despensers.<sup>53</sup> However, his insistence in January 1322 that the recall of the pair should be placed before parliament infuriated Edward II.<sup>54</sup> Perhaps the bishop's loyalty was to the crown, and not the chamberlain. Nevertheless, the author of the *Vita* wrote that in 1325 'there [were] four great personages in England: the Bishop of Exeter, lately Treasurer, Robert Baldock, now Chancellor, [and] the Despensers, father and son'.<sup>55</sup>

Relationships with other members of the household did not survive that long. Bartholomew Badlesmere was a former retainer of Gilbert Clare, Hugh junior's brother-in-law, and had received payment in the royal household as early as 1300.<sup>56</sup> Fryde described him as an ally and supporter of the younger Despenser,<sup>57</sup> and the two men knew each other well. Badlesmere was appointed steward of the household at the same time that Despenser was made chamberlain. Both were heavily involved in peace negotiations with the Scots and in 1320 Badlesmere received a gold buckle studded with six emeralds as a New Year gift from the king.<sup>58</sup> However, his loyalties were divided. He may have owed his promotion to Despenser but this was not a strong enough bond. Badlesmere resigned during 1321, fought for the Contrarians during the civil war and was executed for rebellion.

A handful of minor household officials came into the chamberlain's sphere but by the end of the reign were in service elsewhere. William Cliff was a chancery official who also

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<sup>51</sup> SC 1/39/116.

<sup>52</sup> Stapeldon did not hand over any money when he left office in August 1321, implying that he expected to return, as indeed he did: Fryde, *Tyranny*, 90.

<sup>53</sup> SC 1/49/188 (a letter from Isabella in which she lambasted the bishop for deserting her and leaving her household penniless, thus proving, she wrote, that he was in cohorts with the younger Despenser); F.D. Blackley, 'Isabella and the Bishop of Exeter', in T.A. Sandquist and M.R. Powicke (eds.), *Essays in medieval history presented to Bertie Wilkinson* (Toronto 1969), 220-35.

<sup>54</sup> Fryde, *Tyranny*, 52.

<sup>55</sup> *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, 142. In 1327 Isabella and Mortimer, as part of their attempt to legitimise their invasion, pardoned the commonalty of London for their adherence to these four men: CPR 1327-30, 27.

<sup>56</sup> J. Topham (ed.), *Liber Quotidianus Contrarotularis Garderobae* (London 1787), 311.

<sup>57</sup> Fryde, *Tyranny*, 46, 51.

<sup>58</sup> BL Add. MS 17362, ff. 11r, 49r; SAL MS 120, f. 24r-v; and below, chapter 3(b).

acted as Despenser's clerk; his involvement was such that he was mentioned by name in the 1321 indictment.<sup>59</sup> Burgundian William Cusance, who enjoyed a long career in the household, was first appointed in September 1320 as keeper of the wardrobe. It was a post doubtless influenced by his employment as one of the younger Hugh's clerks between 1319 and 1324, and consequently he was denounced as *alienigenam* by the barons in 1321.<sup>60</sup> However, by 1323, Cusance had joined the service of the prince of Wales, and in January 1326, whilst the young Edward was in France, became a permanent member of the prince's household.<sup>61</sup> Robert Silkeston and Nicholas Hugate acted in much the same way, the latter changing his allegiance during 1324 and entering the service of Queen Isabella.<sup>62</sup> In fact, only the king's serjeant Simon of Reading stayed to the end, and was executed on a gallows below Despenser at Hereford.<sup>63</sup>

It is possible to detect a certain desperation about the younger Despenser's 'service' as chamberlain. There are numerous examples of his arresting men and women and sending them to prison for so-called failure to demonstrate allegiance to his rule. In February 1325 Henry Beaumont was imprisoned at Kenilworth because he would not swear to the king and Hugh, 'to be of their part, to live and die' with them.<sup>64</sup> Any men who were in cohorts with him changed sides after realising the true nature of his authority, and almost all were later recycled into Edward III's service, thus showing the continuity of a serving nobility. Yet his behaviour also shows the regime's lack of foundation. Rather than infiltrating men into the administration to do his bidding Despenser relied on men who were already there, and was left exposed when they abandoned him. His 'service' in the household cut against the entire culture of a serving nobility: men did not merely hate him because of his rise to power, but because of his monopolisation of the king and his overriding influence in matters of state.

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<sup>59</sup> *Bridlington*, 67.

<sup>60</sup> *ibid.*, 67; Tout, *Place of Edward II*, 123n; E.B. Fryde, 'The Deposits of Hugh Despenser the Younger with Italian Bankers', *EcHR* 4 (1951), repr. *Studies in Medieval Trade and Finance* (London 1983), 360.

<sup>61</sup> N. Denholm-Young, 'Edward of Windsor and Bermondsey Priory', in *Collected Papers on Medieval Subjects* (Oxford 1946), 166-67.

<sup>62</sup> Chaplais (ed.), *Saint-Sardos*, nos. 45, 63, 87, 95, 102; Tout, *Chapters*, iv, 73-74.

<sup>63</sup> Cambridge, Trinity College MS R.5.41, f. 123v.

<sup>64</sup> 'Chroniques de Sempringham', in J. Glover (ed.), *Le Livre de Reis de Brittanie e Le Livre de Reis de Engleterre*, RS 42 (London 1865), 354.

## Counsel

Sound counsel was considered essential to good government. It was taken for granted that a monarch would surround himself with men who would provide advice for the successful running of the realm.<sup>65</sup> This took various formal guises, such as the king's council, an administrative body which regularly met for consultation. Members were formally retained, taking an oath of office and receiving a wage or fee for their services. The king also consulted his close friends and intimates on a more informal basis. This 'counsel' was a much more amorphous concept, often overlapping with the council itself. The physical boundaries of the court and subsequent proximity of the king to his friends frequently enabled advice to be offered by any courtier who had the king's ear. Unfortunately, no systematic archive of the king's council was kept before Richard II's reign and analysis of the Despenser's involvement in this service must be found by other methods.<sup>66</sup> One quantitative way is a consideration of the royal charter witness lists, which have recently received fresh investigation.<sup>67</sup> Although the lists do not provide us with a much-needed 'barometer of baronial influence', they still give us 'the best evidence that we are ever likely to get about the composition of the king's council' by indicating how witnesses were perceived by contemporaries (in this case, by the clerks who drew up the lists).<sup>68</sup> They show who was *expected* to be at court, and therefore allow glimpses of those who offered advice to the king.

The two great Despenser administrators were Hugh the elder and Edward. Hugh senior was first sworn into the council in 1296, and by 1305 was receiving regular summons to Edward I's Great Council.<sup>69</sup> He witnessed more than half of Edward II's

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<sup>65</sup> For two different approaches to the concept of counselling the king, see A.L. Brown, *The Governance of Late Medieval England, 1272-1461* (London 1989), 30-42; J. Ferster, *Fictions of Advice: The Literature and Politics of Counsel in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia 1996), 67-88.

<sup>66</sup> There are a handful of writs of summons to council which have survived for Edward II's reign: both Hughs were summoned in April and June 1317, in May 1324 and in March 1325 (*Parl. Writs*, II(i), 170, 171, 325-28, 647-57).

<sup>67</sup> C. Given-Wilson, 'Royal Charter Witness Lists 1327-1399', *Medieval Prosopography* 12 (1991), 35-93; J.S. Hamilton, 'Charter Witness Lists for the Reign of Edward II', in N.E. Saul (ed.), *Fourteenth Century England I* (Woodbridge 2000), 1-20; R. Huscroft, 'Introduction', in id. (ed.), *The Royal Charter Witness Lists of Edward I (1272-1307)*, List and Index Society 279 (London 2000), v-xx; J.S. Hamilton, 'Introduction', in id. (ed.), *The Royal Charter Witness Lists of Edward II (1307-1326) from the Charter Rolls in the Public Record Office*, List and Index Society 288 (London 2001), v-xi; and, for completeness, D.L. Biggs, 'Royal Charter Witness Lists for the Reign of Henry IV, 1399-1413', *EHR* 119 (2004), 407-23.

<sup>68</sup> Given-Wilson, 'Witness Lists', 58-59.

<sup>69</sup> E 175/1, no. 20; J.F. Baldwin, *The King's Council in England during the Middle Ages* (London 1913), 91; T. Wright (ed.), *The Chronicle of Pierre de Langtoft*, RS 47(ii) (London 1868), 205; H. Johnstone, *Letters of Edward, prince of Wales, 1304-1305* (Roxburghe Club 1931), 133-34.

charters prior to Bannockburn, including 67 of 68 in 1312-13.<sup>70</sup> Subsequent to the barons' demand that he be removed from court, Despenser was much less active in 1315-16 whilst Thomas of Lancaster was on one of his rare sojourns at court.<sup>71</sup> He was also conspicuous by his absence from the lists between 20 July 1318 and 20 February 1320, supporting the comment of the *Vita* that he chose to go on pilgrimage to Santiago as he was afraid to face Lancaster at the York parliament in 1319.<sup>72</sup> Following the civil war and his promotion to the earldom of Winchester in 1322, Hugh continued to witness regularly. Edward Despenser is first listed in 1362, five years after he fought at Poitiers. He witnessed over eighty per cent of charters between 1364 and 1367, and 56 of the 130 great charters issued throughout the 1360s. This demands comparison with the few members of the higher nobility who were active at court at this time, such as Arundel and John of Gaunt.<sup>73</sup> Despenser was the only non-titled member of the nobility to witness charters so consistently, more than twice as many as any other save for the stewards of the household. It points to a career at court during the years of peace to follow up from an impressive military performance.<sup>74</sup> In a sense this brings us back to the household, as Edward appears to have been as much of a courtier as the younger Despenser, despite never holding formal office. He was a product of the prevailing culture of the mid-fourteenth century, as an aristocratic military elite became administrators. It was a gradual shift prompted by upward movement in the ranks below the baronage, leading the nobility to shoulder arms against the threat from below and forcing them to accept roles they previously disdained. That Edward Despenser was prepared to conform indicates his recognition of the political shifts he witnessed around him.

The charter witness lists also outline the 'meteoric rise to power' of Hugh the younger, who first appears on the lists in 1316. It is interesting to compare him with Gaveston, whose involvement in government was, according to these figures, virtually

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<sup>70</sup> Hamilton, 'Witness Lists', 5. The one exception (a grant to Bromholm) appears to hold no particular significance: id. (ed.), *Witness Lists of Edward II*, 64.

<sup>71</sup> See Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster*, 160-89, for the earl's activities in 1314-16.

<sup>72</sup> Hamilton, *Witness Lists of Edward II*, 141, 162; *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, 93; *CCR 1318-23*, 123.

<sup>73</sup> W.M. Ormrod, 'Edward III's Government of England, c.1346-1356', unpublished D.Phil thesis (University of Oxford 1984), 110-14. Despenser and Arundel were also business associates: the earl lent Edward 300 marks sometime before 1371: C. Given-Wilson, 'Wealth and Credit, Public and Private: The Earls of Arundel 1306-1397', *EHR* 106 (1991), 7, 24.

<sup>74</sup> See below, section (b).



non-existent. Although we know that both men were close to the king,<sup>75</sup> Gaveston witnessed an average of only 5.7% of charters before his execution in 1312, whilst the younger Hugh, at the height of his career in 1320-21, witnessed 78.8%. It is particularly significant to find Despenser witnessing prior to his appointment as chamberlain, since to be mentioned amongst the more prominent barons and earls is a telling indication of his influence. There were fewer witnesses from 1322 to 1326, implying that the Despenser dominance ensured that only a certain number of men were advising the king at the highest level.

At the end of the century, Thomas Despenser witnessed charters during the last two years of Richard II's reign. His involvement is difficult to ascertain: although he witnessed two-thirds of the charters in 1398-99, in practice, this meant seven of only eleven. Perhaps of most value is to compare this figure with that of the others involved in the Epiphany Rising of 1400. Whilst the earl of Salisbury witnessed nine charters of eleven in 1398-99, and the earl of Rutland had witnessed consistently throughout the 1390s, neither Huntingdon nor Kent appear at all.<sup>76</sup> Despenser was also present at the Eltham Great Council in July 1395, a year after he took livery of his lands, implying that his passage to service at court was relatively swift.<sup>77</sup>

Analysis of witness lists can only tell part of the story. The remainder of this section will contrast the 'evil counsel' to which the barons objected in the 1320s with the 'good counsel' provided by the elder Hugh and Edward. Turning from the official records to the chronicle accounts shows the different views of the Despensers held by contemporaries. The clearest objection to 'evil counsel' appeared in the charges against the family in 1321 when the younger Hugh, as chamberlain, was accused of introducing his father into the king's council without consent of the barons in parliament.<sup>78</sup> No less

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<sup>75</sup> For Gaveston's itinerary: Hamilton, *Piers Gaveston*, Appendix I; E.M. Hallam, *The Itinerary of Edward II and his Household*, List and Index Society 211 (London 1984), years 1307-12.

<sup>76</sup> Salisbury and Despenser each authored private petitions in the last parliament of the reign and appear well versed in legal procedures: *Rot. Parl.*, iii, 352, 360-68.

<sup>77</sup> E 28/4 (using ultra-violet light, I have confirmed the interpolation of Despenser's name suggested by Baldwin, *King's Council*, 505); Froissart, *Oeuvres*, xv, 136.

<sup>78</sup> The articles have been examined in detail, and a number of different texts survive: B. Wilkinson, 'The Sherburn Indenture and the Attack on the Despensers, 1321', *EHR* 63 (1948), 1-28; Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster*, 279-87; Fryde, *Tyranny*, 45-48; N. Pronay and J. Taylor (eds.), *Parliamentary Texts of the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford 1980), 157-58; M.C. Prestwich, 'The Charges Against the Despensers, 1321', *BIHR* 58 (1985), 95-100; C. Valente, *The Theory and Practice of Revolt in Medieval England* (Burlington, VT 2003), 127-28, 137-41. The 'official' version is printed in *Statutes of the Realm*, i, 181-84; an additional sixteenth-century French copy is in BL. Sloane MS 1301, f. 242.

than three of the charges against the Despensers included this accusation of ‘accroaching’ the king’s power, and of removing those councillors authorised by the 1311 Ordinances.<sup>79</sup> These demands were repeated, albeit in different forms, throughout the century: in 1301 Edward I had been urged by parliament to allow his officials to be appointed by common consent;<sup>80</sup> and similar demands were made of Edward III in 1340 and Richard II’s minority council in 1381.<sup>81</sup> Following the annulment of the exile in 1322, the *Brut* chronicle repeatedly emphasised that it was ‘through conseil’ of the Despensers that the king ‘bicomme as wood as a lyoun, and what-so-euer the Spensers wolde haue done, it was don’. By this ‘conseil’, wrote the author, Lancaster’s followers were disinherited; the Despensers obtained many estates; Robert Baldock, ‘a false rybaude and a couetous’, was made Chancellor; and the king made every town of England poor by pursuing war against the Scots.<sup>82</sup> The language used is significant: everything that went wrong in the realm was not attributed to the king, but to the evil influence of the elder and younger Hugh who were closer to the king than anyone else. It was not just that Edward ‘dede more by other menis counsel than by his owne’.<sup>83</sup> Like Rehoboam son of Solomon, he was accused of failing to listen to mature counsel and, consequently, calamity ensued.<sup>84</sup> This pattern was repeated in the last two years of Richard II’s reign, and the charges made against the king in 1399 indicate that he was deposed partly because of his inability to choose honourable counsel and also his determination to ignore sound advice.<sup>85</sup> As earl of Gloucester, Thomas Despenser was partly to blame and suffered accordingly by demotion from his earldom. Both Despensers had cut across the accepted culture of service by rising too far, too fast, and failing to return the king’s favour by counsel of which the upper nobility approved. Again, it is apparent that it was the younger Hugh’s counsel to Edward II that brought his downfall. When parliament was called to the Tower of London in 1324, Despenser demanded every man’s input and denounced them as traitors when, as the *Historia*

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<sup>79</sup> M.C. Prestwich, ‘The Ordinances of 1311 and the Politics of the Early Fourteenth Century’, in J. Taylor and W.R. Childs (eds.), *Politics and crisis in fourteenth-century England* (Gloucester 1990), 10-11, outlines the reasoning behind that clause.

<sup>80</sup> H.T. Riley (ed.), *Willelmi Rishanger, Chronica et Annales*, RS 28 (London 1865), 460.

<sup>81</sup> A. Goodman, ‘Richard II’s Councils’, in id. and Gillespie (eds.), *Richard II: the Art of Kingship*, 66-67.

<sup>82</sup> F.W.D. Brie (ed.), *The Brut or The Chronicles of England*, EETS, old series 131 & 136 (1906-8), i, 224-25; *Polychronicon*, viii, 318-19.

<sup>83</sup> *Polychronicon*, viii, 299.

<sup>84</sup> 1 Kings 12:8; 2 Chronicles 10:8.

<sup>85</sup> Goodman, ‘Richard II’s Councils’, 74-76; C. Given-Wilson (ed.), *Chronicles of the Revolution, 1397-1400* (Manchester 1993), 175, 177, 179.

*Roffensis* noted, no one answered 'because they were all afraid to speak the truth openly'.<sup>86</sup>

The author of the *Vita* was perhaps thinking of this same incident when he wrote that

parliaments, colloquies and councils decide nothing these days. For the nobles of the realm, terrified by threats and the penalties inflicted upon others, let the king's will have free play.<sup>87</sup>

These events were a complete contrast with the behaviour of the elder Hugh during the reign of Edward I, when – as the second half of this chapter will show – he performed his feudal duties with great diligence, and was entrusted with a number of missions for the crown. They were also starkly different from the 'good' counsel for which Edward III sought from his magnates: the mid-fourteenth century saw 'one of the most productive alliances between crown and nobility known in the later Middle Ages'.<sup>88</sup> Edward Despenser's attachment to the retinue of Prince Lionel in 1368 was clearly a result of his public loyalty to Edward III, but must also be attributed to his willingness to adhere to the culture of service. Without question, different members of the family reaped the appropriate reward according to the nature of their counsel.

### Parliament

As G.O. Sayles has written, there were times when the king needed weightier advice than that which his regular council or group of friends could provide.<sup>89</sup> He then turned to parliament, the most formal and infrequent of assemblies in which service could be performed to the crown. Generally, a personal summons to parliament implied the recipient had been 'recognised', although at the beginning of the fourteenth century magnate summonses were often inconsistent and illogical.<sup>90</sup> At the end of Edward I's reign there appeared little correlation between the achievements of the non-titled nobility and their emergence in parliament, a problem compounded by the apparent reluctance of many lords to attend.<sup>91</sup> Considering this somewhat random distribution of summonses it is arguable that the parliamentary arena may not have been viewed as a place where

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<sup>86</sup> BL Cotton MS Faustina B.V, f. 45v.

<sup>87</sup> *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, 136.

<sup>88</sup> Ormrod, *Edward III*, 110; Waugh, *England in the reign of Edward III*, 192.

<sup>89</sup> G.O. Sayles, *The King's Parliament of England* (London 1975), 21.

<sup>90</sup> M.C. Prestwich, 'Magnate Summonses in England in the Later Years of Edward I', in *Parliaments, Estates and Representation* 5 (1985), 95-101; Powell and Wallis, *House of Lords*, 219-31.

<sup>91</sup> J.S. Roskell, 'The Problem of the Attendance of the Lords in Medieval Parliaments', *BHHR* 39 (1956), 153-204.

service, with all its constituent benefits, could be performed. Nevertheless, it is clear that a personal summons was seen as a mark of recognition, and many men attended parliament as much from a willingness to serve as political expediency. It became increasingly recognised as a place in which the business of the realm was carried out, and despite the rise of the commons, the upper house remained the most important component of parliament.<sup>92</sup> Being passed over implied that a man was not fit for this exalted service, and no one, not even a political dissident like Lancaster, wanted to be in that situation. It is necessary, therefore, to explore how the Despencers viewed parliament, and how it became a forum for their reconciliation as much as their condemnation. It was the scene of the two Hughs' exile and pardon in 1321-22, as well as their final condemnation in 1327. Hugh III was pardoned before parliament in 1331, and in 1397 Thomas obtained the earldom of Gloucester and a full pardon for the events of the 1320s. He was then tried by the Lancastrians and demoted from his earldom in 1399. Henry V later condemned the family in parliament but the Yorkist regime under Edward IV repealed this once again in 1461 (unsurprisingly, since the Kingmaker owed part of his estates to the legitimacy of the claim).<sup>93</sup> This sustained interest provides an opportunity to examine the whole of the family and the emphasis here will be upon the post-1327 Despencers.

After the events of the 1320s it was entirely conceivable that Hugh III, son of the younger Despenser, would have been comprehensively ignored by Edward III. Having been personally involved in the defence of Caerphilly Castle against Isabella's forces, he had immediately placed himself out of favour with the new regime. However, unlike Gaveston, his was a noble family even before the elder Hugh's elevation to the earldom of Winchester. Yet despite being formally pardoned for his involvement at Caerphilly, he had to watch from the sidelines as other rebel families were summoned to parliament immediately. As Appendix 1 shows, it was not until the end of 1338 that Hugh III received his first summons. It is interesting that this came at ostensibly the same time as his first appearance in the king's council, shortly after his mother's death.<sup>94</sup> 1338 was the year after Edward III's major peerage creations, signifying both a general sense of goodwill and, since the French war had now begun, a degree of political necessity. The

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<sup>92</sup> G.J.A. Dodd, 'The Lords, Taxation and the Community of Parliament in the 1370s and Early 1380s', *Parliamentary History* 20 (2001), esp. 309-10.

<sup>93</sup> *Rot. Parl.*, iii, 355, 360-68, 459; iv, 18; v, 484.

<sup>94</sup> *CFR 1337-47*, 25.

crown used the 1330s as a probationary period to provide conciliatory gestures both to ‘the solid, generally uncontroversial members of the nobility who tended to follow the royalist line whoever was actually in charge, [and] showing at least limited faith in the next generation of those families who had caused problems in the 1320s’.<sup>95</sup> Far from causing controversy or using patronage as a ‘down-payment’, Edward acted exactly as the nobility themselves had demanded in the Ordinances of 1311. He used parliament to provide Hugh III with an opportunity to rebuild a career and thereby cement his loyalty, since a man who owed everything to the crown would be in no position to rebel. The immense success of this policy would be shown over the next decade. The young Mortimer heir also received grants from the crown in the 1330s and 1340s, pointing the way forward to his full restoration in parliament in 1354.<sup>96</sup> In making these very public gestures Edward III was provoking Hugh III and Roger Mortimer III into participating in the same administration which executed their fathers and grandfathers. It was a successful combination of carrot and stick that sat alongside the existing assumptions about service. The king was making public his willingness to patronise men even before their domestic service warranted it, and Despenser and Mortimer both responded in kind.

This entire rationale contrasted with the evident fear of assembly which had pervaded Edward II’s reign, and the apparent secrecy of the decision-making when the younger Despenser was at the helm. Thomas of Lancaster boycotted the York parliament of 1320 altogether, famously stating that ‘it was improper to hold parliament in a chamber [*in cameris*]’.<sup>97</sup> Maddicott compared this statement with clause 19 of the *Modus Tenendi Parliamentum* (*parliamentum debet teneri in loco publico, et non in privato, nec in occulto loco*), but Tout noted that the rather vague *in cameris* may be rendered ‘in a chamber’, implying that Lancaster saw Despenser running parliament in much the same way as the household.<sup>98</sup> Eight years later, his brother Henry refused to attend at Salisbury because he feared arrest by Roger Mortimer,<sup>99</sup> and as we saw, the elder Despenser travelled to Spain in 1319 because he was afraid to face Lancaster in parliament. When ‘parliaments decided

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<sup>95</sup> J.S. Bothwell, ‘Edward III, The English Peerage, and the 1337 Earls: Estate Redistribution in Fourteenth-Century England’, in Bothwell, *Age of Edward III*, 37; Ormrod, *Edward III*, 94, 99-101; see also J.S. Bothwell, ‘“Until he Receive the Equivalent in Land and Rent”: the Use of Annuities as Endowment Patronage in the Reign of Edward III’, *BIHR* 70 (1997), 146-69.

<sup>96</sup> *Rot. Parl.*, ii, 255-56.

<sup>97</sup> *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, 103; also H.R. Luard (ed.), *Flores Historiarum*, RS 95 (London 1890), iii, 219.

<sup>98</sup> Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster*, 253-54; Tout, *Chapters*, ii, 331.

<sup>99</sup> J.R. Lumby (ed.), *Chronicon Henrici Knighton, vel Cnitthon, Monachi Leycestrensis*, RS 92 (London 1889), i, 449.

nothing' there was little honour to be gained from performing service within the accepted norms.

Edward III's success in bringing the Despensers into line is demonstrated by the rapidity with which the twenty-year old Edward Despenser was summoned to the 1358 parliament. It is likely that this extremely early summons was due as much to Hugh III's willingness to respond to the trust invested in him as to Edward's actions at Poitiers (1357), where he had been knighted. Edward continued to attend parliament regularly as he accepted the mantle of administration in the 1360s, but, as Appendix 1 indicates, there are gaps (1360, 1362, 1368-71, 1373-75) when he was not summoned. However, this was certainly no indication of an unwillingness to perform service. Edward was missing in 1360 because he was treating in Brétigny with the French, was in Milan at the end of the decade and in 1373 was fighting in France with John of Gaunt.<sup>100</sup> In common with others at this time, he attended parliament when it was practical to do so. This did not diminish the importance of parliamentary service in the eyes of the non-titled nobility, but merely implies that men such as Edward Despenser, involved in a myriad of tasks, could only attend if it coincided with breaks in their other lines of service. It is notable that when Despenser returned from the continent in 1372 he immediately received a writ of summons for the prorogued Westminster parliament, despite having no original summons. His four-year absence in Italy (explained in detail in section (b)) had certainly not driven him from the king's mind, and the summons is impressive testimony to how far Edward had risen in the king's favour. He was evidently a sought-after member of government, a fact further demonstrated by his regular appointment as trier of parliamentary petitions. Although the importance of this post has traditionally been played down,<sup>101</sup> appointees to the list were usually in high favour. The earl of Arundel, for example, was appointed as trier in 1340 and 1341, but after his involvement in the 1341 political crisis was absent from the list until 1348.<sup>102</sup> It therefore seems plausible to suggest that although these were relatively minor appointments they nevertheless marked another aspect of a man's ability to serve. Edward Despenser was a trier of petitions for Aquitaine and overseas in the assemblies of 1363, 1365, 1366 and 1372, always listed first after the titled nobility (see Appendix 1).

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<sup>100</sup> See below, chapter 3(b).

<sup>101</sup> H.G. Richardson and G.O. Sayles, *The English Parliament in the Middle Ages* (London 1981), ch. XXII, 382-88.

<sup>102</sup> *Rot. Parl.*, ii, 113, 126, 135, 146-47, 157, 164.

Twenty-five years later Thomas Despenser, aged twenty-four, was made a trier in his very first parliament, but the situation was different. Thomas had nowhere shown that he was a bureaucrat, but had recently led an army in Ireland. By summoning him to parliament and making him a trier of petitions, Richard II was making a public demonstration of their friendship as well as emphasising *Edward* Despenser's abilities. But above all he was showing how much he needed his allies in positions of authority, even in such a minor post. In Thomas's second parliament, Richard II elevated him to the earldom of Gloucester – quite a feat for a man whose family had not been part of his upper nobility for three generations. However, in the first parliament of Henry IV's reign, Thomas was one of the commissioners appointed by the Lancastrians to read the sentence of deposition, although judging from his trial and demotion in that same assembly and his later involvement in the Epiphany Rising, it is unlikely this was done by choice.

### Conclusion

The Despensers stood and fell on their domestic service. It was the principal means by which they did their duty to the crown, influenced politics and built up their reputation. With the exception of the younger Hugh's term as chamberlain they were a conventional noble family, willing to adjust their aspirations to the culture of service that evolved over the fourteenth century. Yet this does not tell the whole story, especially in a century when so many members of the nobility spent much of their time fighting abroad. Nor does it explain the initial recovery of the family after Evesham, when Hugh the elder re-established the Despensers' claim to prominence. True royal servants had to be versatile if they were to prosper.<sup>103</sup> Household officers, councillors and lawyers also had to be soldiers and diplomats by turns. For a full picture, we must consider the Despensers' military and diplomatic service.

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<sup>103</sup> McFarlane, 'Extinction and Recruitment', 164.

## (b) Foreign service: War and Diplomacy

The Despensers came from a long tradition of military and diplomatic activity. Hugh, the Montfortian justiciar of England, fought in the vanguard at Lewes (1264) where he forced his own father-in-law to submit to the baronial forces. Although one chronicler commented that he had received poor reward for his valuable services,<sup>104</sup> Despenser chose to remain with de Montfort when his men were encircled and routed at Evesham the following year. In the years that followed, military and diplomatic service provided the means by which the Despensers could express their loyalty to the crown and recover political standing, particularly in the 1290s and 1330s. Investigation shows that they were almost constantly involved with foreign affairs throughout the fourteenth century: discounting minorities (1349-55, 1375-94), the only significant gap occurs in the decade after 1326. This section takes a necessarily chronological perspective to analyse certain aspects of the Despensers' military involvement.

### 1294-1307

Although Hugh the elder fought under Edmund, earl of Cornwall in the second Welsh war of 1283,<sup>105</sup> his military career began in earnest in 1294, the year that Edward I faced a three-pronged threat from Scotland, Wales and France. The discontent that had been rife since John Balliol was installed on the Scottish throne was exacerbated when Philip IV declared Edward's duchy of Aquitaine confiscate.<sup>106</sup> In September, as troops were mustered to sail for Gascony, a national revolt broke out in Wales.<sup>107</sup> Although the Lanercost chronicler was scornful of 'the miserable Welsh',<sup>108</sup> the rebellion was the greatest threat to English supremacy for a decade, and the army destined for Gascony, which had included the elder Hugh, was redirected to Wales.<sup>109</sup> Despenser himself,

<sup>104</sup> 'Chronicon Thomae Wykes', in *AM*, iv, 153.

<sup>105</sup> *Foedera*, I(ii), 630; *Parl. Writs*, I, 246. J.E. Morris was unaware that Despenser was involved before 1294 (*The Welsh Wars of Edward I* (Oxford 1901, repr. 1996), 247), probably because he received no letters of protection, nor appeared on the roll for valuation of horses (C 67/8; C 42/2/7).

<sup>106</sup> The outbreak of war with France is best summarised in F.M. Powicke, *The Thirteenth Century*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (Oxford 1962), 644-50. For Philip's declaration, see *Foedera*, I(ii), 800. For a recent discussion of the 'unofficial diplomacy' behind these events, see W.M. Ormrod, 'Love and War in 1294', in M.C. Prestwich, R.H. Britnell and R. Frame (eds.), *Thirteenth Century England VIII* (Woodbridge 2001), 143-52.

<sup>107</sup> For details, see Morris, *Welsh Wars*, 240-70; R.R. Davies, *The Age of Conquest: Wales 1063-1415* (Oxford 1991), 382-86.

<sup>108</sup> H. Maxwell (ed.), *The Chronicle of Lanercost* (London 1913), 107.

<sup>109</sup> Despenser's involvement: *Parl. Writs*, I, 261; *Rôles Gascons*, III, no. 3449.



however, was detached from the army and sent to the continent to recruit allies against the French.<sup>110</sup> This was the first of a long series of diplomatic missions. Perhaps Edward, having witnessed ‘a total failure of intelligence’ up to this point, remembered the legal mind of Hugh’s father.<sup>111</sup> Unlike Aymer de Valence, whose links with France ‘considerably added to his value as a diplomat’,<sup>112</sup> Despenser had no foreign estates, and his inclusion must have been on merit rather than because of any vested interest. In any case, the mission was clearly successful. By October, the support of Adolf of Nassau, king of the Romans, his sons-in-law Henry, count of Bar and John, duke of Brabant, and Florence V, count of Holland, was assured. It was a mission that caught the attention of Pierre Langtoft, who described Despenser as a *baroun renomex*.<sup>113</sup> Despenser and his companions returned to England, where he and fifteen men-at-arms met Edward I at Chester and travelled into Wales with the king.<sup>114</sup>

Although the Welsh threat was suppressed with ease, the next few years saw a host of separate campaigns in Scotland and France. This enabled Despenser to prove himself to the king: over the next decade, hardly a year went by without a summons for military service, appointment to a diplomatic mission, or both. Hugh served in Scotland in campaigns during 1296, 1298, 1299-1300, 1301, 1302 and 1307, with increasingly larger retinues and greater responsibility.<sup>115</sup> He was also sent to Rome, Avignon, Paris and Cologne in 1295-96, 1296-97, 1300-1, 1302, 1305 and 1307.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> CPR 1292-1301, 72-73, 76; *Treaty Rolls 1234-1325*, 89-90, 98-100, 102. For the general diplomatic activity of 1294-98, see Powicke, *Thirteenth Century*, 658-69; G.P. Cuttino, *English Medieval Diplomacy* (Bloomington, IN 1985), 67-68; G. Barraclough, ‘Edward I and Adolf of Nassau: a chapter in medieval diplomatic history’, *Cambridge Historical Journal* 6 (1940), 225-62; M.C. Prestwich, ‘Edward I and Adolf of Nassau’, in P.R. Coss and S.D. Lloyd (eds.), *Thirteenth Century England III* (Woodbridge 1991), 127-36.

<sup>111</sup> Prestwich, *Armies and Warfare*, 217.

<sup>112</sup> Phillips, *Aymer de Valence*, 8.

<sup>113</sup> Langtoft, 204.

<sup>114</sup> C 67/10, m. 2 (protection). Despenser was one of the king’s twelve companions: Morris, *Welsh Wars*, 248. Michael Prestwich notes that Despenser also spent some time ‘presumably in Wales’ with his step-father, Roger Bigod, in 1295: *War, Politics and Finance in the Reign of Edward I* (London 1972), 64 (citing C 47/2/10/8).

<sup>115</sup> 1296: C 67/11, m. 2 (protection); Morris, *Welsh Wars*, 64 (retinue of 25). 1298: *Parl. Writs*, I, 311 (summons); C 67/13, m. 1 (protection); Morris, *Welsh Wars*, 64 (retinue of 50); E 101/354/5a, ff. 7v (restoration of horses, £208 15s 3½d), 9r (wages of war, £172 15s 10d). 1299-1300: *Parl. Writs*, I, 323 (summons); C 67/14, mm. 17, 10, 9 (protection and retinue of 25). 1301: *Parl. Writs*, I, 347 (summons); C 67/14, mm. 5-2 (protection); BL Add. MS 7966a, ff. 75v (restoration of horses, £26 8s 4d), 83v (wages of war, £84 3s; retinue of 4 knights and 21 men-at-arms). 1302: *Parl. Writs*, I, 366 (summons); C 67/15, m. 5 (protection), 9, 14 (retinue of 4). 1307: C 67/16, mm. 12-5 (protection and retinue of 30, including Hugh the younger for the first time).

<sup>116</sup> *Foedera*, I(ii), *passim*; *Treaty Rolls 1234-1325*, *passim*; CPR, *passim*.

However, it was during 1296-98, and particularly the crisis of 1297, that Despenser's service made most impact on Edward I. Following the Dunbar campaign of 1296, with the English coffers perilously low, Despenser, with the bishop of Coventry, Amadeus of Savoy, Otto Grandison and John of Berwick, was ordered to Paris to seek peace with Philip IV.<sup>117</sup> This trip had an air of desperation about it: the envoys also received separate letters authorising them to discuss peace with the papal legates, Adolf of Nassau, the Burgundian nobility, and 'any nobles whatsoever'.<sup>118</sup> Although ultimately unsuccessful in staving off military action, this mission has been described as 'the turning point in the diplomatic war',<sup>119</sup> resulting on 7 January 1297 in the permanent alliance between Edward I and Guy, count of Flanders.<sup>120</sup> This union was to be sealed by the marriage of the Prince of Wales to the count's daughter, Isabella, and on 2 February Hugh Despenser and Walter Beauchamp, having been involved in the negotiations, were chosen to attest to Edward's faith in the marriage.<sup>121</sup> Although the marriage was never consummated, it is a strong indication of how far Hugh had risen in the king's opinion.

Meanwhile, Edward I's domestic crisis was intensifying.<sup>122</sup> When archbishop Winchelsey assembled the clergy at St Paul's on 13 January 1297, Despenser and Berwick were the royal representatives sent to the convocation. After Winchelsey read out the papal bull *Clericos laicos*, Despenser spoke up on behalf of the king, earls and barons, demanding payment of the clerical tenth. Over the next two months, he also acted as messenger to the Exchequer barons, and was appointed proctor to the convocation that assembled in March.<sup>123</sup> It indicates Edward's desperation that a man heavily involved in the Flanders marriage negotiations should also be required to do this, but it clearly underscores the king's increasing regard for his service. This was further emphasised when he voluntarily crossed to Flanders with the king's forces in August, this being the campaign which many of the magnates chose to boycott.<sup>124</sup> Rishanger recorded that

<sup>117</sup> *Treaty Rolls 1234-1325*, 120-25. The men were becoming regular companions on such missions.

<sup>118</sup> Five separate letters in all: *Foedera*, I(ii), 848-49.

<sup>119</sup> Barraclough, 'Edward I and Adolf of Nassau', 244.

<sup>120</sup> *CPR 1292-1301*, 232-33. This must have been established from England, since Despenser was emissary to the clergy on 13 January.

<sup>121</sup> *Foedera*, I(ii), 856.

<sup>122</sup> For detailed discussion of the 1297 crisis, see B. Wilkinson, *Constitutional History of Medieval England, 1216-1399* (London 1948), i, 187-232; G.L. Harriss, *King, Parliament and Public Finance in Medieval England to 1369* (Oxford 1975), 49-74; Prestwich, *War, Politics and Finance*, 247-61; id., 'Introduction', *Documents illustrating the crisis of 1297-98 in England*, Camden 4<sup>th</sup> ser., 24 (London 1980), 1-37. From the perspective of the clergy, see J.H. Denton, *Robert Winchelsey and the Crown 1294-1313* (Cambridge 1980), 53-135.

<sup>123</sup> Prestwich, *Documents*, no. 1; Denton, *Winchelsey*, 108, 124-25.

<sup>124</sup> SC 1/47/76; *Parl. Writs*, I, 282, 288, 293 (summons); C 67/12, m. 3d (protection); E 101/6/28, 37, 39-40 (the king's retinue); N.B. Lewis, 'The English Forces in Flanders, August-November 1297', in R.W.

Hugh had personally accompanied the king.<sup>125</sup> Although the Flanders campaign was abandoned in September 1297 when the Scots defeated Warenne's army at Stirling Bridge, those who had stood shoulder to shoulder with the king were remembered. After landing at Sandwich in March 1298, Hugh rode to Scotland with the king and fought in Edward's battalion in the victory at Falkirk.<sup>126</sup>

Serving the king in 1296-98 launched Despenser as one of Edward I's most loyal and capable followers.<sup>127</sup> He came on the scene at a time when Edward 'felt he had been tricked by his cousin of France, treacherously attacked by the Scots, and stabbed in the back by men at home to whom he looked for friendship and counsel',<sup>128</sup> and in a short time had repaid the king's trust. In 1300, when Edward received orders from Boniface VIII to leave Scotland, the envoys of 1296-97 were dispatched to Rome with letters stating explicitly that their involvement was due to previous successful negotiations.<sup>129</sup> In addition, in April 1302, Despenser and seven others were sent to Paris to conclude peace with France, and were given the same powers they had received in 1296-97.<sup>130</sup> Finally, in 1305, he was sent to Avignon to discuss a possible crusade to the Holy Land, to consider 'things touching the salvation of the king's soul', and, most importantly, to obtain the annulment of the Confirmation of the Charters (1297).<sup>131</sup> It was yet another diplomatic success. Directly after this mission Edward I bought the marriage of Hugh the younger for £2000, and in doing so, allied the Despensers to one of the most powerful baronial families in England. When it is remembered that Eleanor Clare was the king's favourite granddaughter, it serves to emphasise the significance.

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Hunt, W.A. Pantin and R.W. Southern (eds.), *Studies in Medieval History presented to F.M. Powicke* (Oxford 1948), 312 n.4 (Despenser's retinue of seven).

<sup>125</sup> *Willelmi Rishanger*, 412-14.

<sup>126</sup> For the king's companions at Falkirk: BL Harley MS 6589, f. 9r; Morris, *Welsh Wars*, Appendix IV.

<sup>127</sup> The Caerlaverock poet wrote of 'the good Hugh Despenser, who loyally on his courser knows how to break up a mêlée': N.H. Nicholas (ed.), *The Siege of Caerlaverock* (London 1828), 28. The Caerlaverock campaign is notable because only three men who received summons actually served in person: Despenser, John Hastings and the earl of Gloucester (Prestwich, *War, Politics and Finance*, 68-70). For the repeated failure of summonses to muster sufficient men in 1299, see *ibid.*, 94-97; Morris, *Welsh Wars*, 298.

<sup>128</sup> Powicke, *Thirteenth Century*, 696.

<sup>129</sup> *Foedera*, I(ii), 922-23; *Treaty Rolls 1234-1325*, 146; *CPR 1292-1301*, 543.

<sup>130</sup> *Foedera*, I(ii), 940; *Treaty Rolls 1234-1325*, 152-53; *CPR 1301-1307*, 30. When Hugh returned home, he received wages totalling £444 6s 9d (BL Add. MS 7966a, f. 34v), and a gift of a roan palfrey, worth 20 marks (BL Add. MS 8835, f. 42r).

<sup>131</sup> *Foedera*, I(ii), 974; *CPR 1301-1307*, 382, 387; Johnstone (ed.), *Letters of Edward*, 144, 150, 151, 153; G.P. Cuttino, *The Gascon Calendar of 1322*, Camden 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, 70 (London 1949), no. 398.

It has been suggested that the Scottish wars under Edward I provided inadequate opportunities to induce men to 'fight with the consistent determination required for victory'.<sup>132</sup> It is interesting, however, to set this beside the service of Hugh Despenser the elder. Although there is nothing to suggest he was an extraordinarily skilled warrior, his loyalty – particularly in 1297 – ensured that he regained the standing that his father had lost after Evesham. Edward needed negotiators as well as soldiers in those difficult years, and it was in this field that Despenser seems to have flourished. He rebuilt the family reputation, and in doing so came to the attention of the young Edward of Caernarvon, who came to value this devotion even more than his father had done.

### 1307-1327

Military service under Edward II was considerably less advantageous, principally because Edward was more concerned with hedging and ditching than with the defence of the realm. While Edward I's occupation of Scotland depended to a great extent on occupation of castles<sup>133</sup> – a tactic which by its very nature required constant campaigning – his son embarked upon only four major forays north of the border throughout his entire reign (1310-11, 1314, 1319 and 1322).<sup>134</sup> Of these, the first appears to have been to avoid the censure of the Ordinances. The second, however, ended in the ignominious defeat at Bannockburn, the third likewise at Berwick, and the fourth, equally embarrassingly, at Byland Abbey. Indeed, the king's debacles in 1314 and 1322 both happened with a Despenser at his side.<sup>135</sup>

However, these failures should not cloud an interpretation of service in the earlier part of the reign. Hugh the elder lived on the recognition he gained under Edward I and accompanied the new king to Boulogne for his marriage to Isabella of France in January 1308.<sup>136</sup> It is clear that without this ascendancy, the later notoriety of the family could

<sup>132</sup> M.C. Prestwich, *The Three Edwards* (London 1980), 78.

<sup>133</sup> C. McNamee, *The Wars of the Bruces* (East Linton 1997), 50.

<sup>134</sup> Hallam, *Itinerary of Edward II*, *passim*. The reign is a catalogue of repeated military summonses and unfulfilled musters: M.C. Prestwich, 'Cavalry service in early fourteenth century England', in J. Gillingham and J.C. Holt (eds.), *War and Government in the Middle Ages: essays in honour of J.O. Prestwich* (Cambridge 1984), 147-58.

<sup>135</sup> The elder Despenser at Bannockburn (*Lanercost*, 208); the younger at Byland Abbey (BL Stowe MS 553, f. 61v).

<sup>136</sup> On 22 March 1307 the ailing Edward I had requested that Despenser and his usual diplomatic companions accompany Prince Edward into France (*Foedera*, I(ii), 1012). This was presumably to conclude the marriage negotiations, although it coincided with Gaveston's first exile and the famous incident when

never have occurred. After 1308, Edward II left England on only seven further occasions, and the elder Despenser accompanied him each time, both in peace and in war.<sup>137</sup> This included seven weeks in Paris in summer 1313, when the king and queen attended the coronation of the king of Navarre.<sup>138</sup> It was also Hugh junior's first trip to France in royal service (one chronicler notes that two hundred knights accompanied the party), and is noteworthy as one of the first occasions when Edward II and the younger Despenser came into contact.<sup>139</sup>

It seems that Edward's demand for the elder Hugh's advice meant that he was less regularly sent on missions away from the king. His appointment for life as justice of the forests doubtless focused much of his time on domestic affairs, and – early in the reign, at least – he clearly acted as a man of trust and discretion in the law courts.<sup>140</sup> Dugdale wrote that he 'acted jointly in all [Edward's] affairs of greatest consequence'.<sup>141</sup> In sharp contrast with the previous reign he was sent on only one major foreign mission, to Gascony and Avignon in 1320. He originally received protection to travel with the king,<sup>142</sup> but Edward was still in London when Despenser, Bartholomew Badlesmere and Edmund of Woodstock sailed for Bordeaux on 19 March, accompanied by the bishop of Hereford.<sup>143</sup> Despenser and Badlesmere were to enquire into the excesses of the seneschal and his officers in Gascony, and to make changes if necessary.<sup>144</sup> It is an sad indictment upon Edward's ability to choose his followers that there were nineteen seneschals of the duchy in as many years. Despenser and Badlesmere wrote to the king in May, explaining the appointment of a new castellan at Montfaucon, which could imply that the mission was proceeding successfully.<sup>145</sup> However, the fact that another

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the king reputedly tore handfuls of hair from his son's head and drove him from his presence (H. Johnstone, *Edward of Caernarvon, 1284-1307* (Manchester 1946), 121-24).

<sup>137</sup> (1) To Scotland, September 1310 until August 1311; (2) to Paris, May – July 1313; (3) to Boulogne, December 1313; (4) to Scotland, June – July 1314; (5) to Scotland, September 1319; (6) to Amiens, June – July 1320; (7) to Scotland, August – September 1322.

<sup>138</sup> *Annales Londoniensis*, 230; *Annales Paulini*, 274. On this trip, Hugh was also appointed envoy to repay a cardinal priest who had loaned the king £2000 for the 1310-11 Scottish expedition (CPR 1307-13, 573).

<sup>139</sup> Fryde, *Tyranny*, 32, provides further reasons for suggesting this date.

<sup>140</sup> See, for example, G.O. Sayles (ed.), *Select Cases in the Court of King's Bench: Edward II*, Selden Society 74 (1955), 32, 40.

<sup>141</sup> Dugdale, *Baronage*, i, 390a.

<sup>142</sup> CPR 1317-21, 426.

<sup>143</sup> *Foedera*, II(i), 418; *Treaty Rolls 1234-1325*, 234-35. Edward was possibly delayed by illness: the wardrobe book records the payment of expenses to an apothecary who treated the king and Eleanor Despenser during the year (BL Add. MS 17362, f. 18r).

<sup>144</sup> *Catalogue des Rolles Gascons, Normans et Francois*, i, 55. Various letters of credence to rulers and bishops in France survive, dated February/March 1320: SC 1/32/78-82, 84, 88; C 47/24/3/12, no. 1. I am grateful to Professor David Smith for the Chancery reference.

<sup>145</sup> SC 1/37/7.

commission was charged with exactly the same duty four years later suggests otherwise.<sup>146</sup> The envoys later travelled to Avignon to negotiate with John XXII,<sup>147</sup> before returning to Edward II, who by this time had arrived at Amiens with the younger Hugh. Despenser senior received £404 expenses for the trip, and six of his servants were given gifts, suggesting that the king at least was pleased with the outcome of the expedition.<sup>148</sup>

By this time the younger Hugh had risen high in royal service, but his military capabilities left much to be desired. He sealed an indenture with the king on 10 October 1316 to provide thirty men-at-arms for two years at 400 marks per year, but the men were probably deployed at Odiham Castle (Hants.), which Despenser was charged to defend, rather than against the Scots as originally intended.<sup>149</sup> In April 1319 Edward commanded him to march north with a body of men-at-arms whilst preparations were completed for an invasion of Scotland.<sup>150</sup> The English invasion focused on the recapture of Berwick, but the Scots countered and routed an English army of clerics and peasants at Myton-on-Swale. The younger Despenser was then sent to Robert Bruce with the earl of Pembroke, Bartholomew Badlesmere and the bishop of Ely to treat for peace.<sup>151</sup> Although a two year truce was arranged, it was after these defeats, declared Robert of Reading, that the king's infamy 'began to be notorious, his torpor, his cowardice, his indifference to his great inheritance [increased]'.<sup>152</sup>

Immediately the truce expired in 1322, the Scots swarmed over the border and ravaged the north-west: Edward, with the Despensers recently returned to favour, swiftly mustered troops and rode north. Although Bruce claimed that peace was something he had always desired,<sup>153</sup> Edward needed victory to shore up his throne. With his existing followers, it was unlikely. Although Lancaster was defeated at Boroughbridge – the only successful military manoeuvre of the entire reign – the war against the Scots ended once again in embarrassment. Bruce's men pursued the 'chicken-hearted and luckless' king

<sup>146</sup> J. Sumption, *The Hundred Years War, I: Trial by Battle* (London 1990), 90.

<sup>147</sup> SC 1/32/122 (Edward's letter to the pope); *Catalogue des Rolles Gascons, Normans et Francois*, ii, 9.

<sup>148</sup> BL Add. MS 17362, ff. 11r, 31r-32r (includes 40s to one messenger, who probably delivered the letter to the king in May).

<sup>149</sup> E 101/13/36/139; *Parl. Writs*, II(i), 477; *CPR 1317-21*, 46.

<sup>150</sup> *Parl. Writs*, II(i), 515. It is unclear whether this actually happened, as the chronicles mention nothing of an advance party.

<sup>151</sup> *Rotuli Scotiae* (London 1814), i, 194a; *CPR 1317-21*, 414.

<sup>152</sup> Quoted in M. McKisack, *The Fourteenth Century, 1307-1399* (Oxford 1959), 57.

<sup>153</sup> McNamee, *Wars of the Bruce*, 235.

almost as far as Beverley.<sup>154</sup> Once again, Hugh the younger was dispatched with Pembroke and Robert Baldock to make peace, whilst his own son was sent as a hostage to Tweedmouth.<sup>155</sup> The resulting truce of Bishopsthorpe was intended to last thirteen years, but there was widespread opposition from the English, who saw only that Despenser and his cronies had sacrificed the north.<sup>156</sup>

1322 was the final campaign of Edward's reign. He did not leave England again and, significantly, neither did the Despensers. This fits well with existing knowledge regarding the internalised rule that existed in 1322-26, as well as confirming one of the factors behind what R.R. Davies has described as the 'ebb tide' of Edward I's 'empire'.<sup>157</sup> Most importantly, it demonstrates the Despensers' fear of the rest of the magnates during the 1320s. Even though Hugh the younger was in charge of the war in Saint-Sardos (1324-25), he directed operations entirely from England, despite providing 1000 men and victuals for the army.<sup>158</sup> Nor could Edward persuade Hugh the elder (then aged sixty-three) to travel to the French court with Edmund of Woodstock, his companion of 1320, to negotiate with Charles IV. The *Vita* commented that the Despensers did not dare go abroad in 1324, nor – if the king did – to remain in England, because the nobles so hated them.<sup>159</sup> It is ironic that in dissuading Edward from going to France to seek reconciliation with the queen, they unwittingly unravelled all the diplomatic achievements of the elder Despenser in previous years. The atmosphere of the 1320s was very different from the 1290s, because the accepted norms of service had been abandoned. When England was ruled by the Despensers, there was no higher power.

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<sup>154</sup> BL Stowe MS 553, f. 61r; quotation from *Lanercost*, 240. Despite the failure, there were large expenses paid for wages for this campaign. Hugh the elder took a retinue of 4 bannerets, 21 knights and 73 men-at-arms, who were owed a total of £222 8s (BL Stowe MS 553, f. 61v); Hugh the younger took two bannerets, 19 knights and 66 men-at-arms, who were owed £289 16s (f. 61r). Neither had received payment by the end of the year (f. 147r).

<sup>155</sup> Phillips, *Aymer de Valence*, 230-31.

<sup>156</sup> Fryde, *Tyranny*, 132. For another angle on the English failure: M.C. Prestwich, 'Military Logistics: the Case of 1322', in M. Strickland (ed.), *Armies, Chivalry and Warfare in Medieval Britain and France: Proceedings of the 1995 Harlaxton Symposium* (Stamford 1998), 276-88.

<sup>157</sup> R.R. Davies, *The First English Empire: Power and Identities in the British Isles 1093-1343* (Oxford 2000), taken from the title of chapter seven ('The Ebb Tide of the English Empire, 1304-1343').

<sup>158</sup> He was owed £47 15s 9d for this: BL Add. MS 7967, f. 107v. For the war, see the collection of documents in Chaplais (ed.), *Saint-Sardos*.

<sup>159</sup> *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, 138-40. They were clearly not tempted by financial reward: the younger Hugh's retainer John Felton led a force to Gascony in 1326 for which he received wages of £804 14s 8d, but neither Despenser was with him (BL Add. MS 7967, ff. 31v-32r).

1333-1349

Languishing in Bristol castle in 1330, Hugh Despenser III may have reflected that in defending Caerphilly from Isabella's forces, he had at least proved to the young Edward III that he was a spirited and capable soldier. As it turned out, military service was to be even more important in Hugh III's rehabilitation than in the years after Evesham. He fought at the great victory at Halidon Hill (1333), but his first sustained opportunity for military service came in July 1336, when, as one of 85 men-at-arms, he rode to Scotland under the banner of the king's brother, John of Eltham, earl of Cornwall.<sup>160</sup> Eltham had been a ward of the Despensers in the 1320s and held some of their confiscated estates.<sup>161</sup> After a small force under Edward III had razed Aberdeen to the ground, Eltham entered Scotland with several thousand men, including Despenser, and continued the destruction in the south-west.<sup>162</sup> Presumably the earl spoke of Hugh to his brother the king, since it was only months after this important strategic manoeuvre that Despenser was restored to some of his father's lands.<sup>163</sup>

Eltham died in September 1336 and Despenser appeared to have lost his benefactor. However, Edward III's forces in these years were stretched to breaking point. Regarding recruitment for the ensuing French wars, Ayton notes that one of the chief sources of manpower was those men seeking new allegiances following the death or retirement of their former captain. Several of these offered their services as independent captains, and Hugh III was 'the most notable of these'.<sup>164</sup> Indeed, military service over the next decade was to fully restore the Despensers to favour. Hugh III continued to serve in Scotland until 1340, perhaps an unlikely decision for a southern lord. He won his spurs in the retinue of the earl of Warwick in summer 1337, where the wardrobe book records he lost his only horse, and then served independently in the winter of 1337-38 with the earls of Gloucester, Arundel and Salisbury.<sup>165</sup> Tracing his rise from knight bachelor to banneret

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<sup>160</sup> E 101/19/36, m. 1.

<sup>161</sup> E 101/382/12; Bothwell, 'Estate Redistribution', 36-37.

<sup>162</sup> *Lanercost*, 298-99.

<sup>163</sup> *CPR 1334-38*, 461.

<sup>164</sup> A. Ayton, 'Edward III and the English Aristocracy at the Beginning of the Hundred Years War', in Strickland (ed.), *Armies, Chivalry and Warfare*, 190.

<sup>165</sup> 1337: E 101/20/17, m. 7d (Warwick's retinue list); BL Cotton MS Nero C.VIII, f. 284v (restoration of one courser). 1337-38: *Rotuli Scotiae*, i, 508a; *CPR 1334-38*, 550; *CCR 1337-39*, 403. It was around this time that Hugh married Salisbury's daughter (see above, chapter 2(d)).



is a powerful indication of his military capabilities.<sup>166</sup> It also speaks of the influence of war on Edward III's reconciliation with men of dubious family history. It extended to others as well: on 1 July 1338, Edward Despenser I, Hugh III's younger brother, received protection to serve in France in the service of his father-in-law Henry de Ferrers, 'a man of solid baronial stock'.<sup>167</sup>

It was not until the campaign of 1340 that Hugh III set foot in France. The admiral of the fleet was ordered to provide him with two cogs, the *St Mary* and the *Clyve*, to transport him across the Channel where he took part in the great naval victory at Sluys.<sup>168</sup> His role in the battle is impossible to ascertain, and it can only be guessed whether he was invited to the councils of war which Edward III held in the aftercastle of his ship following the battle. He was, however, in England by October, at the last full regency council before the political crisis of 1341 broke.<sup>169</sup> It is again hard to ascertain Despenser's involvement in the crisis, but it is notable that he was not summoned to the king's council directly after the 1341 parliament, nor did he not go with the king to Scotland in late 1341. This campaign took place after Edward annulled the concessions made in parliament, and was clearly one for the king's supporters alone. Since Hugh was now seasoned in Scottish warfare it is a little strange why he was not included. If we add the fact that he received no payment for Sluys,<sup>170</sup> it is tempting to interpret this as a deliberate snub by Edward to all of those who may have been involved in the crisis. However, it is difficult to be certain about this, and it seems very unlikely – indeed, utterly foolish – that Despenser should have become embroiled in controversy when he had only recently secured the king's favour.

All three Despenser brothers, Hugh, Edward and Gilbert, served in the Breton campaign of 1342.<sup>171</sup> Together with Oliver Ingham, who in 1322 had served under Hugh the younger but was now a household knight,<sup>172</sup> Hugh III led a force of 26 archers and

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<sup>166</sup> His horses also increased in value, from 20 marks to £40: A. Ayton, *Knights and Warhorses* (Woodbridge 1994), 227, 241, 245.

<sup>167</sup> *Treaty Rolls 1337-39*, 129, 149; C 76/14, m. 3; quotation from Ayton, 'Edward III and the English Aristocracy', 185.

<sup>168</sup> C 76/15, mm. 8, 18, 20, 22, 24; *Foedera*, II(ii), 1098; *CCR 1339-41*, 290.

<sup>169</sup> Harriss, *King, Parliament and Public Finance*, 285.

<sup>170</sup> See Ayton, 'Edward III and the English Aristocracy', 181, who views the lack of payment as merely 'an omission'.

<sup>171</sup> Edward and Gilbert served in their brother's retinue: C 61/54, m. 30. For a list of captains in 1342-43, see Ayton, *Knights and Warhorses*, Appendix 2.

<sup>172</sup> E 43/750; BL Stowe MS 553, f. 61r.

six dozen men-at-arms intended for Gascony.<sup>173</sup> After this was diverted to Brittany, the squadron took part in the battle at Morlaix, where Adam Murimuth recorded that

at least 200 [French] men-at-arms were killed or captured and not a single person of note was lost, except lord Edward Despenser, who was killed there'.<sup>174</sup>

Later in the year, with the English armies and their Breton allies struggling to break down French resistance, the earl of Northampton took the earl of Warwick and Hugh III with 400 men-at-arms and attacked Nantes: they broke the Loire bridge, encircled the city on the north side, and spread terror through the Nantais.<sup>175</sup> After the troops returned to England in February 1343, Hugh was dispatched to the papal court under the leadership of Henry of Lancaster.<sup>176</sup> Not only was this an intriguing juxtaposition of two formerly rival families, but significantly, the envoys were chosen in parliament. Fourteen years earlier, parliament had legitimised the executions and forfeitures of the elder and younger Despenser, but now it marked a major stage in the family's restoration. As it happened, the actual mission met with little success.<sup>177</sup> It is difficult to ascertain whether Despenser was with Lancaster and his father-in-law, the earl of Salisbury, when they arrived in Spain to woo Alfonso XI and convince him to deploy his Castilian galley fleet in favour of the English.<sup>178</sup> However, he was in Aquitaine with Arundel in 1344, and since Lancaster and Arundel were both appointed lieutenants in the duchy that year there is reason to suppose that Despenser *had* returned with the earl from Iberia.<sup>179</sup> If he was there, he would have taken part in the siege of Algeciras, which was taken from the Moors.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> E. 36/204, f. 106r. Sumption, *Trial by Battle*, 399, gives details of the route. According to Michael Jones, Hugh III was not one of Edward III's Breton captains in 1342, but this is presumably because his force was originally intended for Gascony rather than Brest (M. Jones, 'Edward III's captains in Brittany', in W.M. Ormrod (ed.), *England in the Fourteenth Century: Proceedings of the 1985 Harlaxton Symposium* (Woodbridge 1986), Table 1).

<sup>174</sup> E.M. Thompson (ed.), *Adae Murimuth continuatio chronicarum 1303-47*, RS 93 (London 1889), 126-28.

<sup>175</sup> E.M. Thompson (ed.), *Robertus de Avesbury de gestis mirabilibus regis Edwardi tertii*, RS 93 (London 1889), 340-42; Sumption, *Trial by Battle*, 405.

<sup>176</sup> Thompson (ed.), *Murimuth*, 136-38; K.A. Fowler, *The King's Lieutenant: Henry of Grosmont, First Duke of Lancaster 1310-1361* (New York 1969), 45.

<sup>177</sup> Capgrave later wrote that 'because the Pope was a Frenschman, thei found but litil coumfort there': F.C. Hingeston (ed.), *The Chronicle of England*, RS 1 (London 1858), 211.

<sup>178</sup> The itinerary is difficult to establish as Lancaster's exact whereabouts during the truce of 1343-44 were unknown even to the government: Fowler, *King's Lieutenant*, 261 n.37.

<sup>179</sup> *Foeder.*, III(i), 10.

<sup>180</sup> For the Despensers and the crusades see below, chapter 6.

By the year of the Crécy campaign, Despenser ranked alongside Lancaster and Warwick for battle experience.<sup>181</sup> In the days prior to the battle, he won further distinction. On 23 August 1346, as Philip VI appeared to have surrounded the English army, Edward III was told of a ford across the Somme, over which he and his men could escape. The almost miraculous night-time crossing saved the English, and it was the advance party, entrusted to Hugh III, Reginald Cobham and the earl of Northampton, which defeated a small French force and enabled the main army to reach safety.<sup>182</sup> Despenser was then immediately sent to conduct a major foraging expedition (the English supplies were so low they were living off meat from captured cattle). He and the earl of Suffolk ransacked Noyelles and Crotoy, and found a 'great plenty of supplies'.<sup>183</sup> Two days later, during the battle of Crécy itself, he fought in the rearguard with Arundel, Suffolk and Huntingdon,<sup>184</sup> and afterwards took part in the eleven-month siege of Calais (1346-47).<sup>185</sup> When he died in 1349, he had incurred massive war credits.<sup>186</sup> In 1348 he had been paid £849 towards his costs of fighting abroad,<sup>187</sup> and after his death, his executors recovered a further £3858.<sup>188</sup> It is a tribute to his ability and service that Edward III, with considerable wartime debts, was willing to pay this out.

### 1356-1375

In September 1356, Edward Despenser II was a little over twenty years of age when he received protection to travel to France in the retinue of the Black Prince.<sup>189</sup> According to Froissart, he played a prominent role in the capture of the town of Romorantin, and three weeks later fought with the prince at the battle of Poitiers.<sup>190</sup> It was an ideal

<sup>181</sup> Harriss, *King, Parliament and Public Finance*, 332. He was listed 'as an earl' when the fleet sailed on 11 July 1346: Thompson (ed.), *Murimuth*, 199.

<sup>182</sup> R. Barber, *Edward Prince of Wales and Aquitaine* (London 1978), 61-62. The drama of the night has been captured by M. Livingstone and M. Witzel, *The Road to Crécy: The English Invasion of France, 1346* (Harlow 2005), 257-59.

<sup>183</sup> Thompson (ed.), *Avesbury*, 367-69.

<sup>184</sup> 'The Acts of War of Edward III', in R. Barber (ed.), *The Life and Campaigns of the Black Prince* (London 1979), 29.

<sup>185</sup> BL Harley MS 6595, f. 7r. He was in Calais on 30 January 1347 but had arrived at Dover by August: R.M. Haines, *Ecclesia Anglicana: Studies in the English Church of the Later Middle Ages* (Toronto 1989), 19.

<sup>186</sup> E 36/204, f. 123r; E 101/390/12, mm. 10, 18, 37.

<sup>187</sup> CPR 1348-50, 116.

<sup>188</sup> Harriss, *King, Parliament and Public Finance*, 332 n.6. The Chancery initially recorded that Despenser was owed £2703 6s 5d, but his executors successfully negotiated a higher amount (CPR 1348-50, 293-94; Wrottesley, *Crécy and Calais*, 161). See also chapter 5, below.

<sup>189</sup> *Catalogue des Rolles Gascons, Normans et Francois*, i, 137.

<sup>190</sup> Froissart, *Oeuvres*, v, 390, 422-23; Francisque-Michel (ed.), *Le Prince Noir poeme du herault d'armes Chandos* (Paris 1883), 87.

beginning for an extremely capable man. Although there can be little doubt that Edward's military service was influenced by the career-in-arms of his uncle, fighting at Poitiers ensured his recognition for many years to come. In September 1359, after the over-ambitious second treaty of London had been rejected by the French dauphin, the English prepared for a further show of force. Despenser once again travelled in the Black Prince's retinue, captaining a force of 92 knights, 47 esquires and 10 archers.<sup>191</sup> His uncle, Gilbert Despenser, brother of Hugh III, also crossed to Calais. Although the king failed in his attempt to be crowned ruler of France, both men received payment that year as knights of the king's household.<sup>192</sup> According to Froissart, Edward was also involved in the negotiations over the Treaty of Brétigny (1360).<sup>193</sup> He was also nominated as a Garter knight in March 1360, at the end of the abortive campaign and took the stall beside the king at Windsor.<sup>194</sup> Other barons, such as Reginald Cobham, Thomas Ughtred and Walter Mauny were also nominated in this period: 'their [four] names read like a roll-call of chivalric achievement ... whose peerless reputations were matched only by those of the founder-companions themselves'.<sup>195</sup> Such commendation was certainly true of Despenser later in the decade but even taking into account his involvement with the peace treaty, he still had barely five years experience. It is therefore compelling to see the nomination, at least in part, as a recognition belatedly paid to Edward's late uncle, Hugh III.<sup>196</sup>

Further evidence about the Despensers' military career may be found in the church of St Mary at Elsing, Norfolk. The Elsing Brass is the most elaborate monumental brass of the fourteenth century, and commemorates Sir Hugh Hastings (c.1307-47).<sup>197</sup> Hastings' image is flanked by eight mourners, clad in armour, thought to be his companions-in-arms against the French. These include Edward III, the earls of Lancaster, Warwick, Pembroke and Stafford, John Grey of Ruthin, and Almeric St Amand. The final figure is

<sup>191</sup> Protection: *Catalogue des Rolles Gascons, Normans et Francois*, ii, 72. Retinue: C 76/38, m. 17. Wages: E 101/393/11, f. 80v. For a list of captains in 1359-60, see Ayton, *Knights and Warhorses*, Appendix 3.

<sup>192</sup> E 101/393/11, f. 76r.

<sup>193</sup> Froissart, *Oeuvres*, vi, 305.

<sup>194</sup> E. Ashmole, *The institution, laws and ceremonies of the most noble Order of the Garter* (London 1672), Appendix, Table 1.

<sup>195</sup> H.E.L. Collins, *The Order of the Garter 1348-1461* (Oxford 2000), 91-92.

<sup>196</sup> The concept of Edward III visiting the reward of the father on the son is considered further in chapter 6, below.

<sup>197</sup> Hugh Hastings was the son of John Hastings and his second wife Isabel, daughter of Hugh Despenser the elder. It is not unlikely that he was named after his grandfather. For a description of the brass: J.J.G. Alexander and P. Binski (eds.), *Age of Chivalry: Art in Plantagenet England 1200-1400* (London 1987), no. 678. For full references: L. Dennison and N. Rogers, 'The Elsing Brass and its East Anglian Connections', in N.E. Saul (ed.), *Fourteenth Century England I* (Woodbridge 2000), 167 n.4.

missing, but is generally thought to be Edward Despenser.<sup>198</sup> If this is true, it is an additional testimony to his military stature. However, art historians are agreed that the brass was made prior to 1350, and that all eight mourners fought with Hastings at Crécy in 1346. As Edward Despenser II and Hugh Hastings never met (Edward was just eleven when Hastings died in 1347), the eighth figure must instead be a different member of the family. Since the first Edward Despenser died in 1342, and probably never knew Hastings either, the missing figure must be Hugh III.<sup>199</sup> This fact takes on new significance when it is considered that all the mourners appear to be dressed in the insignia of Garter knights.<sup>200</sup> Hastings' family were dropping broad hints to all comers, suggesting that if only he had lived long enough, he would have been a member of the Order. But in connection with the Despensers, there is something further. Hastings, after all, was Hugh III's cousin, and the families had frequently intermarried.<sup>201</sup> If the brass was made whilst the Order was being formulated, they obviously expected that Hugh III would be a Garter knight, an entirely plausible assumption considering his military record. Alternatively, if the brass was made after the founder members were selected, Hastings' family were sending the message that cousin Hugh *should* have been included. This explanation not only provides a valid reason for Despenser's inclusion on the brass, but also explains Edward Despenser's later decision to marry his daughter Anne to Hugh Hastings III.

Edward Despenser II was clearly more than a warrior, as his domestic record has shown. Like his great-grandfather Hugh the elder, he was involved in diplomacy at the highest level. In 1364, he also witnessed the oath of marriage between the earl of Cambridge and Margaret of Flanders,<sup>202</sup> an event which held far-reaching consequences for the Despensers, since the earl's daughter would later marry Edward's son. It was probably with this in mind, and certainly as a mark of the esteem in which he was held

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<sup>198</sup> The original state of the brass is known from the Grey-Hastings case in the Court of Chivalry (1408): A.R. Wagner, 'A Fifteenth-Century Description of the Brass of Sir Hugh Hastings at Elsing, Norfolk', *Antiquaries Journal* 19 (1939), 423; M.H. Keen, 'English Military Experience and the Court of Chivalry: The Case of Grey v. Hastings', repr. *Nobles, Knights and Men-at-Arms in the Middle Ages* (London 1996), 167-85; more generally, A. Ayton, 'Knights, esquires and military service: the evidence of the armorial cases before the Court of Chivalry', in id. and J.L. Price (eds.), *The medieval military revolution* (London 1995), 81-104.

<sup>199</sup> This is further buttressed by the fact that another of the mourners, Almeric St Amand, was related by marriage to the Despensers and the Hastings (see chapters 2(c) and 4). He fought with Hugh III in 1340: C 76/15, m. 18; C 81/1724/89.

<sup>200</sup> Collins, *Order of the Garter*, 250 n.59.

<sup>201</sup> See above, chapter 2(d), and below, chapter 4.

<sup>202</sup> *Voedera*, III(ii), 750-51.

that in 1368, Edward was appointed steward of the king's son, Lionel of Clarence.<sup>203</sup> Edward accompanied the duke to Italy where Lionel married Violante, daughter of Galeazzo Visconti, duke of Milan. The Milanese annals state that Lionel was accompanied by around 2000 men, which included Froissart, soldier of fortune Sir John Hawkwood and many of the men of the free companies.<sup>204</sup> By all accounts, the wedding was one of unsurpassed grandeur: even Petrarch was said to have attended.<sup>205</sup> However, within three months Lionel was dead. Suspicion arose that he had been poisoned, and it fell to Despenser to avenge the duke's death. It can hardly have allayed the situation when Galeazzo demanded the restitution of his daughter's marriage portion. It appears that Edward joined forces with the papal armies, who were at war with the Milanese. By Michaelmas 1369 the money had been delivered to England,<sup>206</sup> but Despenser remained overseas for three further years, where his service in the papal armies 'won great praise in those parts for many years to come'.<sup>207</sup>

Edward returned home in August 1372, and received elaborate gifts from the king as reward.<sup>208</sup> He was fortunate that his service in Italy ensured he missed the failed campaigns of 1369 and 1370, and Pembroke's naval defeat off La Rochelle in June 1372.<sup>209</sup> The rest of his life was taken up, almost exclusively, in service in the French wars. Shortly after arriving home, he sailed with the king towards La Rochelle, where, beaten by winds for nine weeks, the fleet was forced to return to England without landing.<sup>210</sup> The following year, he sealed an indenture to travel with Gaunt on the duke's 'great march' from Calais to Bordeaux, where he was on active service from 19 June 1373 until 22 April 1374.<sup>211</sup> He was one of eleven captains, commanding a retinue of almost six hundred.<sup>212</sup> Despenser's responsibility is impressive, and although the *chevauchée* was

<sup>203</sup> *Foedera*, III(ii), 843. Edward and Lionel were neighbours: Clarence was lord of Usk and Caerlion.

<sup>204</sup> Froissart, *Oeuvres*, vii, 246; J. Temple-Leader and G. Marcotti, *Sir John Hawkwood* (London 1889), 60 n.

<sup>205</sup> D. Muir, *A History of Milan under the Visconti* (London 1924), 62-66.

<sup>206</sup> E 372/212, m. 40.

<sup>207</sup> *Polychronicon*, viii, 371, 419. Despenser's time in Italy is examined in the light of the crusading fervour of the 1360s in chapter 6.

<sup>208</sup> E 101/397/5, f. 84v (wardrobe book for 1374, entry dated 26 August 1372).

<sup>209</sup> Gilbert Despenser served in Gaunt's expedition of 1369: J.W. Sherborne, 'John of Gaunt, Edward III's Retinue and the French Campaign of 1369', in R.A. Griffiths and J.W. Sherborne (eds.), *Kings and Nobles in the Later Middle Ages: a tribute to Charles Ross* (Gloucester 1986), 59 n.39.

<sup>210</sup> E 101/32/26 (five unnumbered membranes in a leather pouch).

<sup>211</sup> E 101/32/26; V.H. Galbraith (ed.), *The Anonimale Chronicle 1333 to 1381* (Manchester 1927), 73. Near the end of the campaign, Despenser received a letter from pope Gregory IX, asking him to discourage Gaunt from war (*CPL 1362-1404*, 131-32). It was no doubt due to Edward's previous loyalty to the papacy, although there is no evidence that he took any action.

<sup>212</sup> E 364/8, m. 10d; J.W. Sherborne, 'Indentured Retinues and English Expeditions to France, 1369-1380', *EHR* 79 (1964), 728 (I have corrected the manuscript reference).

limited in its success, the impoverished treasury owed his men almost £10,000 in back-pay. Similarly, in the last expedition of the reign, Edward sailed for Brittany with the earls of Cambridge and March with a retinue of 19 knights, 380 esquires and 385 archers.<sup>213</sup> Letters of protection had been sealed in November 1374, but Despenser's retinue was not mustered until the following March. Half the fleet sailed in December, with the remainder following in early April.<sup>214</sup> It was during this campaign that the truce of Bruges was finalised on 27 June, and immediately afterwards Edward, who had become fatally ill during the voyage, was ordered home.<sup>215</sup> Most striking in these final campaigns are Despenser's fellow-commanders. He shared major responsibilities with dukes and earls, both English and foreign. In 1373-74, only the dukes of Lancaster and Brittany led larger retinues, and in 1375, he was the only non-titled captain.

### 1388-1399

There are only three occasions where it is certain that Thomas Despenser performed military service to Richard II. The first is the most exceptional, as it took place at the age of fifteen. He was permitted to join the English fleet, commanded by the earl of Arundel who had recently been made a knight of the Garter.<sup>216</sup> Arundel had recently won a 'brilliant naval victory' over the combined French, Spanish and Flemish fleets off Margate, and in 1388 was made governor of Brest. According to the *Westminster Chronicle*, Thomas was knighted by Arundel on the island of Batz, off La Rochelle.<sup>217</sup> However, his role at sea was probably inconsequential, and claims that this was a springboard by which he became associated with the Appellants appear somewhat exaggerated.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> E 364/10, m. 4d; Sherborne, 'Indentured Retinues', 730 (again, I have corrected the reference).

<sup>214</sup> E 101/34/3 (muster roll); E 101/34/5 (Despenser's account roll); *Foedera*, III(ii), 1018 (protections); Lumby (ed.), *Polychronicon*, viii, 382; H.T. Riley (ed.), *Thomae Walsingham Historia Anglicana 1272-1422*, RS 28 (London 1863-64), i, 318-19.

<sup>215</sup> G.F. Beltz, *Memorials of the Order of the Garter* (London 1841), 142.

<sup>216</sup> E 101/41/5; *CPR 1385-89*, 416. Thomas's sister Elizabeth had recently married John, Arundel's nephew (see above, chapter 2(c)).

<sup>217</sup> *Westminster Chronicle*, 350-53. I am grateful to Dr Adrian Bell for communication regarding the 1387-88 campaign, and refer to his thesis: 'Anatomy of an Army: The Campaigns of 1387-88', unpublished PhD thesis (University of Reading 2002), 207-8.

<sup>218</sup> For example, Collins, *Order of the Garter*, 101, who also states that Thomas was made a Garter knight by 1388. However, there is only one definite reference for his promotion to the Order, dated April 1399: Beltz, *Memorials of the Order of the Garter*, 332.

Unlike his father and uncle, Thomas was never retained as a household knight, and served only twice in a military capacity during the 1390s, in both the king's expeditions to Ireland. In 1395-96 – still underage – he led a retinue of 2 knights, 22 esquires, 50 mounted archers and 100 foot archers on an eight-month campaign, though it is likely that this owed more to his father's legacy than to Thomas's own exploits with Arundel in 1388.<sup>219</sup> Thomas's reluctance to leave England not only reflects the state of war with France – peace had been finalised just as he came of age – but also tells us a great deal about the relationship between members of the *duketti* and Richard II. In the 1390s, just as his ancestors had done during the 1320s, Thomas only travelled abroad with the king. The 1399 Irish campaign saw Despenser, the dukes of Exeter, Albemarle and Surrey and the earls of Salisbury and Worcester seal their indentures and sail with the king.<sup>220</sup> In contrast to the 1320s, when the Despensers refused to leave the country and would not permit the king to do so either, Richard and his favourites all embarked for Ireland, leaving the throne vacant as they did so. Although the family negotiating skills came to the fore again – Thomas reportedly arranged the meeting between Richard and the Irish king of Leinster, Art MacMurrugh<sup>221</sup> – Bolingbroke landed in England whilst the king was in Dublin. This campaign was perhaps less a display of military service than of poor counsel. By the time they returned to England in late July, Richard II's throne was already lost.

### Conclusion

In a century dominated by war in France and Scotland, the Despensers made good use of the opportunities with which they were presented. Hugh the elder grew to prominence because of the opportunities granted him in the 1290s, and Hugh III rebuilt the family reputation after the turmoil of 1326. It is particularly noticeable that, contrary to the accepted view of the Despensers, they continued to perform loyal service throughout the century, not merely in isolated patches. Indeed, when K.B. McFarlane argued in 1953 that the unbroken military service of the greater baronage was in danger of being

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<sup>219</sup> E 101/402/20, f. 32v. The name enrolled is that of Edward Despenser, but this is presumably a scribal error, as there was no member of the family with that name in 1396.

<sup>220</sup> C 76/83, m. 12 (protection); E 101/69/1/296-301 (indentures); E 403/562, mm. 2-3 (payment).

<sup>221</sup> Saul, *Richard II*, 289. There is an illustration of this in Jean Creton's chronicle (BL Harley MS 1319), printed in E.M. Thompson, 'A contemporary account of the fall of Richard the Second: Part I', *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 5 (1904), 171, plate 3.



overlooked, he cited such great names as Bohun, FitzAlan, Beauchamp and Montagu, who, he was sure, 'would be recognised for what they are by any English schoolboy'.<sup>222</sup> Surely the name Despenser should be added to this list: for three generations they were at the very top of their profession.

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<sup>222</sup> McFarlane, 'The Nobility and War', repr. *Nobility*, 40.

## 4

## The Despensers and their Circle

SINCE McFarlane's seminal work on bastard feudalism, the study of the baronial affinity has received much attention.<sup>1</sup> Bastard feudalism, a nineteenth-century term which for many years carried pejorative moral overtones, is now understood to describe the essential tie which, from the thirteenth century until at least the sixteenth, bound the greater and lesser aristocracy together. Embodied by a system of monetary agreements, it replaced the more concrete feudal system of land tenure whilst continuing to provide the nobility with manpower appropriate to their status. The focus of this chapter is the Despenser circle, the networks formed between the family and their retainers.

There are two methods used to analyse these networks. The quantitative approach has largely focused on locating those networks formed through patronage, with the implicit assumption that the gentry would only choose to be bound to a lord who would constantly pass benefits down to them.<sup>2</sup> Men served a lord for financial reasons, but also

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<sup>1</sup> K.B. McFarlane, 'Bastard Feudalism', repr. *England in the Fifteenth Century* (London 1981), 23-44. For the most recent bastard feudalism debate: P.R. Coss, 'Bastard Feudalism Revised', *P & P* 125 (1989), 30-39; D.A. Carpenter, P.R. Coss and D. Crouch, 'Debate: Bastard Feudalism Revised', *P & P* 131 (1991), 165-89; M.C. Carpenter, 'Gentry and Community in Medieval England', *JBS* 33 (1994), 340-80. M.A. Hicks, *Bastard Feudalism* (London 1995), provides a synthesis of literature, arguing that bastard feudalism was an administrative mechanism rather than a political problem; J.M.W. Bean, *From lord to patron: lordship in late medieval England* (Manchester 1989), specifically examines the development of indentures of retinue. For specific studies on the baronial affinity: C. Rawcliffe, *The Staffords: Earls of Stafford and Dukes of Buckingham, 1394-1521* (Cambridge 1978); M. Cherry, 'The Courtenay Earls of Devon: The Formation and Disintegration of a Late Medieval Aristocratic Affinity', *Southern History* 1 (1979), 71-97; M.C. Carpenter, 'The Beauchamp affinity: a study of bastard feudalism at work', *EHR* 95 (1980), 514-32; S.K. Walker, *The Lancastrian Affinity, 1361-1399* (Oxford 1990); D.S. Green, 'The Household and Military Retinue of Edward the Black Prince', unpublished PhD thesis (University of Nottingham 1998).

<sup>2</sup> Studies focusing on patronage include R.E. Horrox, *Richard III: A Study in Service* (Cambridge 1989), esp. 1-26; R.E. Horrox, 'Service', in id. (ed.), *Fifteenth-century attitudes* (Cambridge 1994), esp. 73-78.

to make good marriages, find legal assistance or advance their careers. Critics have argued that this process is rather one-dimensional, as it fails to deal with networks from the gentry's perspective.<sup>3</sup> They suggest that constant advancement, although welcome, was not the main reason for service, and that it is equally important to use a qualitative approach to establish *why* links existed and whether or not the nature of these connections changed over time. Although in wartime men were expected to join their lord on campaign, peacetime retaining was by far the most important: the effective numbers a lord could bring to bear in normal everyday life was indicative of his influence and how willing men were to serve him from day to day.<sup>4</sup> In a sense, a study of the noble retinue is a study of how a peacetime affinity adapted to function in a military capacity, and vice versa.

The magnate retinue is seen as a series of concentric circles with the lord at the centre. Different men were retained for different purposes: men might offer counsel, or act as administrators, attorneys, trustees, feoffees or servants. Although no one category was necessarily closer to the lord than any other, there were differing degrees of affinity between the lord and his retainers, classified by Carpenter as 'weak' and 'strong' ties.<sup>5</sup> Due to constraint of space and to maintain clarity, this chapter is principally concerned with the latter. To minimise the methodological problem that evidence of association is not evidence of commitment, in this study it is not considered enough to have witnessed one charter or been on one military campaign with a Despenser to be considered a member of the affinity. Only repeated involvement is taken to suggest a strong tie. The analysis considers both vertical (lord-retainer) and horizontal (retainer-retainer) connections, since a regional affinity by its very nature brought together men with no previous ties. Since the retinue was not static, but was constantly reforming to the demands placed on it, vertical links sometimes *became* horizontal: in other words, men in the employ of the Despensers also acted for each other, as attorneys, witnesses and feoffees. This is the value of the qualitative approach and the methodology used in the chapter will therefore follow this pattern.

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<sup>3</sup> See particularly the work of Christine Carpenter: 'The Beauchamp affinity'; *Locality and Polity* (Cambridge 1992); 'Gentry and Community'; 'The Stonor Circle in the Fifteenth Century', in R.E. Archer and S.K. Walker (eds.), *Rulers and Ruled in Medieval England: essays presented to Gerald Harriss* (London 1995), 175-200.

<sup>4</sup> See also chapter 3(a), above.

<sup>5</sup> Carpenter, 'Gentry and Community', 366-67; also Walker, *Lancastrian Affinity*, 8.

Turning to the sources for the Despenser networks, it has been seen already that the evidence which McFarlane, Carpenter, Hicks and others have used for later affinities is lacking for the fourteenth century.<sup>6</sup> Reconstruction of an affinity must therefore resort to other methods: letters of protection, witness lists, ancient deeds, parliamentary writs and royal household books. These are the sources used in accounts of the Despenser affinity by Nigel Saul and Scott Waugh, both of whom focus on the 1320s.<sup>7</sup> They emphasise the double allegiance of many retainers of the younger Hugh, whose intimacy with the royal household enabled a number of men to serve both him and the king. This chapter takes a thematic approach to establish the Despenser powerbase, its structure and size, allowing the approach adopted by Saul to be extended backwards (to the 1290s) and forwards (to 1400). It then analyses local politics and office-holding, parliament and estate administration and the geography of the affinity. A concomitant aim is to study the individuals involved, and ascertain how loyalty could be commanded in a family where four of six generations died violently at the hands of others (thus providing a basis for further questions in chapter five). First of all it is necessary to briefly examine the relationship between the Despensers and the rest of the nobility.

### *The Despensers and the Nobility*

My survey of the affinity shows that connections between the Despensers and the higher nobility existed in three ways. Firstly, members of the nobility witnessed charters, made financial agreements with and served in the military retinue of the Despensers. This was especially true in the March of Wales. William Montagu (d. 1319) was steward of the royal household and close ally of the Despensers,<sup>8</sup> but his son (d. 1344), soon began to hate Hugh the younger. As the genealogy shows, there was a long-term connection between the two families and the animosity of the 1320s appears to have lessened after 1326. When Montagu was granted the lordship of Denbigh in 1331, it was Hugh III who received payment.<sup>9</sup> After he became earl of Salisbury in 1337, Montagu was prepared to forget past feuding and married two of his daughters to Hugh III and his

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<sup>6</sup> See above, chapter 1.

<sup>7</sup> N.E. Saul, 'The Despensers and the Downfall of Edward II', *EHR* 99 (1984), 1-33; S.L. Waugh, 'For King, Country and Patron: the Despensers and Local Administration, 1321-22', *JBS* 22 (1983), 23-58.

<sup>8</sup> Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster*, 194-95.

<sup>9</sup> BL Egerton Roll 8715, where Montagu agreed to pay £1000 to Hugh III for control of Denbigh and the outlying cantrefts, and £233 6s 8d to Hugh's mother Eleanor. Quitclaims of rights in Denbigh from Alice and Ebulo Lestrangle and Hugh III also survive in the Montagu Cartulary: Holmes, *Estates*, 28.

bastard nephew Edmund, yet as late as 1341 the papacy was compelled to rule that Hugh III and Elizabeth Montagu should remain married 'to allay the strife between William and the late Hugh Despenser the younger'.<sup>10</sup> As so often, the war with France actually healed old wounds: Montagu and Despenser shared retainers in the 1340s and became companions-in-arms. Thirty-five years later, Salisbury's son was granted protection to serve with Edward Despenser in the 1373 French campaign.<sup>11</sup>

The connections made by marriage to the Marcher lords clearly impacted upon the Despensers' retaining policy.<sup>12</sup> A fascinating picture emerges in which the 'new' Marcher lords – those who held lands from the late-thirteenth century onwards – visibly began to shoulder arms against the 'old'.<sup>13</sup> One way this was done was by intermarrying in order to create a similar identity to that which already existed amongst the 'old' lords. The Despensers provide a perfect example of this solidarity.<sup>14</sup> In 1313 the marriage of John St Amand, Montagu's cousin, to Margaret Despenser brought him into the family circle. St Amand became a close friend of the family: he travelled with the elder Hugh to Spain in 1319, and was his attorney whilst the new earl of Winchester was away in Scotland in 1322.<sup>15</sup> St Amand's son Almeric later fought in France with Hugh III, and appears with him on the Elsing Brass.<sup>16</sup> Marriage also brought the Hastings of Abergavenny into the orbit of the elder and younger Hugh. A Marcher family whose seat of power was not far from the Despenser heartland of Glamorgan, they were to establish a long-term friendship with the family based on mutual interest and martial prowess.<sup>17</sup> John Hastings senior (d. 1313) first came into contact with Hugh the elder in 1294 in Wales and later married his daughter Isabel. However, his first wife, also Isabel, was sister to Aymer de Valence, earl of Pembroke, and Hastings served both men for much of his career.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, it was to Pembroke that Hastings' son John paid his allegiance. This not only speaks of the continuing interaction of families in the Marches, but also of the mechanism of retaining in fourteenth-century England. Men often served more than one master and were rarely considered the poorer for it. However, following Pembroke's

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<sup>10</sup> See above, chapters 2(c) and 2(d).

<sup>11</sup> E 101/32/26, m. 2.

<sup>12</sup> This is further discussed below in 'The geography of power', and in chapter 5.

<sup>13</sup> For 'old' and 'new' Marcher lords, see Davies, *Lordship and Society*, 34-62.

<sup>14</sup> See family tree 3.

<sup>15</sup> CPR 1317-21, 271; 1321-24, 189.

<sup>16</sup> See above, chapter 3(b).

<sup>17</sup> Hastings senior appears in Appendix 3 as a member of the 'inner circle', but the family are discussed here because of their status and kinship to the Despensers.

<sup>18</sup> Saul, 'Despensers', 9-10.

death in 1324, the younger Hastings passed back into the Despensers' circle for a few months before his own death in 1325. It was not surprising that the Despensers should have wanted to encourage this connection: on Pembroke's death, Hastings became heir not only to the lordships of Abergavenny and Cilgerran, but also to the Valence earldom and county of Pembroke.<sup>19</sup> Equally unsurprising was the fact that after 1325, the king granted the wardship and marriage of the minor, Laurence Hastings, to the younger Despenser.<sup>20</sup> Despite the 'interregnum' following 1326, Eleanor, sister of Hugh III, married Laurence Hastings in c.1337 (thus becoming countess of Pembroke in 1339) and the two families fought together in the opening phase of the French war.

The Beauchamps were another new Marcher family who made good their claim to Gower under earl Guy of Warwick. Following his death in 1315 custody of the lands was granted to the elder Despenser at 1000 marks per annum.<sup>21</sup> Like the elder Hastings, Walter Beauchamp was a member of the affinity, even to the extent of involvement in the younger Hugh's Channel piracy in 1321. Sir Giles Beauchamp witnessed charters for both Despensers in the 1320s; the animosity this raised amongst the nobility was demonstrated when his name was scratched out of the parliamentary returns in January 1327.<sup>22</sup> There is little doubt that the turbulent history of the southern frontier had nurtured a mood of separation and mistrust of outsiders,<sup>23</sup> and the Clare partition of 1317 which brought the Despensers to the fore substantially changed the political face of the March. In order to build his Welsh empire, the younger Hugh cut across the rights of other Marcher lords, many of whom had enjoyed pre-eminence in the area for centuries. The decision made by Roger Mortimer in 1319 to marry two of his daughters to Thomas Berkeley III and John Charlton of Powys ('old' Marcher families) is typical of the developing friction. Relations were irreparably damaged by the civil war of 1321-22 and for the next eighty years interaction between the Despensers and the 'old' lords of the March was almost non-existent,<sup>24</sup> whilst links with 'new' lords were solidified across the century. These divisions seem to underline the characteristic antagonism of the March, the collective elephantine memory which harboured grievances more jealously

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<sup>19</sup> Davies, *Lordship and Society*, 280.

<sup>20</sup> CPR 1324-27, 95; CIPM, vii, no. 391.

<sup>21</sup> CFR 1307-19, 336; Davies, *Lordship and Society*, 51-52, 283-84.

<sup>22</sup> Powell and Wallis, *House of Lords*, 311 n.36.

<sup>23</sup> Davies, *Lordship and Society*, 34-35, 276-77.

<sup>24</sup> Edward Despenser married Elizabeth Burghersh (lords of Ewyas Lacy and neighbours of the Hastings), but this was a connection forged in warfare rather than local politics.

than any others. It may also point to reasons for the Despensers continuing to look outwards after the 1330s, rather than becoming entrenched in the interminably reactive Marcher politics.

The powerful Bassets of Drayton had an even longer association with the Despensers than the Montagus, Beauchamps and Hastings. Ralph Basset and Hugh Despenser (d. 1265) were two of the most loyal Montfortians during the Barons' Wars, and died side by side at Evesham. A generation later, Basset's son entered the service of the elder Hugh in the late 1290s.<sup>25</sup> Following his death in 1299, Basset's heir, a third Ralph, became a ward of Hugh and others, who paid 1000 marks between them to purchase custody of the minor from the executors of the earl of Cornwall.<sup>26</sup> This Ralph Basset was accused in 1321 of corruption, together with Hugh senior and other Despenser men, Sir John Inge and Sir Ralph Camoys. After the civil war he travelled in the elder Despenser's retinue to Scotland in 1322 and in 1326 supervised the troop array for the defence of the realm.<sup>27</sup> His affinity to the family is not in doubt, but he was not foolish enough to fight Isabella when she arrived. Nevertheless, Basset's friendship with the Despensers endured: he was one of the mainpennors who guaranteed Hugh III's release from prison in 1332.<sup>28</sup>

The second type of connection between the Despensers and the nobility are the instances of Despensers serving in the retinue of other nobles. Most important was the war with France where, as outlined in the previous chapter, it was argued that the martial ability of Hugh III, Edward and Hugh V enabled the fortunes of the family to reach a pinnacle. The Despensers fought under members of the royal family (John of Eltham, Edward the Black Prince and John of Gaunt) as well as the magnates (earls of Northampton, Huntingdon, Arundel, Cambridge – but not, significantly, the Mortimer earls of March). That they were held in the highest regard by the upper nobility is evidenced by Edward Despenser's campaigns in 1373-75, where he commanded a regiment of over 600 men, and Hugh V's involvement in the siege of Brest in 1387-88, where he was lieutenant of John Holand, earl of Huntingdon.

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<sup>25</sup> C 67/14, mm. 5, 10.

<sup>26</sup> *CCR* 1302-7, 67.

<sup>27</sup> *CPR* 1321-24, 187.

<sup>28</sup> *Rot. Parl.*, ii, 61. The modern insignia of Woking Borough Council is a shield containing aspects of the arms of medieval holders of the manor, including both Despensers and Bassets.

Thirdly, members of the Despensers' retinues are found in the employ of other nobles and the royal family. On one hand, there are further examples of dual or multiple allegiance – such as Thomas Bridges, who was retained variously by Edward, Elizabeth and Thomas Despenser, John of Gaunt and the earls of Stafford and Warwick – but on the other, men appear to have progressed from the Despensers to other lords and vice versa. This is most clearly seen in the Crécy campaign. Sir Robert Apperle was with Hugh III until at least 1345 but received no protection under his name in 1346, by which time he had transferred the retinue of Sir Thomas Bradestone.<sup>29</sup> Sir William Careswell likewise served Bartholomew Burghersh after 1345, a connection which is understandable since Burghersh later received custody of the young Edward Despenser.<sup>30</sup> This overlap is most clearly evident with the Black Prince whose appeal, as heir to the throne, exceeded that of any other. A number of men used this opportunity as a stepping stone to success: John Alveton (also a retainer of Burghersh), Thomas of Castle Goodrich, Sir Rhys ap Gruffydd, Thomas Chamberlain and Sir William Moigne (a ward of Hugh III) all found later employment with the Prince. This was also true of relations of men in the Despensers' affinity, including Edmund Hakelut, Richard Kendale, Nicholas de la Beche, John of Castle Goodrich, Sir Philip Courtenay, Sir Walter Pavely and Rhys ap Gruffydd II.<sup>31</sup> There were a variety of reasons for this: Hugh III came into extended contact with the Prince in France during the 1340s, and Edward Despenser began his career with the Prince at Poitiers. In addition, the Prince's elevation to duke of Cornwall meant that he came into extended contact with the Despenser's west country followers and his Welsh estates ensured that he could fish for supporters in the same pool as the Marchers. David Green points to the family's strong personal ties with the Prince, having played 'played a central part in the Black Prince's family history' and become 'an important part of his retinue'.<sup>32</sup> The generosity of the Prince compared with the relatively poor patronage provided by the Despensers meant that men were more prepared to leave than to join.

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<sup>29</sup> G. Wrottesley (ed.), *Crécy and Calais from the Public Records* (London 1898), 151. Hugh was appointed to a commission set up to investigate Apperle's death: CPR 1348-50, 176.

<sup>30</sup> Wrottesley (ed.), *Crécy and Calais*, 104, 146, 165.

<sup>31</sup> Green, 'Retinue of Edward the Black Prince', *passim*. The transfer was not entirely one-sided however, as Sir Nicholas Burneby of Northants fought with Despenser in 1346 having left the Prince's service: Wrottesley (ed.), *Crécy and Calais*, 145.

<sup>32</sup> Green, 'Retinue of Edward the Black Prince', ii, 58.



Life Retainers, Annuities and the Inner Circle

I have found eight life indentures sealed by the Despensers, and a further twelve life annuities (see Appendix 2). The majority survive as royal confirmations enrolled in the patent or close rolls. Others have been derived from annual payments made during the 1390s by the receiver of Thomas Despenser, earl of Gloucester, preserved in The National Archives.

Six indentures survive in full. Peter Ovedale's agreement with the younger Hugh in 1316 was curious.<sup>33</sup> There was no promise of any wage, and the only financial obligation was on the retainer's side who agreed to pay £400 if he defaulted on the indenture. The only apparent benefit for Ovedale was the promise of marriage to Isabel Hastings, Despenser's sister and the widow of John Hastings senior. Considering Despenser's rapid rise to power, the promise of a good marriage and the financial threat of defaulting, it is surprising that within two years Ovedale sealed an indenture with Humphrey de Bohun, earl of Hereford.<sup>34</sup> Perhaps he did not receive what he had expected from Despenser. One additional piece of information comes from the chamber account for 1324-26, which tells us that in June 1325 Despenser retained Sir Thomas Grey for life, for a fee of £200.<sup>35</sup> Grey was constable of Norham castle and was paid from the chamber at Hugh's insistence. According to Nigel Saul, Grey was an 'important Despenser accomplice', but Andy King sees Grey's connection purely as a marriage of convenience, citing disparaging comments about the younger Hugh contained in the *Scalacronica*.<sup>36</sup> The only other indenture from this period was made between Despenser and Sir Hugh Neville, an Essex knight, who contracted to serve for a year with two knights and seven esquires.<sup>37</sup> Neville's allegiance to the family is undocumented, but he remained loyal to the crown as late as autumn 1326.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> M. Jones and S.K. Walker (eds.), 'Private Indentures for Life Service in Peace and War', *Camden Miscellany* XXXII, 5<sup>th</sup> series, 3 (London 1994), no. 22; Bean, *From lord to patron*, 51-52.

<sup>34</sup> Jones and Walker (eds.), 'Private Indentures', no. 28.

<sup>35</sup> SAL MS 122, ff. 29r, 33r.

<sup>36</sup> Saul, 'Despensers', 29; A. King, 'Scaling the Ladder: the Rise and Rise of the Grays of Heton, c.1296-c.1415, in R.H. Britnell and C.D. Liddy (eds.), *North-East England in the Later Middle Ages* (forthcoming). I am grateful for an advance copy of the latter article.

<sup>37</sup> Jones and Walker (eds.), 'Private Indentures', no. 29. This document (DL 27/186) has a fine example of Hugh Despenser's personal seal: see comments in *Catalogue of Seals in the Public Record Office. Personal Seals*, ii, no. 1291.

<sup>38</sup> *Park Writs*, II(i), 760.

The majority of indentures and annuities were made by Edward and Thomas Despenser.<sup>39</sup> Two of Edward's use particularly interesting language.<sup>40</sup> In November 1372 Sir Thomas Arthur and Nicholas Bernak both undertook to serve with very little definition of what they would receive in return. Bean suggests that the indentures 'were more concerned with peace than war ... reflecting the needs of a Marcher lord who felt it superfluous to engage in precise definitions of foreign service'. Despenser had just returned from the papal armies and would spend the next three years fighting the French. Perhaps the traditional distinction between service in peace and war was untenable for Despenser, fresh as he was from the crusade against the Visconti. If this is true we may assume that other men who were retained for life in 1372 (those in Appendix 2, but for whom indentures do not survive) made broadly the same agreement.

The indentures sealed in the 1390s were notable for two reasons. First, they demanded that additional men be brought when summoned, a possible hint at Despenser's concern at the level of support he was able to command. Secondly, they all included the possibility of a crusade. William Hamme's indenture, sealed a month into Henry IV's reign, made allowance for travel to Prussia, Rhodes and other parts beyond the realm, implying that Despenser had not yet thrown in his lot with the rebel earls. The invasion of Europe by the Ottoman Turks and the preparation for a crusade appears to have affected the magnates' retaining policy: in 1395 the duke of Gloucester had also stipulated 'travelling against the enemies of the Lord' as a condition of service for William Cheyne.<sup>41</sup> It has even been suggested that the crusading movement of the 1380s and 1390s was originally envisaged as an Anglo-French alliance between Charles VI and Richard II.<sup>42</sup> Although the crushing defeat at Nicopolis in 1396 brought an end to any hopes of this confederation, the prevailing mentality in the Baltic and Eastern Europe at this time provides an interesting backdrop to Thomas Despenser's retaining motivations.

Generally it is difficult to draw any conclusions about the Despenser circle based on this evidence alone. Although indentures were the most formal agreements between lord and patron, surviving records suggest that numbers of indentured life retainers were

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<sup>39</sup> According to one calculation, in 1375 life annuities were costing Edward Despenser £465 18s 7d per annum: *GCH*, 608 n.108.

<sup>40</sup> Bean, *From lord to patron*, 90-91.

<sup>41</sup> Jones and Walker (eds.), 'Private Indentures', no. 85; and see further discussion in chapter 6(a), below.

<sup>42</sup> J.J.N. Palmer, *England, France and Christendom, 1377-99* (London 1972), 180-210.

surprisingly few.<sup>43</sup> Consequently, using the criteria outlined in the introduction, Appendix 3 has been constructed to show the ‘inner circle’ of each of the Despensers, and the remainder of this section discusses both sets of data in tandem. It should be explained that the lack of a formal contract did not imply that the bond was in any way fragile or temporary. The example of Sir John Inge is instructive: in 1321 the younger Despenser wrote to Inge to ‘charge him in the faith which he owes’ to carry out certain tasks.<sup>44</sup>

It is immediately noticeable that nearly all of the elder Despenser’s men joined his service between 1286 and 1306, the dates of his marriage to Isabel Chaworth and Hugh the younger’s marriage to Eleanor Clare. Indeed, all but a handful acted in his service in the 1290s, when he first rose to the fore in the crown’s service. John Holt, John Jukyn, Peter Malory, William Mansel and Walter Pavely all appear to have been legal representatives: Holt witnessed no fewer than twenty-three charters or deeds for Despenser between 1296 and 1304, Pavely twenty-three between 1299 and c.1310 and Mansel thirteen between c.1302 and 1310.<sup>45</sup> Despenser came into contact with at least fifteen of his retainers in a military or diplomatic capacity, successfully moulding a permanent retinue out of a military affinity.<sup>46</sup> Although the younger Hugh attracted a greater number of followers, his father’s affinity laid the foundations of family power for the rest of the century. Most of his men joined him early in his career, before 1307; they were lifted by him from obscurity and their careers founded on their military capabilities. By contrast, the majority of the younger Hugh’s retinue joined him *after* his meteoric rise (there are none from 1306 to 1313), suggesting a different priority. In chapter 3(b) it was argued that the wars of 1294-1306 ‘made’ Hugh Despenser the elder: on this evidence, they ‘made’ many of his followers too.

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<sup>43</sup> Only about 150 have been found for the late medieval nobility, excluding John of Gaunt and William lord Hastings: Jones and Walker (eds.), ‘Private Indentures’, *passim*. David Green has found only seven for the Black Prince: ‘Retinue of Edward the Black Prince’, i, 11. The evidence for life annuities is equally scarce: Holmes, *Estates*, 60-61.

<sup>44</sup> *C. 14C Wales*, 221.

<sup>45</sup> McFarlane commented that the evidence for Mansel was ‘suggestive but no more’: ‘An Indenture of Agreement between Two English Knights for Mutual Aid and Counsel in Peace and War, 5 December, 1298’, *England in the Fifteenth Century*, 54 n.42. However, he did not cite all the references available, and a connection seems plausible.

<sup>46</sup> Berenger, Bodrugan, Camoys, Chastilon, Cobham, Etchingham, Fishacre, Hastings, Haudlo, Mandeville, Papillon, Rasen, Ratynden, Sidemanton and Trehampton either fought in Despenser’s retinue in Wales and Scotland, or accompanied him abroad to Paris or Rome.

It is highly significant that the families who consistently served in the Despensers' inner circle began as retainers of Hugh the elder, not Hugh the younger. A closer look at the son's retinue shows that it was distinctly different from the father's: his inner circle was smaller but his number of officials much larger. Perhaps this is dictated by the evidence which does not always distinguish between the two men, but it seems indicative of what we know of the younger Hugh and the kind of men with whom he associated. He attracted hangers-on who wanted a share of his influence rather than retainers who desired his lordship.<sup>47</sup> Berenger, Camoys, Etchingham, Haudlo, Ratynden, Felton and Inge were seven of the most loyal men the Despensers would ever employ, yet only the latter two were demonstrably Hugh's men.<sup>48</sup> Lughteburgh, William Dene, Harwedon, Iweyn, Gorges and Chastilon served until their deaths, yet only Iweyn was a retainer of the younger Hugh. Ultimately, when only Simon of Reading went with Despenser to the gallows at Hereford the rest must have breathed a sigh of relief at the distance they had maintained to the last.<sup>49</sup>

Hugh III's rehabilitation in the late 1330s threw him almost immediately back into high politics. The wars in Scotland and France allowed no time for gradual restitution, and the composition of his retinue supports this. John of Eltham's Scottish campaign is especially significant for tracing the rise of a military retinue from the ashes of the 1320s. Thomas Chamberlain, Sir Edward Kendale, Sir Andrew Sackville and Sir Roger Warde, (together with Roger Dalyngrigge, father of Sir Edward), all came together for the first time with Despenser in 1336.<sup>50</sup> When Despenser became an independent captain after Eltham's death, these four men presumably entered his service. The chief focus of the 1340s was war, something that was also true for Edward Despenser, the majority of

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<sup>47</sup> John Iweyn is one example, an official of William Braose who swapped sides in 1318 but as a riposte had his Gower lands confiscated and was accused of murder (*CAP Wales*, 344-47; R.A. Griffiths, *The Principality of Wales in the Later Middle Ages, I: South Wales 1277-1536* (Cardiff 1972), 258-59). Despenser, as chamberlain, had Iweyn was cleared of the charges, but in 1321 the Marchers had their revenge and he was executed at Swansea.

<sup>48</sup> Berenger was arguably the least popular of the elder Hugh's men: *Rot. Parl.*, ii, 380-1. He sought private restitution after 1321 (JUST 1/1020/1), and as a creditor of Eleanor Despenser as well as her father-in-law (SC 1/49/142) he probably acted, as did many others, for both Despensers during their last years.

<sup>49</sup> There are no other specific references to Simon of Reading in association with the Despensers. He was a king's sergeant (BL Stowe MS 553, f. 103v) who fled to Wales with Edward II in 1326 and was executed because he 'despised the Quene Isabel' (F.W.D. Brie (ed.), *The Brut or The Chronicles of England*, EETS, old series 131 & 136 (1906-8), i, 240). There is no tangible evidence that he was Despenser's standard bearer (Haines, *King Edward II*, 185), the marshall of the king's house (R. Holinshed, *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Wales* (London 1586), III(i), 340), or 'one of Despenser's closest friends' (Fryde, *Tyranny*, 77), although Nigel Saul is probably right to assume there was familiarity between the two men ('Despensers', 11).

<sup>50</sup> E 101/19/36, m. 1. A decade earlier, Hugh junior employed a Thomas Chamberlain, possibly the same man: SC 1/36/126.

whose followers joined his service during or after his return from Italy in 1372. There are a number of examples which hint at the unity war could bring to a retinue. After all, if pitched battle could bring the king and his magnates together as companions-in-arms, could it not do the same for others? Together with John Alveton and William Osberston, Kendale, Sackville and Warde acted as Hugh's agents for raising loans in 1348 and 1349 from his relative, the earl of Salisbury.<sup>51</sup> After Despenser's death his wife Elizabeth also acknowledged a debt to the same group of men who, since they came from diverse locations, were clearly brought together by service in the retinue. This was also the case when Edward Despenser's executors petitioned the crown together in 1376, when Edward Dalyngrigge employed Thomas Sackville as an attorney in 1388 and when two of Thomas Despenser's men acknowledged a joint debt to three other members of the Gloucestershire gentry in 1398.<sup>52</sup>

Due to the minorities of 1349-56 and 1375-94 there was little overlap between retinues since most retainers found other employment after their lord's death. This was true after 1375 for men such as John atte Wode, a prominent West Country official; Sir John Paleys of Cologne, probably retained as Edward made his way back to England from Italy; and Sir Edward Dalyngrigge, the Sussex knight who rose through Despenser's employ to become one of Richard II's most valued councillors.<sup>53</sup> Although we have seen this period did little to damage the political standing of the family, it was not so favourable for retaining. However, Sir Thomas Fallele and his kinsman Sir John Fallele passed seamlessly from the service of Hugh III to Edward: Sir Thomas was ever-present on the French campaigns in 1340-47, and Sir John ever-present in 1372-75.<sup>54</sup> Thomas Bridges and clerk Henry Yakesley both continued in the employ of Edward's wife Elizabeth, the former as her steward and receiver, the latter as her esquire.<sup>55</sup> Bridges also served John of Gaunt and the earl of Warwick in the early 1390s, but returned to Despenser after he obtained his majority.<sup>56</sup> John Frome of Buckingham did likewise, first acting as Edward's attorney in 1359 before going to a prosperous career in local

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<sup>51</sup> N.E. Saul, *Scenes from provincial life: knightly families in Sussex 1280-1400* (Oxford 1986), 183.

<sup>52</sup> *CAP Wales*, 356; C 76/72, m. 8; C 115/78, f. 194v.

<sup>53</sup> N.E. Saul, 'The rise of the Dallingridge family', *Sussex Archaeological Collections* 136 (1998), 123-32. He was chief executor of Despenser's will (with Thomas Brown, Robert Burton, John Dautesey, Robert Perde and Henry Yakesley): Lambeth Palace, Reg. Sudbury, f. 90r; E 101/35/5.

<sup>54</sup> In his will, Edward left John Fallele a gift of a white courser: Lambeth Palace, Reg. Sudbury, f. 89v.

<sup>55</sup> In 1377 Elizabeth granted Yakesley a yearly rent of £13 14s 10d on her manor of Ashley (Hants.): *CPR 1377-81*, 395.

<sup>56</sup> Saul, *Knights and Esquires*, 65, 81, 93.

office under the earl of Salisbury. He then returned to the Despensers and is last mentioned as a member of Thomas's council on 14 November 1399.<sup>57</sup> William Daventry of Potcote in Cold Higham, Northants, was retained for life by both Edward and Thomas and continued to serve Elizabeth Despenser during the 1380s and 1390s.<sup>58</sup> He received his annuity throughout Thomas's long minority,<sup>59</sup> as did John Tremyr, a Franciscan friar from Plymouth.<sup>60</sup> Hugh Mortimer of Weldon, Northants, was first mustered for Edward Despenser's 1375 campaign, an event which appears to have made a great impact on him since in his will made forty years later, Mortimer requested that he be buried in the Tewkesbury chapel with Edward, and that his family's remains be transferred there.<sup>61</sup> Mortimer's father Thomas had been a close ally of Edward Despenser, and Hugh was himself retained for life by Thomas Despenser, consequently obtaining election to the 'Revenge Parliament' in 1397. He was also bequeathed a large golden bowl overlaid with eagles in Elizabeth Despenser's will, for whom he acted as executor in 1409.<sup>62</sup> In a striking microcosm of the close-knit world in which these men lived, Mortimer was later to marry the elder daughter of John Frome. Both Frome and Robert Andrew, a retainer of Isabel Despenser and her husband William Beauchamp, acted as Mortimer's executors after his death in 1416. Yet Mortimer, who became Prince Henry's chamberlain, also provides a striking example of the fluidity of political allegiance at this time.<sup>63</sup> It is curious indeed that a man who so willingly served the Lancastrian regime would eventually choose to be buried alongside the family who had died trying to ensure it never took hold in the first place.

So despite the vicissitudes of political life, the Despensers *could* command loyalties throughout generations. They also used their lordship to appeal to entire families. Sir John Haudlo spent twenty-seven years with the elder Hugh (1299-1326), a relationship rewarded in 1316 when Hugh arranged his 'beloved' follower's marriage to Matilda Lovell.<sup>64</sup> Their first formal connection came in the summer of 1299, when Haudlo received letters of protection to travel in Despenser's retinue on the ill-fated Scottish

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<sup>57</sup> C 81/1724/95; E 101/511/29/2. See also J.S. Roskell, L. Clark and C. Rawcliffe (eds.), *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1386-1421* (Stroud 1993), iii, 133-35.

<sup>58</sup> Bristol RO, MS 5139/49.

<sup>59</sup> E 101/511/12/15; CPR 1388-92, 397.

<sup>60</sup> E 101/511/12/11.

<sup>61</sup> *Commons 1386-1421*, iii, 783-86; Griffiths, *Principality of Wales*, 212-13.

<sup>62</sup> Lambeth Palace, Reg. Arundel, ii, ff. 108v-109r.

<sup>63</sup> A.J. Dunn, *The Politics of Magnate Power in England and Wales 1389-1413* (Oxford 2003), 181-82.

<sup>64</sup> *CAID*, A6814. On another occasion he was granted various manors for life: *CAID*, A10910.

campaign. He was a capable official, regular witness and proficient soldier who caught the eye of the younger Hugh, who in 1314 sent a letter to the king requesting Haudlo to be released from duties as sheriff of Kent as his services were required in the Bannockburn campaign.<sup>65</sup> Sir John Haudlo, however, was the elder Despenser's man, prepared to accompany him to Spain in 1319 and into exile in 1321 after his estates were devastated in the civil war. They were also complicit in more dubious activities: in 1323 Despenser 'imperiously informed the chancellor that he was to renew a commission issued in favour of John Haudlo and enter the names Haudlo would send'.<sup>66</sup> Such loyalty led to employment for his entire family. In 1313 Despenser senior retained Haudlo's brother William, a priest, for three years, having previously secured his appointment to the church of Wootton Bassett.<sup>67</sup> Another brother, Robert, acted as his attorney in 1320 and 1322.<sup>68</sup> In 1326 Sir John came into contact with the young Hugh III, who, as soon as he received livery of his estates in 1337 remembered his grandfather's old friend and released certain lands to him in Oxfordshire.<sup>69</sup> That same year, Thomas Haudlo, son of John, was granted permission to marry the daughter of Sir Thomas Berkeley: the pope explained that the marriage was 'to put an end to the strife caused by Sir Thomas having sided with Roger Mortimer and John Haudlo with Hugh Despenser'.<sup>70</sup> This devotion was still evident in 1341, when Haudlo requested the dean and chapter of Salisbury to pray for the souls of king Edward II and Hugh Despenser the elder.<sup>71</sup>

Sir William Erkalewe's loyalty also survived the tricky period 1326-36. He was with Edward II in 1326 but by 1337 acted as Hugh III's attorney and in 1338 became sheriff of Glamorgan and steward of the Despenser estates in England.<sup>72</sup> The Burnells of Castle Holgate provide a further, more long-term example. They originally appeared in the Despenser circle when Hugh the elder obtained the marriage of Edward Burnell, a minor, with the intention of marrying him to his eldest daughter Aline.<sup>73</sup> The Burnells

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<sup>65</sup> E 159/87, m. 31d.

<sup>66</sup> R.W. Kaeuper, 'Law and Order in Fourteenth-Century England: The Evidence of Oyer and Terminer', *Speculum* 54 (1979), 762.

<sup>67</sup> CPL 1305-42, 113; C.T. Flower and M.T.B. Dawes (eds.), *Registrum Simonis de Gandavo, Dioc. Saresbiriensis, A.D. 1297-1315*, CYS 40 (Oxford 1934), I(ii), 623. It is unclear if this is the William Haudlo who was royal attorney in South Wales in 1348: Griffiths, *Principality of Wales*, 549.

<sup>68</sup> CPR 1317-21, 422; CPR 1321-24, 189.

<sup>69</sup> CCR 1337-39, 271, 272-73.

<sup>70</sup> CPL 1305-42, 541.

<sup>71</sup> CPR 1340-43, 194. In May 1340, Hugh III acknowledged that he owed John's daughter Elizabeth 640 marks: CCR 1339-41, 477.

<sup>72</sup> C 71/17, m. 5; Clarke, *Cartae*, iv, 180, 182.

<sup>73</sup> It took Despenser six years of negotiations and cost him 1000 marks: Waugh, *Lordship of England*, 224-25.

therefore became permanent kin of the Despensers and, in 1316, to John Haudlo (Matilda Lovell was Edward Burnell's sister). They were also bound by land to the lords of Glamorgan for nearly a century. The manor of Martley (Worcs.), held by the Despensers since King Henry III's reign, was part of Aline's dower in her marriage to Burnell.<sup>74</sup> On his death it reverted to Hugh senior and despite confiscation in 1327, was obtained once again by Hugh III in 1338.<sup>75</sup> In 1364 this was disputed by the Burnell heir and a compromise was arranged in which Edward ceded Martley to the Burnells in return for the nearby manors of Sodbury and Bushley.<sup>76</sup>

Cleric John Ellerker's experience with the family was still more colourful. After receiving a pardon for the rape and abduction of Elizabeth Luttrell at the request of Hugh the elder in 1309, he faithfully served the crown and Hugh the younger in the 1320s.<sup>77</sup> After Hugh III's emergence, Ellerker was made escheator of North Wales and granted an annuity of 20 marks in 1339. No doubt Despenser had half an eye on Ellerker's relationship with his father in the previous decade, since the annuity was made for 'past and future good service'. It was misjudged, however, and the following year Ellerker was accused of embezzling Hugh's money.<sup>78</sup> He was removed from office as escheator and after appointment to a church in Cambridge in 1342, no further contact with the Despensers is known.

### Office-holding

What did the Despensers require from the men in their employ? It would be expected for a family moving in ever-increasing political circles to safeguard their interests by ensuring their retainers held local offices or represented their interests in parliament, and their ability to do this is a guide to the extent of their power in the shires. The main problem is trying to ascertain whether men were chosen for the retinue because of their position or used their connection with the Despensers to be elected. The following

<sup>74</sup> *CCR* 1279-88, 148; *CIPM*, ii, no. 101; *VCH Worcs.*, iv, 292.

<sup>75</sup> *CIPM*, ix, 328-42; Birmingham City Archives, MS 3688/196.

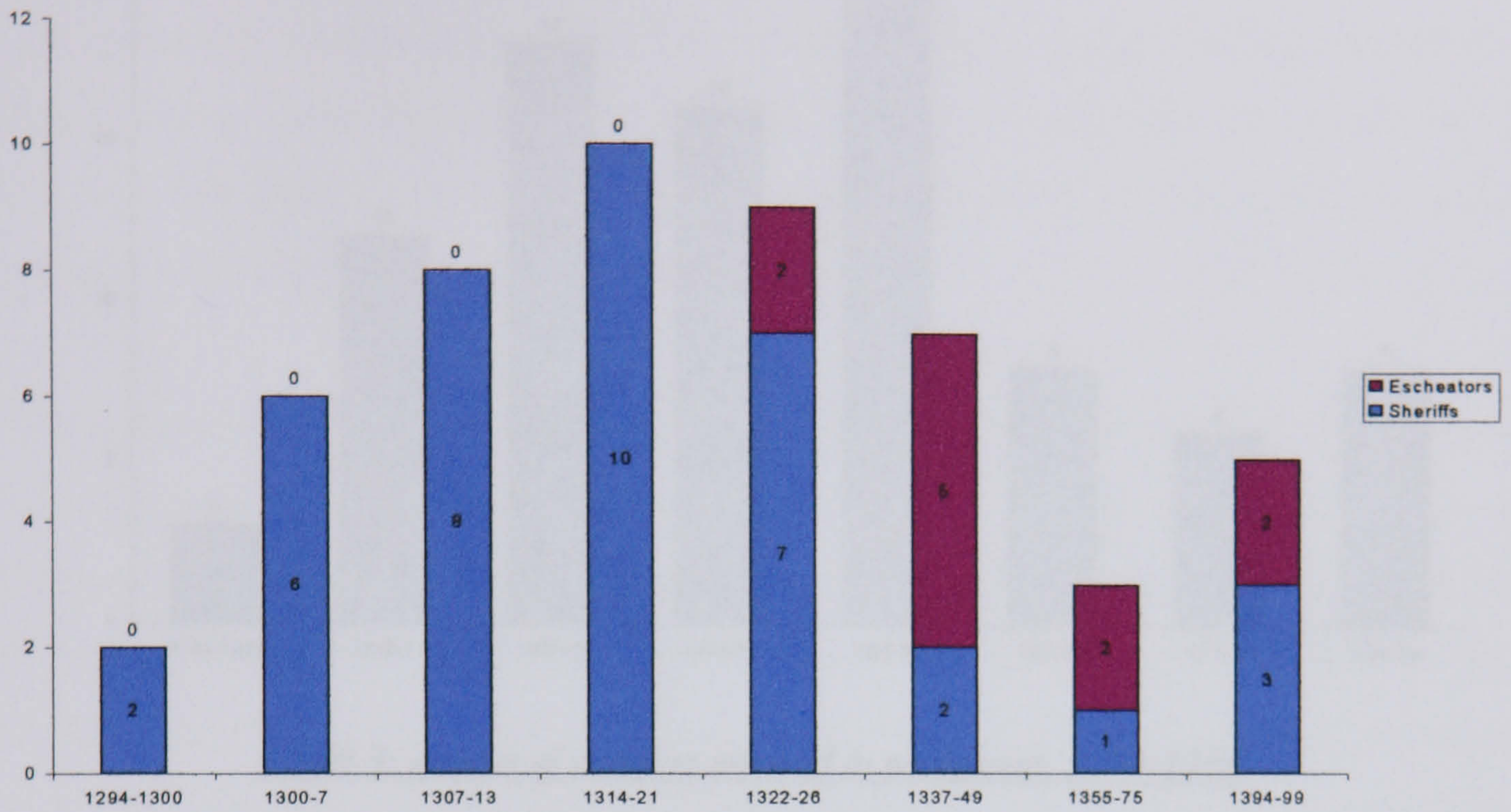
<sup>76</sup> C 44/3/13; *CFR* 1356-68, 284; *VCH Worcs.*, iv, 292.

<sup>77</sup> *CPR* 1307-13, 181.

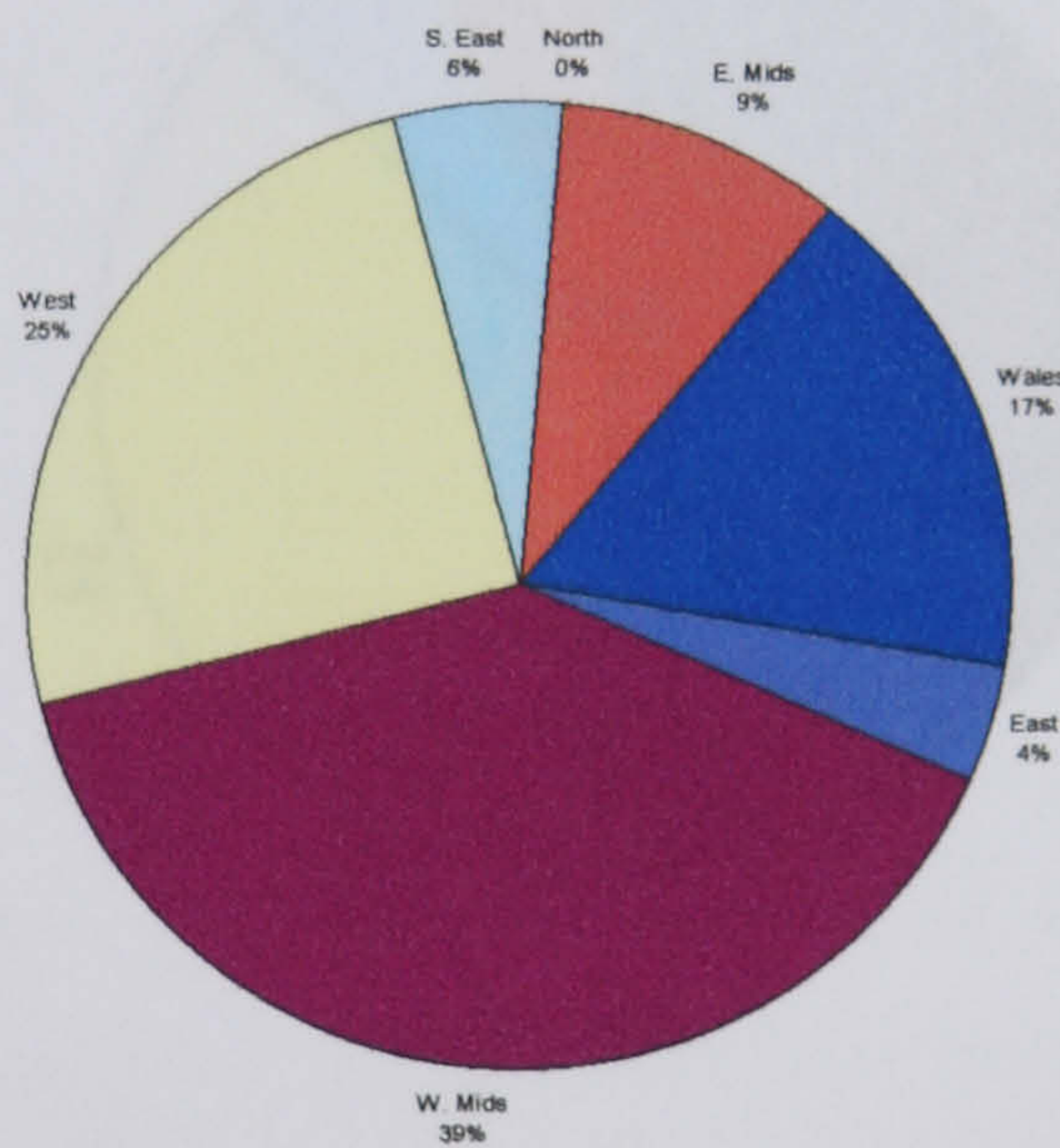
<sup>78</sup> F.J. Bywaters, 'The Clergy of Willingham 1300-1955, Part I', *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society* 49 (1955), 72-73.



charts show local offices (Charts 1 and 2) and MPs (Charts 3 and 4), first chronologically then by region.<sup>79</sup> Names and dates are included in Appendices 4 and 5.

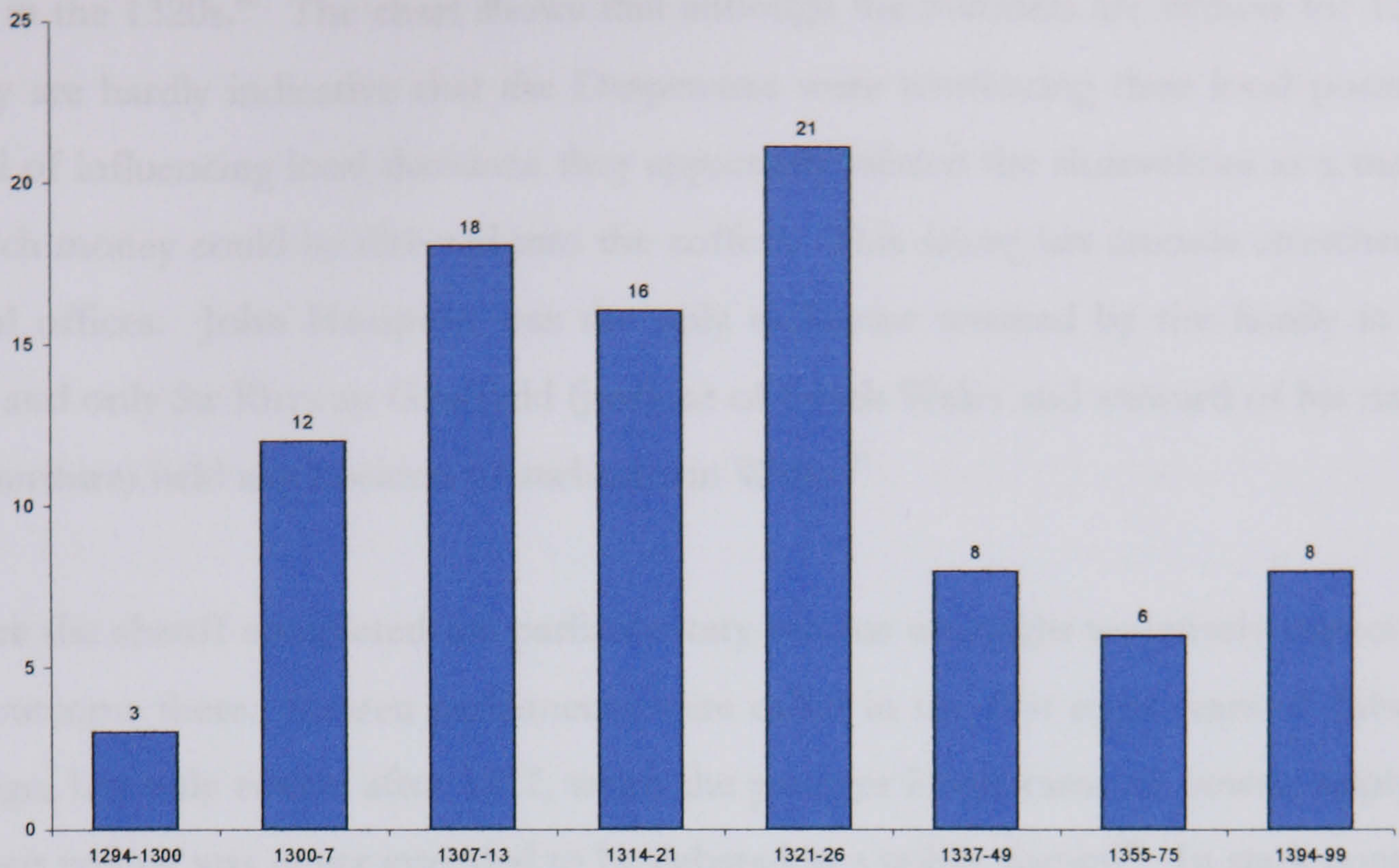


*Chart 1: number of retainers acting as sheriffs and escheators, 1294-1399*

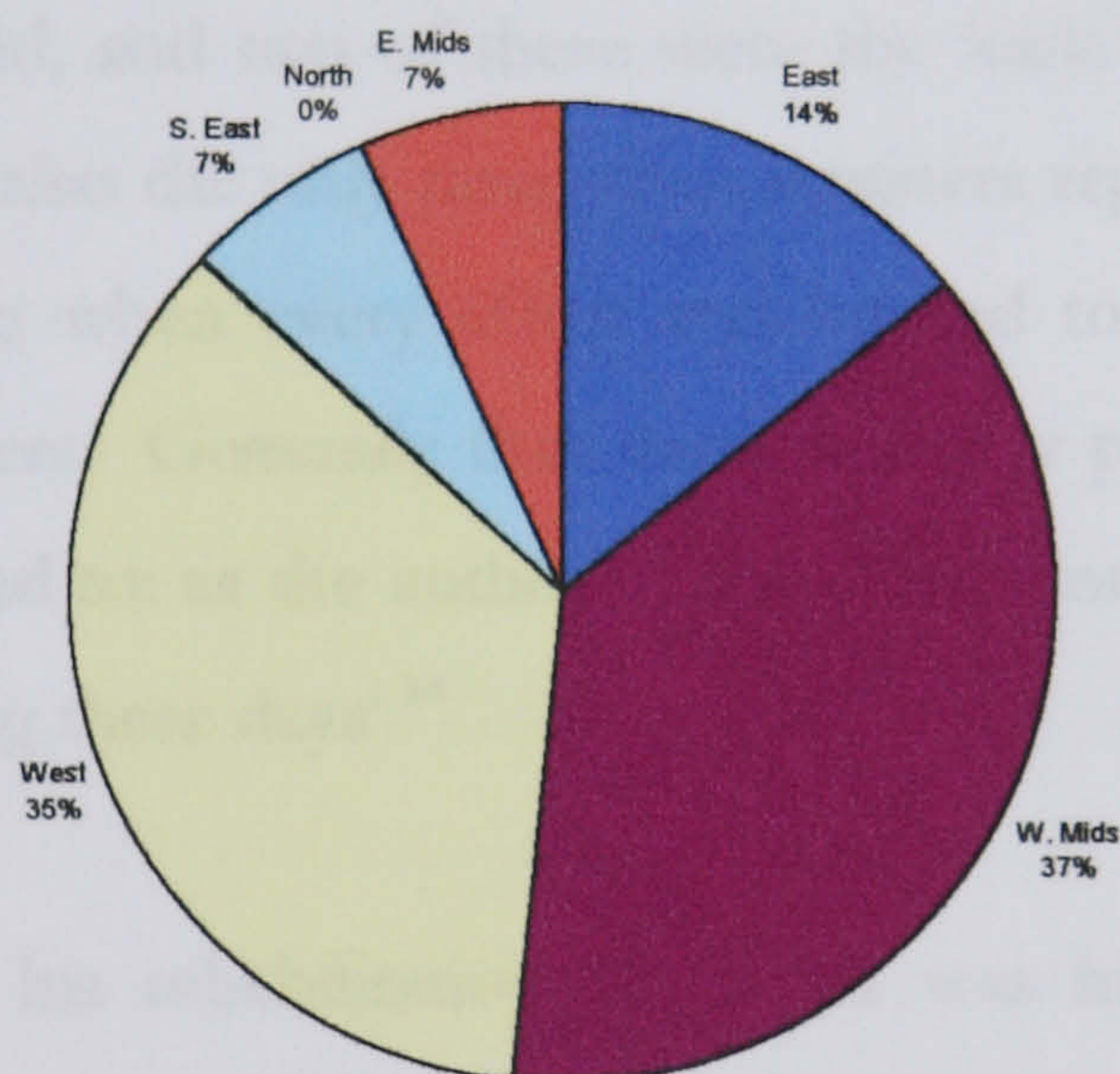


*Chart 2: number of retainers acting as sheriffs and escheators by region*

<sup>79</sup> Sources for charts 1 and 2: *List of Sheriffs for England and Wales*, PRO Lists and Indexes 9 (1898); *List of Escheators for England and Wales*, PRO Lists and Indexes 72 (1932). Sources for charts 3 and 4: *Return of the Name of Every Member of the Lower House of Parliament ... 1213-1874* (London 1878), i.



*Chart 3: number of retainers returned to parliament, 1294-1399*



*Chart 4: number of retainers returned to parliament by region*

The sheriff was the most important official in the provinces with wide-ranging responsibilities, and it is hardly surprising to find men of this ability in the retinue. But it worked both ways: Sir John Acton had already spent five years as sheriff of Herefordshire (1294-99) before he was connected with the family, but within a year was returned as a knight of the shire to parliament. By the 1320s however, the Despencers' policy had changed, doubtless at the instigation of the younger Hugh. Nigel Saul has shown that very few of the Despenser's supporters were appointed to the office of

sheriff in the 1320s.<sup>80</sup> The chart shows that although the numbers are highest for 1314-26 they are hardly indicative that the Despencers were reinforcing their local position. Instead of influencing local decisions they apparently viewed the shrievalities as a means by which money could be directed into the coffers. This *laissez-faire* attitude stretched to all local offices. John Hampton was the only escheator retained by the family in the 1320s, and only Sir Rhys ap Gruffydd (justiciar of South Wales and steward of his native Cardiganshire) held any position of authority in Wales.<sup>81</sup>

Since the sheriff completed the parliamentary returns we might tentatively expect the same outcome there. Sixteen parliaments were called in the first eight years of Edward II's reign, but only twelve after 1317, when the younger Hugh came to power, implying that their regime was never intended to be debated in a public forum.<sup>82</sup> In stark contrast with Thomas of Lancaster, who frequently required his followers to attend parliament, neither of Hugh's life retainers were obliged to do this.<sup>83</sup> The Despencers only bothered with parliament when strictly necessary. On just three occasions after 1313 were more than four retainers returned, and two of these were the 'exile' parliaments of 1321 and May 1322. The latter was also the only time when retainers represented boroughs. This was clearly a rare occasion when every effort was needed to influence the judgement made against the Despencers. Generally they cared little for parliament, and having the ear of the king did not need to: as the author of the *Vita* wrote, 'parliaments, colloquies and councils decide nothing these days'.<sup>84</sup>

At the early stages of his rehabilitation Hugh III was hardly in a position to be concerned with parliament. His retinue consisted of military-minded men, perhaps second sons looking to the French wars to make their fortune, rather than the seasoned, semi-retired country gentry whose experience was so valued on peace commission and judicial benches. In these circumstances, none would be keen to hold an office which would tie them to England. Although John Alveton, Edward Kendale, William Erkalewe

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<sup>80</sup> Saul, 'Despencers', 16-20. He also suggested the sheriffs replaced by Isabella and Mortimer in February 1327 were closely allied to the old regime and identified three as such (Erkalewe, Marlborough and Wachesham). To these can probably be added Adam Walraund, sheriff of Wiltshire, who witnessed a charter for the elder Hugh as far back as 1302: E. 40/12047 (four of his five co-witnesses were proven Despenser retainers).

<sup>81</sup> Griffiths, *Principality of Wales*, 99, 102, 284.

<sup>82</sup> I have used the appendix to H.G. Richardson and G.O. Sayles, 'The English Parliaments of Edward II', repr. *The English Parliaments in the Middle Ages* (London 1981), ch. XVI.

<sup>83</sup> Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster*, 52-53; Jones and Walker (eds.), 'Private Indentures', nos. 24-25, 27, 31.

<sup>84</sup> *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, 136.

and William Whittington sat for parliament before the war began, none of the retinue did so between July 1340 and March 1348. A similar pattern is seen with local offices: only John Ellerker (who left the family's service in c.1341) acted as escheator and John Alveton and Robert FitzElys as sheriff. There was also a substantial lack of local talent with only three sheriffs of Glamorgan from 1337 to 1400 being members of the local gentry.<sup>85</sup> Perhaps this tells us the kind of followers Hugh III was able to recruit when rebuilding the family reputation. Since many of them needed the events of the 1340s to bolster their own careers, they were unlikely – even unable – to care about the stigma of 1326. With a few exceptions, they needed Despenser as much as he needed them.

Considering his own domestic record, it might be expected that Edward Despenser would recognise the value of officials who represented his interests, yet during his lifetime only John atte Wode and Richard Turberville were escheators, and both held this position before they came into contact with Edward. In fact, the only man who used Despenser's influence to gain office was Sir John Dautesey, sheriff of Wiltshire in 1373-74. Parliament, a forum which Edward had used to prove his own worth to the crown, was only sporadically used for his own men. There was never more than one retainer sitting in each of the parliaments of 1360-1375. It seems that the elder and younger Hugh were not the only members of the family unconcerned with control of local government. If this evidence is anything to go by, none of the Despensers can have had their interests maintained locally at all. Did this mean that a family as powerful as the Despensers could maintain their position perfectly well without resorting to 'placemen'? When it is remembered that most of Edward's men joined him in his latter, most successful, years, it will be clear that it was military success that marked he and his uncle out from their forebears. Men served them because of the potential for promotion on the battlefield or the spoils of war, not a seat on a peace commission. This policy, risky as it was, worked because of the time out of which it was born. These were years when a man's fortune could be made in France; yet they were also 'quiet' years, with no rebellion or threat to the crown. It was this combination which allowed for some serious shortcomings in the Despenser's local patronage.

It is also important that a number of Edward Despenser's men were parliamentarians during the long minority of his son. Linda Clarke has commented on the role that

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<sup>85</sup> *GCH*, 181.

retainers had to play when the head of a noble house was a minor, citing those who championed the cause of the earls of Arundel and Westmoreland.<sup>86</sup> Both Sir John Dautesey and Sir John Thorpe were MPs for Wiltshire and Gloucestershire during the 1380s, and there is little doubt that they acted on their former lord's behalf. Thomas Bridges, later Thomas Despenser's receiver, held office in Worcestershire and Gloucestershire for fifteen years after lord Edward's death. It was these men, together with Elizabeth Despenser, who worked tirelessly to safeguard her late husband's inheritance for her son, that enabled Thomas Despenser to begin his career as well-placed as he did.

Richard II's manipulation of parliament is well-known: in the so-called 'Record and Process' of his deposition he was accused of ordering sheriffs to appoint his own men to parliament.<sup>87</sup> In September 1397 the Gloucestershire election was a Despenser affair, with Robert Pointz the sheriff in charge of the return of Hugh Mortimer and John Browning.<sup>88</sup> Richard Ruyhale also sat for Worcestershire and John Wilcotes' brother William for Oxfordshire. These were some of Despenser's key retainers, yet Mortimer had no local interest and was virtually landless at the time of the election. He had a £40 annuity from Despenser and sat for only one parliament.<sup>89</sup> Pointz, who had previously acted as escheator for two years, left office after the election, but twelve months later Browning was made sheriff and held the post until removed by Henry IV. Even so, this by no means gave Richard II the comprehensive control of the March he required. There were no Despenser retainers returned for Herefordshire, Somerset, or Dorset in 1397, and while the king did place his supporters in Welsh offices none of them were Thomas's men. Since it is obvious Richard would have used the men if they were available we can only conclude that Thomas Despenser, soon to be earl of Gloucester, simply did not have the men he needed to justify such a position. It is necessary to turn to the geography of the affinity to investigate further.

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<sup>86</sup> I. Clarke, 'Magnates and the affinities in the parliaments of 1386-1421', in R.H. Britnell and A.J. Pollard (eds.), *The McFarlane Legacy* (Stroud and New York 1995), 145-46.

<sup>87</sup> C. Given-Wilson (ed.), *Chronicles of the Revolution, 1397-1400* (Manchester 1993), 178; id., *Royal Household*, 248-51.

<sup>88</sup> If William Frome, returned for the city of Bristol, was related to John Frome, then it is likely that he too was a Despenser man (*Commons 1386-1421*, i, 403).

<sup>89</sup> *Commons 1386-1421*, i, 399.

The geography of power

The Despensers began as a small baronial family but swiftly built up enormous estates in England, Wales and Ireland. As a result, their catchment area for followers substantially increased. Not surprisingly, Hugh the elder's early retainers came overwhelmingly from southern England, where his estates inherited from Philip Basset and Patrick Chaworth were based. Indeed, the Despensers' lack of strength in the north was later to impact significantly on the continuing argument with Thomas of Lancaster. More interesting is the fact that the retinue was so wide-spread so early in his career. Prior to 1306, Hugh's followers came from far beyond the Basset/Chaworth lands: Sussex, Cornwall, Devon, Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, Hampshire, Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Northamptonshire and South Wales.<sup>90</sup> The Northants connection existed because another branch of the Despenser line, descended from Geoffrey of Martley, uncle of Hugh the justiciar (d. 1265), was based in the county.<sup>91</sup> Hugh's clerk, Robert Harwedon, was probably from Great Harrowden; his brother Henry would later accompany Hugh III to Rome in 1343.<sup>92</sup> A number of men also came from the west country, the most prominent of whom was Sir Hugh Courtenay, the elder Hugh's nephew. The Courtenays later became the 'provincial' earls of Devon, arguably on the same financial footing as the more powerful barons. Courtenay fought at Caerlaverock in Despenser's retinue and was knighted in 1306 with Hugh the younger. He went again to Scotland with Despenser senior in 1307, in the meantime witnessing a number of charters.<sup>93</sup> This led to a number of other men joining the Despenser circle from the west country, notably Sir Henry Bodrugan, a powerful Cornish baron.<sup>94</sup> Bodrugan may have met Despenser as early as 1286 but joined his retinue in 1303 and remained there until his death in 1309, after which Hugh was granted custody of his lands.<sup>95</sup> The Cornish connection is significant for the Despensers since Hugh III and Edward served with John of Eltham and Edward the Black Prince, respectively earl and duke of Cornwall. It seems that Hugh senior's movements on a national stage in the 1290s began to draw interest from

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<sup>90</sup> As evidenced by respective entries in GEC, *CIPM* and C. Moor, *Knights of Edward I*, Harleian Society 80-84 (1929-32).

<sup>91</sup> When Hugh V died in 1401 he held the manor of Collyweston, near Northampton, from Bishop Henry Despenser: *CIPM*, xviii, no. 605.

<sup>92</sup> A.B. Emden, *A biographical register of the University of Oxford to A.D. 1500* (Oxford 1958), ii, 877-78.

<sup>93</sup> C 67/14, m. 10; E 40, 249-55; C 81/1724/81.

<sup>94</sup> Moor, *Knights*, i, 103-4.

<sup>95</sup> *CPR 1307-13*, 306.

men across the south of England, and his appointment as justice of forests south of the Trent in 1297 gave him an extensive influence.

Hugh junior's marriage to Eleanor Clare in 1306 and developing ambitions in the Marches initially concentrated his affinity in South Wales. The Despensers were newcomers to the area and whilst the Clare alliance was the beginning of a century-long foothold in Glamorgan, the aspirations of the younger Hugh did nothing to soothe the tension in the region.<sup>96</sup> However, it was not until the younger Despenser's appointment as chamberlain that men began to flock to him: Appendices 2 and 3 indicate that most of his retinue joined his service between c.1318 and 1321. His focus was his Welsh 'empire' and it was here that he placed many of his closest followers: Sir John Inge as sheriff of Glamorgan and Devon, John Botiller as his steward in Staffordshire, Worcestershire and Gloucestershire, John Iweyn as constable of Newport, William Dene as steward in Gloucestershire, John Hampton as sheriff then escheator of Gloucester, and Thomas Dene as constable of Carmarthen, chamberlain of South Wales and then receiver in Cantrefmawr. Others more tangentially connected included Adam Bouwes, steward of Usk in 1325, who was probably a Despenser man,<sup>97</sup> and William Martel, constable of Gloucester castle in 1322, an ex-Contrariant who received a pardon at Despenser's request.<sup>98</sup> But all these were Englishmen. None of the life retainers were men from Glamorgan, something that had a catastrophic effect in 1326. The only Welshman of any standing in Despenser's retinue was Sir Rhys ap Gruffydd of Carmarthenshire.<sup>99</sup> He became part of the Despenser circle some time before 11 May 1322 when the younger Hugh sealed an indented lease granting him the castles of Dryslwyn and Dinefwr and all land in Cantrefmawr for seven years, at an annual rent of £500.<sup>100</sup> His standing at court was underlined when he was nominated deputy-justiciar – the first Welshman after the Conquest to assume effective control over the government of South Wales.<sup>101</sup> Rhys fled after the Despensers' executions, having tried and failed to help Edward II escape from Berkeley Castle and was consistently at odds with Roger Mortimer. Nevertheless, this

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<sup>96</sup> J.C. Davies, 'The Despenser War in Glamorgan', *TRHS*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ser., 9 (1915), 21-64; R.A. Griffiths, 'The Revolt of Llywelyn Bren, 1316', repr. *Conquerors and conquered in medieval Wales* (Stroud 1994), 89-90.

<sup>97</sup> E 40/4881.

<sup>98</sup> *CPR 1321-24*, 400.

<sup>99</sup> Griffiths, *Principality of Wales*, 99-102.

<sup>100</sup> *CAID*, A4878. Since the original rent on these lands was valued at 300 marks (*CPR 1317-21*, 255), Despenser made a tidy 250 per cent profit.

<sup>101</sup> R.A. Griffiths, 'Gentlemen and Rebels in Later Medieval Cardiganshire', repr. *Conquerors and conquered*, 55.

reaction was driven by the amount he had to lose when Edward II fell, rather than providing any comment on the Despenser retaining policy.

The inability of Hugh the younger to rally local supporters to his banner in October 1326 begs a number of questions of his ability as a lord. The fact that he was hated in Wales was not new: thirty thousand tenants of Glamorgan had renounced their fealty in 1321, and in response Hugh had ordered Sir John Inge to take Welsh hostages.<sup>102</sup> Yet the men of Despenser's affinity were not members of the local gentry but shrewd political players from across England. Many had already made their careers before they came into his sphere of influence and most obtained pardons within a few months of his execution. Sir Robert Waterville of Orton (Hunts.), who had only been with the Despensers for a year or two, needed little incentive to change sides and was actually one of those who invited the young Edward to become keeper of the realm on 26 October.<sup>103</sup> Nor did Hugh Turplington, who instantly traded his loyalty to Mortimer and Isabella and served Mortimer faithfully before his death in the coup at Nottingham Castle.<sup>104</sup> Yet a survey of the lists of household knights and esquires for 1327-30 shows that most retainers, such as Sir John Inge, were extremely fortunate to escape with a pardon.<sup>105</sup> Letters which survive from the 1320s underline Inge's complicity in Despenser's plots: without any doubt, he was one of the closest men to his lord.<sup>106</sup> Perhaps the fact that his brother Henry had been one of those who tried Gaveston in 1312 served to palliate Inge's guilt;<sup>107</sup> in any case, king Edward III recognised his value and he is recorded as custodian of Chirk in 1331-32,<sup>108</sup> and before his death served on a commission of oyer and terminer with Hugh III.<sup>109</sup> But the most loyal supporters were naturally those most inextricably linked to the family. Sir John Felton had received payment as a knight in the household before turning his back on royal service and becoming more fully involved

<sup>102</sup> *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, 111; *CAC Wales*, 180.

<sup>103</sup> Saul, 'Despensers', 14.

<sup>104</sup> E 101/383/8, f. 19r; *CPR 1327-30*, 102, 238; C. Shenton, 'Edward III and the Coup of 1330', in Bothwell, *Age of Edward III*, 16.

<sup>105</sup> Only Turplington appears to have been taken on by Isabella and Mortimer: E 101/383/8, ff. 19r-23r; C. Shenton, 'The English court and the restoration of royal prestige', unpublished DPhil thesis (University of Oxford 1995), Appendix 2.

<sup>106</sup> SC 1/37/6, SC 1/63/185; Clarke, *Cartae*, iii, nos. 892, 894-95, 908; *CAC Wales*, 180, 219-20, 220-21, 259-60. At one time Despenser entered into a recognisance of £300 for Inge's release from Southwark Prison, although the background to this incident is unclear: *CPR 1330-34*, 404.

<sup>107</sup> *Gesta Edwardi de Carnarvan, auctore canonico Bridlingtoniensi*, in Stubbs, *Chronicles*, ii, 43-44.

<sup>108</sup> N. Fryde (ed.), *Calendar of Welsh Entries in the Memoranda Rolls, 1282-1343* (Cardiff 1974), 86, 88. Inge also witnessed Hugh III's receipt of 1000 marks for Denbigh: BL Egerton Roll 8715.

<sup>109</sup> *CPR 1338-40*, 183.



with the Despensers.<sup>110</sup> By August 1326 he was receiving payment as a permanent retainer.<sup>111</sup> After the invasion, he held out at Caerphilly until well into the New Year before submitting to William la Zouche. Sir Rhys ap Gruffydd was not pardoned until 1328, and John Molyns earned his pardon by his involvement in Edward III's coup in 1330.<sup>112</sup> But the scramble for personal salvation underlines the fact that Despenser failed to recognise the importance of lordship: he did not buy it through county offices nor could he command it through the exercise of 'popular' patronage.

A similar parallel exists in 1399. We saw earlier that the three life indentures sealed by Thomas Despenser requested additional men. His lack of peacetime support was underlined in a request for William Cheryton of Llanthony Priory, near Abergavenny, to supply him with 5 men-at-arms and 15 archers to attend parliament in September 1397.<sup>113</sup> When Bolingbroke's invasion took place Despenser and his retinue were in Ireland with the king. According to Adam Usk, on arrival home Despenser was sent to Glamorgan to raise reinforcements.<sup>114</sup> To the king's amazement none were forthcoming. Richard was forced to abandon his plans to fortify his troops in south Wales and headed north with Despenser and a small band of supporters to Conway, where he was eventually captured. This whole scenario is eerily akin to Edward II's flight with the younger Hugh in 1326. Why did the retinue fail to turn out for their lord again? Perhaps the answer is the same suggested for Richard II's own followers, that although Richard's affinity was in place in 1399, when it mattered there was no one to lead it.<sup>115</sup> However, the reverse seems to be true for Thomas: whereas Richard failed to look to his men until it was too late, Thomas appears not to have bothered with them in the first place. In 1397, a young earl (he was only twenty-four), heady with success, could hardly have realised the need to prepare for every eventuality.<sup>116</sup> Nevertheless, in summer 1399 the unexpected happened and because they had both failed to implement 'good lordship', there was nothing he or his

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<sup>110</sup> SAL MS 121, ff. 110v, 124v; BL Cotton MS Nero C.VIII, f. 94r; SC 1/60/130.

<sup>111</sup> SAL MS 122, f. 40r.

<sup>112</sup> Eventually pardoned on 28 March 1331: *CPR 1330-34*, 110.

<sup>113</sup> C 115/78, f. 193.

<sup>114</sup> *Adam of Usk*, 58-59. The chronology of the king's return from Ireland is notoriously difficult to pin down: D. Johnson, 'Richard II's departure from Ireland, July 1399', *EHR* 98 (1983), 785-805; J.W. Sherborne, 'Richard II's Return to Wales, July 1399', repr. *War, Politics and Culture in Fourteenth-Century England* (London 1994), 119-129 (esp. p. 122); Saul, *Richard II*, 409-13. However, Despenser's journey is substantiated by other documentation. On 23 July, seventeen shillings were paid to one John Shortegrove who at the instigation of John Frome and Richard Ruyhale had provided a dozen archers from the Forest of Dean to protect the earl of Gloucester on his journey to Caerphilly: E 101/511/29/8.

<sup>115</sup> Given-Wilson, *Royal Household*, 226.

<sup>116</sup> According to the duke of Norfolk, Despenser was 'the last and least' of the counter-appellants: C. Given-Wilson, 'Richard II, Edward II and the Lancastrian Inheritance', *EHR* 109 (1994), 556.

king could do to stop it. It is ironic that by their continuing indifference to the men of Glamorgan, it was the Despensers themselves who were instrumental in bringing down two English kings.

It was not just the local men who failed to turn out. As in 1326, most of Thomas's close allies chose to follow the example of his cousin Hugh V, and submitted to Bolingbroke. William Hamme, only retained for life on 27 October 1399, could not have been expected to remain loyal to Richard II, and was confirmed in his fee by Henry IV in April 1400.<sup>117</sup> Thomas Sprotley had to wait until September 1400 until he was confirmed as constable of Kenfig Castle, which he received from Despenser in 1396.<sup>118</sup> On the other hand, John Wilcotes of Great Tew, Oxfordshire, managed to get his life retaining fee confirmed by Henry IV on 15 January 1400, just a day after Despenser's execution in Bristol.<sup>119</sup> Wilcotes must have gone to Henry as soon as the Epiphany plot was known, abandoning his lord in favour of his own salvation. He later served the earl of Stafford, the earl marshal (before he too was implicated in rebellion) and finally the Prince of Wales, but as Saul comments, 'a willingness to serve any master implied a willingness to die for none'.<sup>120</sup> Wilcotes' brother William acted similarly. He received protection in 1389 to serve in Brittany with Hugh Despenser V and then moved into Thomas Despenser's circle, acting as his attorney in 1394.<sup>121</sup> Both men served together on peace commissions in 1397 and 1399, but William was no more prepared to be tarred with the brush of rebellion than his brother. He immediately submitted to Henry IV and in November 1399 was appointed sheriff of Oxfordshire and Berkshire, an office he had held six years earlier. By a prudence borne of long political experience, both brothers seamlessly allied themselves to the new regime. When Richard II's *duketti*, stripped of their titles, rose in pathetic rebellion, their men did not follow because they saw no reason to die. Thomas Despenser's ultimate failure came because he was unable to instil in his affinity the same ideology which Richard II had planted in him.

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<sup>117</sup> Hamme was granted a annual fee of £12 in March 1402 'for his probity and good service to the king': CPR 1401-5, 37, cited by Jones and Walker (eds.), 'Private Indentures', 125 n.221.

<sup>118</sup> CPR 1399-1402, 263, 336. He continued in Despenser employment: SC 6/1292/3/5, nos. 3-4.

<sup>119</sup> CPR 1399-1402, 189.

<sup>120</sup> Saul, 'Despensers', 16. For the family: *Commons 1386-1421*, iv, 860-66; F.N. McNamara, 'The Wilcotes Family', *The Berks, Bucks and Oxon Archaeological Journal* 3 (1898), 97-107; corrected by W.F. Carter, 'The Wilcotes Family', *ibid.* 12 (1906-7), 107-13; 13 (1907-8), 18-21.

<sup>121</sup> C 76/74, m. 25; CPR 1391-96, 507.

## Conclusion

The southern March was not an easy area over which to exercise control. Retaining proceeded quietly but successfully before 1307, just as it did for much of the century. Service with the Despensors was the first rung on the political ladder for men like Sir Edward Dalyngrigge, and despite the fact that none of the retainers were local men, the French war and favourable political climate negated what later proved to be a crucial oversight. Marriage in particular was used to create or reinforce associations between lord and patron, although the example of Peter Ovedale suggests how this could also be used as a weapon. By and large, the Despensors maintained their position despite problems. Yet the fact remains that none of the family systematically rewarded their supporters or bothered to take control of local offices. They seemed incapable of recognising the need for support in their Glamorgan heartland. While this did not matter when Edward III was on the throne, the Despensors' errant retaining policy during the troubled reigns of Edward II and Richard II greatly contributed to their downfall.

## 5

## The Despensers and their Estates

IN common with every other fourteenth-century noble lord, the Despensers acquired most of their income from just one source, their estates. Land ensured the continuation of a dynasty, provided a bargaining tool when competing for a good marriage and guaranteed a position of local power and lordship. But a cluster of estates did not simply bring wealth or respectability. For the Despensers, as for others, they provided much-needed tangible proof of royal favour. This chapter takes a thematic approach in analysing the Despenser estates. It deals first with problems of evidence and outlines the economic backdrop of the fourteenth century, before placing the Despenser lands in the context of great magnate holdings by establishing the patrimony of Hugh the elder and younger. One important consequence of the chapter – one that is pivotal to the entire thesis – is the relegation of the 1320s from its traditional central position. This chapter recognises that the recovery of property and political rehabilitation during Edward III's reign were more significant than the land-grabbing of the 1320s, and the estates are thus used as a point of departure for a discussion of minorities and the value of crown-noble relations during the middle of the century. The chapter concludes with an examination of the effect of local economic conditions on the family's estate administration and explains the importance of the Despenser dowagers in the transmission and retention of property.

Evidence for the great magnate estates is inconsistent at best and manorial accounts, surveys and *valors* detailing Despenser lands are few and far between. Almost all that have survived are from 1327-28, which is useful to see the extraordinary extent of

Despenser domination in the 1320s but provides little to help a more wide-ranging survey. By contrast, scholars have taken advantage of the random survival of private archives belonging to the Percies, Mortimers, Talbots, Beauchamps, Montagus and Courtenays, as well as the exceptional accounts of Elizabeth de Burgh, kinswoman to the younger Despenser.<sup>1</sup> As Michael Altschul found in his study on the thirteenth-century Clares, the lack of manorial accounts in Glamorgan – compared with, say, Chirkland or Brecon – is particularly problematic.<sup>2</sup> These documents record how individual elements of a manor were managed and set out their yield over the agricultural year, providing the raw data from which changes in the medieval economy may be understood. Most importantly in this context they show patterns of estate management, lord-peasant relations and the quality of administration by employees.<sup>3</sup> Lacking this data for the Despensers, this chapter relies almost exclusively upon government accounts made during the lengthy periods of royal control.<sup>4</sup>

Next it is necessary to sketch the economic circumstances in which the Despensers operated.<sup>5</sup> In the third quarter of the thirteenth century, England was prosperous: her population had never been higher, the economy was expanding and with it the opportunities for profit. Agriculture became more commercialised and rural land use was evolving. However, a series of economic and social crises, falling temperatures and famine drastically changed the face of north-west Europe. To begin with, the famine of

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<sup>1</sup> Holmes, *Estates*; J.M.W. Bean, *The Estates of the Percy Family 1416-1537* (Oxford 1958); A.J. Pollard, 'Estates Management in the Later Middle Ages: The Talbots and Whitchurch, 1383-1525', *EcHR* 25 (1972), 553-66; M.M.N. Stansfield, 'The Holand Family, Dukes of Exeter, Earls of Kent and Huntingdon, 1352-1475', unpublished DPhil thesis (University of Oxford 1987); M.W. Warner, 'The Montagu Earls of Salisbury circa 1300-1428: A Study in Warfare, Politics and Political Culture', unpublished PhD thesis (University College, London 1991); J.C. Ward, 'Elizabeth de Burgh, Lady of Clare (d. 1360)', in C.M. Barron and A.F. Sutton (eds.), *Medieval London Widows, 1300-1500* (London 1994), 29-45; F. Underhill, *For Her Good Estate: the Life of Elizabeth de Burgh* (New York 1999), esp. 61-83; and more generally McFarlane, 'The Nobility and the Land', repr. *Nobility*, 41-60.

<sup>2</sup> M. Altschul, *A Baronial Family in Medieval England: the Clares 1217-1314* (Baltimore 1965), 201-95; L.O.W. Smith, 'The Lordships of Chirk and Oswestry, 1281-1415', unpublished PhD thesis (University of London 1970).

<sup>3</sup> M. Bailey (ed.), *The English Manor c.1200-c.1500* (Manchester and New York 2002), 97-116.

<sup>4</sup> See comments about this material in C.D. Ross and T.B. Pugh, 'Materials for the Study of Baronial Incomes in Fifteenth-Century England', *EcHR* 6 (1953), 185-89; also R.R. Davies, 'Baronial Accounts, Incomes, and Arrears in the Later Middle Ages', *EcHR* 21 (1968), 211-29.

<sup>5</sup> J. Hatcher, *Plague, Population and the English Economy, 1348-1500* (London 1977), 29-54; E. Miller and J. Hatcher, *Medieval England: Rural Society and Economic Change, 1086-1348* (London 1978), 240-49 and *passim*; B.F. Harvey, 'Introduction: the 'crisis' of the early fourteenth century', in B.M.S. Campbell (ed.), *Before the Black Death: Studies in the Crisis of the Early Fourteenth Century* (Manchester 1991), 1-24; E. Miller, 'Introduction: Land and People', in id. (ed.), *AHEW*, iii, 1-33; S.J. Payling, 'Social mobility, demographic change, and landed society in late medieval England', *EcHR* 45 (1992), 51-73; R.H. Britnell, *The commercialisation of English society, 1000-1500* (Cambridge 1993), parts 2-3, *passim*; B.M.S. Campbell, *English Seigniorial Agriculture, 1250-1450* (Cambridge 2000), 3-10 and *passim*.

1315-17 was 'the worst agrarian crisis since manorial records began [in England]'.<sup>6</sup> Barely three decades later, the pandemic of 1348-49 wiped out almost a third of Europe's population, with recurring outbreaks in 1361, 1368 and 1390. Despite a modern view that in the long-term the Black Death was 'more purgative than toxic',<sup>7</sup> the effects were undeniably catastrophic. The ensuing demographic changes underlie much of the history of fourteenth-century land-ownership as recurrent plague made labour scarce. Even the great magnate estates were affected: Pollard found that economic trends in Shropshire had a far greater effect on the Talbots' income than any mismanagement of estates.<sup>8</sup> Welsh manors were no more immune to the demographic changes brought about by disrupted manorial cultivation in western Europe than their English equivalents.<sup>9</sup> But larger Marcher estates rode out the storm. Even when rents were short, lords heard cases in their own courts and brought pressure to bear on defaulters.<sup>10</sup> Magnates in royal favour could also counter the contracting economy by additional income in the form of rewards, booty or wages of war, and marriages could yield unpredictable windfalls. When Edward Despenser's wife's family, the lords Burghersh, failed in the male line in 1369, the lordship of Ewyas Lacy passed into his hands.<sup>11</sup> Two generations later the second earl of Northumberland married Richard Despenser's widow who brought a substantial dower of £500.<sup>12</sup> For the fortunate few, this staccato increase in wealth staved off potential financial crises. The law of inheritance was so deep-rooted that a noble family, provided they could survive in the male line, usually maintained and even increased their estates.<sup>13</sup> Whilst never independent of wider economic constraints, the nobility were able to work within them, receiving a steady, if reduced income from ordinary revenues.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> E.B. Fryde, *Landlords and Peasants in Later Medieval England* (Stroud 1996), 12; see also I. Kershaw, 'The great famine and agrarian crisis in England, 1315-22', *P & P* 59 (1973), 3-50.

<sup>7</sup> A.R. Bridbury, 'The Black Death', *EcHR* 26 (1973), 591.

<sup>8</sup> Pollard, 'The Talbots and Whitchurch', 565.

<sup>9</sup> D.H. Owen, 'The Occupation of the Land: Wales and the Marches', in Miller (ed.), *AHEW*, iii, 97-106.

<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, the traditional volatility of the March guaranteed that the collecting of judicial fines was never straightforward, especially during times of political or social unrest: in Glamorgan, total revenue for the town of Cardiff fell by more than half between 1316 and 1349 (W. Rees, *South Wales and the March, 1284-1415: a Social and Agrarian Study* (Oxford 1924), 243 n.4).

<sup>11</sup> DL 27/217, Thomas earl of Gloucester's seal from 1398, comprises elements of the Despenser, Clare and Burghersh arms.

<sup>12</sup> Bean, *Percy Family*, 83 n.4, 104-8.

<sup>13</sup> Holmes, *Estates*, 40; McFarlane, 'The Nobility and the Land', 59-60.

<sup>14</sup> Pollard, 'The Talbots and Whitchurch', 566.

## Patrimony

‘Lordship without a territorial basis was inconceivable’, and ‘nowhere was authority more immediate or untrammelled than in the lord’s demesne’.<sup>15</sup> Every lord had his *caput honoris*, a favourite residence where the household was normally based and he usually lived when not at court.<sup>16</sup> The Vale of Glamorgan, with its great strongholds of Cardiff and Caerphilly, was the Despenser heartland. Stretching from the foothills of the Brecons in the north through the Taff and Rhondda valleys to the River Severn, it provided a valuable outlet to the sea, allowing the family to trade and exploit a land that in truth they rarely visited. This was not a particular failing of the Despensers, as by this time the southern March had become a land of powerful absentee landlords whose authority was exercised by deputies. The Despensers’ identification of the region was limited, despite the ambitions of both the younger Hugh and Thomas. None of the Despensers appear to have been popular local lords, although judgement by the standards of the 1320s has been a common trend. The purple prose of a Somerset antiquarian – writing, not of Hugh junior, but of Thomas – provides an example:

They would take what they pleased, a fine beast, a horse, or a fine woman, and carry their prey off to their colossal castle of Caerphilly, so that when anything of the kind was lost, or not known where it might be found, the common expression was ‘it has gone to Caerphilly’, which was tantamount to saying ‘it has gone to the devil’.<sup>17</sup>

From what little evidence we have it was the castles at Cardiff and Hanley (Worcs.), rather than Caerphilly, that were the residences of choice for the Despenser males.<sup>18</sup> When their husbands were absent the Despenser women also preferred Hanley, further from the Welsh border and part of the dower of successive Despenser widows. It was from here that Eleanor was ‘abducted’ by William Zouche in 1329; later, both Elizabeth,

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<sup>15</sup> Davies, *Lordship and Society*, 86, 107.

<sup>16</sup> Given-Wilson, *English nobility*, 104-5.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted by J.F. Nicholls and J. Taylor, *Bristol: Past and Present* (Bristol 1881), 194.

<sup>18</sup> E 101/511/29/1, 7, 9. In London, Thomas Despenser resided at a house in Friday Street that backed onto a monastery (CPR 1391-96, 302; E 101/511/29/2, 3, 6, 8, 10), and obtained permission to create a doorway through which he could pass from the house straight into the church (CPL 1404-15, 544). After his death, the house passed to ‘a certain temporal lady of these parts’, who continued to make use of the doorway, until the abbess and nuns complained to the abbot of Westminster who agreed to have the entrance walled up.

wife of Edward, and Constance, wife of Thomas, frequented the castle.<sup>19</sup> Richard II also stayed here on his way to Ireland in 1395 and 1399.

If Cardiff and Hanley were their homes, then Tewkesbury, seven miles north of Gloucester, was the Despensers' spiritual abode.<sup>20</sup> Six generations of the family were buried in the abbey church of St Mary and lavish improvements – modelled on changes made by Henry III at Westminster – were made in a deliberate attempt to emulate their geographical ancestors. Eleanor Despenser's blue blood and her husband's ambition contributed a chivalric 'image of Paradise' in soaring Decorated arches and ornate window glass. Hugh III and his wife are buried together in canopied tombs beneath magnificent alabaster effigies, and Guy lord Brian, who married Hugh's widow, lies nearby. Grandest of all is Edward Despenser's life-sized image on top of his chantry tomb, wearing full armour and kneeling in prayer. Yet the family were not the last to use the abbey. In 1452, Warwick 'the Kingmaker', anxious to pay heed to his own Despenser ancestry, endowed his brother-in-law's chantry at Tewkesbury and confirmed charters to the abbey made by his predecessors.<sup>21</sup> But as his elaborate tomb at Warwick shows, the earl was already powerful, and did not need Tewkesbury to enhance his position. The Despensers did, and their use of the abbey was enhanced by a number of endowments by various members of the family.<sup>22</sup> The abbey held extensive lands of the lords of Glamorgan,<sup>23</sup> and the Despensers also held court in the town, which in May 1327 was valued at £132.<sup>24</sup> In 1343 Hugh III appropriated the parish church of Llantrissant in Glamorgan to the abbey,<sup>25</sup> and in 1347 (described as 'patron of the

<sup>19</sup> SC 6/1292/3/3, no. 2; SC 6/1292/3/4, no. 2; E 101/511/12/1-2; CPR 1377-81, 395; 1381-85, 278; 1399-1402, 178, 460.

<sup>20</sup> See below, chapter 6(a).

<sup>21</sup> M.A. Hicks, *Warwick the Kingmaker* (Oxford 1998), 61-62. Warwick's Despenser ancestry is painted on the wall of the great hall at Warwick Castle and emphasised in Bodl. MS Lat. Misc. b.2 (R), m. 4d (a copy is currently being prepared by Dr John Goodall for the SAL's *Aspilogia* series), the Warwick Rolls of John Rous (College of Arms, MS Cat. 39, printed in W.H. Courthope (ed.), *The Rous Roll* (London 1859); BL Add. MS 48976), the Pageant of Richard Beauchamp (BL Cotton MS Julius E.IV, article 6, ff. 27v-28r, printed in A. Sinclair (ed.), *The Beauchamp Pageant* (Donington 2003), 158-61), and the Black Book of Woodcote (Warwickshire RO, CF 26/4, f. 103). I am grateful to Professor David Smith for the latter reference. See further E. Mason, 'Legends of the Beauchamps' ancestors: the use of baronial propaganda in medieval England', *JMH* 10 (1984), 25-40; R.K. Morris, 'The Architecture of the Earls of Warwick in the Fourteenth Century', in W.M. Ormrod (ed.), *England in the Fourteenth Century: Proceedings of the 1985 Harlaxton Symposium* (Woodbridge 1986), 161-74.

<sup>22</sup> Bodl. MS Top. Glouc. d.2, ff. 22r-32r.

<sup>23</sup> W. Rees, 'The possessions of the abbot of Tewkesbury in Glamorgan', *South Wales and Monmouthshire Record Society* 2 (1950), 139-52.

<sup>24</sup> SC 11/Roll 249; CChR 1300-26, 463; CPR 1324-27, 206; and more generally, *VCH Glos.*, viii, 146-47.

<sup>25</sup> CPR 1343-45, 118. In the *Chronica de Theokesburie*, Hugh III is portrayed holding a miniature church building in his hand, probably that of Llantrissant: Bodl. MS Top. Glouc. d.2, f. 22v. See Figure 4.



monastery of St Mary<sup>26</sup>) he granted three acres of land in frank almoin that prayers might be said for his soul.<sup>26</sup> When Richard Beauchamp, earl of Warwick, became lord of Glamorgan through his marriage to Isabel Despenser in 1423, his estate officers went to Tewkesbury to have their accounts audited.<sup>27</sup> We may suppose that this was a pattern already set in place over the previous century. After 1423, the Despenser estates were gradually amalgamated with the larger Beauchamp estates, and by Isabel's death in 1439 auditing had moved permanently to Warwick.<sup>28</sup>

Although we saw earlier that sources for a study of the estates were obscure, the overall structure of the Despenser inheritance can be identified since the bulk of the estates arrived as part and parcel of the Clare inheritance. The apportioning of earl Gilbert's lands in 1317 among his three daughters and their eager husbands provides a convenient benchmark. When he adopted the title of lord of Glamorgan and Morgannwg, the younger Despenser knew he was in good company: as well as the earls of Gloucester, previous holders of the title had included King John and Robert FitzHamon, founder of Tewkesbury Abbey and kinsman to the Conqueror. Since the acquisitions of the 1320s were forfeit permanently in 1327, the Clare inheritance formed the core of the Despenser estates until the fifteenth century, and the marriage took on a major political significance. In 1317 Hugh the younger inherited lands in ten counties, the majority of which were in Oxfordshire, Worcestershire, Gloucestershire and the March of Wales.<sup>29</sup> He became lord of the castles of Hanley, Cardiff, Caerphilly, Neath, Llanblethian, Kenfig, Llantrissant and Talvan, together with their surrounding manors and towns; the manors of Tewkesbury, Fairford, Great Marlow, Stanford, Rotherfield, Burford, Shipton and Caversham; and a third of the liberty of Kilkenny in southern Ireland. The total annual value of the inheritance was £2443 12s 6¼d,<sup>30</sup> of which Glamorgan yielded almost half, augmenting – indeed, far outstripping – those held by the elder Hugh.

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<sup>26</sup> *VCH Glos.*, ii, 63.

<sup>27</sup> Gloucester RO, D184/M15/1.

<sup>28</sup> Gloucester RO, D184/M15/6.

<sup>29</sup> English lands are in C 47/9/24; Welsh lands in Clarke, *Cartae*, iii, 1048-56.

<sup>30</sup> Various scholars have produced different figures from the same documents: J.C. Davies, 'The Despenser War in Glamorgan', *TRHS* 3<sup>rd</sup> ser., 9 (1915), 25; *GCH*, 603 n.2; Fryde, *Tyranny*, 34. I have followed T.B. Pugh's calculations in *GCH*, which include reversions (described as 'possibly on the high side' by Davies, *Lordship and Society*, 188 n.50).

Yet Despenser senior, lord of the Basset lands inherited from his mother and the Beauchamp estates of his late wife, had not been idle as he rose in the king's favour. There is substantial evidence to suggest that he was deliberately bolstering his claims on the properties surrounding his estates in the Midlands and Wiltshire, with a number of piecemeal enfeoffments in Winterburn Basset, Compton Basset, Berwick Basset and Wootton Basset (Wilts.), and Wycombe (Bucks.).<sup>31</sup> In 1297 he obtained the manor of Greenhampstead (or 'la Musard') from Malcolm Musard; the following year, Musard's father Nicholas relinquished all claims in the manor.<sup>32</sup> In 1303 Hugh purchased land adjacent to Greenhampstead from his Cornish retainer Henry Pembridge and in 1307 obtained the neighbouring manor of Winston from Geoffrey Pulham and Stoke Mandeville from Drogo Barentyne.<sup>33</sup> He also made a series of canny exchanges with families holding reversions of the Basset lands in the West Midlands.<sup>34</sup> Despenser's administrative abilities appear to have been reflected in his estate management. Two of his chief Wiltshire residences, Vasterne and Wootton Basset, both in Kingsbridge hundred, had been jointly valued at £53 11s 8¼d in 1281. After Despenser had owned them they were separately valued at £60 10s and £56 respectively.<sup>35</sup>

A continual trickle of wealth marked the elder Hugh's increased reputation at the highest level. In 1296 'for good service' he obtained the manor of Kirtlington from his stepmother the countess of Warwick, to be held in fee simple.<sup>36</sup> Two years later the earl of Gloucester demised to Despenser the Northamptonshire manors of Rothwell and Naseby, and in 1302 he entered a bond with Robert Kaynes in which he was to receive Tarrant Kaynes and Combe Kaynes (Dorset), together with other Northamptonshire and Warwickshire manors.<sup>37</sup> Most interesting of all was the decision in 1304 by John of Pontoise, bishop of Winchester, to grant Despenser all his French lands.<sup>38</sup> Presumably

<sup>31</sup> E 401/132 *sub* 12 October 1294; E 401/138 (no date); E 401/139 (no date); E 401/140 *sub* 8 October, 20 October 1295; E 401/144 *sub* 4 October 1298; E 401/145 *sub* 25 May 1299.

<sup>32</sup> *C-ID*, A927, 934. For his career, see R.H. Hilton, *A Medieval Society: the West Midlands at the End of the Thirteenth Century* (London 1966), 255-58.

<sup>33</sup> Bodl. Wiltshire Charter 34; *C-ID*, A943, 946, 4839.

<sup>34</sup> The most notable was Hugh's forceable disseising of John Meysy from his manor of Marston Meysy (Wilts.) in 1305 or 1306: CP 40/360/94; J.S. Bothwell, *Edward III and the English Peerage: royal patronage, social mobility and political control in fourteenth-century England* (Woodbridge 2004), 119-20.

<sup>35</sup> E 142/33, m. 5; *VCH Wilts.*, ix, 194. Their value may explain why they were sacked in 1321 (*ibid.*, 190), but the fact that Despenser owned a prison in Vasterne hints at something more sinister (*Rot. Parl.*, ii, 416).

<sup>36</sup> *CPR 1292-1301*, 206. The reversion was due to one John Page of Curtlington, but was not recovered until 1326: Fryde, *Tyranny*, 30.

<sup>37</sup> *CPR 1292-1301*, 351; *C-ID*, A5848.

<sup>38</sup> R. Deedes (ed.), *Registrum Johannis de Pontissara, Episcopi Wyntoniensis, A.D. 1282-1304*, CYS 30 (London 1924), ii, Appendix 2.

an ally from his frequent missions abroad for Edward I, the bishop also made Hugh an executor of his will.<sup>39</sup> He then obtained the manor of Deddington (Oxon.) which he gave to his clerk Robert Harwedon whilst keeping the reversion for himself.<sup>40</sup> Fryde points out that although Hugh senior handed over some East Anglian properties to his son, he kept the ancestral inheritance to himself.<sup>41</sup> Perhaps this was greed; more probably it was evidence of the pragmatism that marked the first half of his political career. Nevertheless, despite these efforts it was the Clare estates, stretching across southern England from Wales to Essex, that formed the nucleus of the Despenser inheritance for more than one hundred years. In 1461 when Edward IV revoked the forfeiture of 1400 in favour of his cousin Warwick, many of the estates conveyed were those through which the younger Despenser had first ridden in 1317.<sup>42</sup>

### Tyranny by land: the 1320s

After Bannockburn the younger Despenser's ambition became clear for all to see. His rapacious acquisition of land in Wales which directly caused the civil war of 1321 have been well documented,<sup>43</sup> and a brief recap will suffice. From 1317, when the estates were handed over, until mid-1321, when the Despensers were exiled, the younger Hugh attempted to systematically take over south Wales. In 1318 King Edward II granted him the castle and town of Dryslwyn and the lordship of Cantref Mawr in west Wales; Hugh also took fealty of the residents in Hugh Audley's portion of Gwynllwg before its new owner could take possession, eventually forcing Audley and his wife Margaret Clare to exchange their lands for less valuable English manors. T.B. Pugh has emphasised Despenser's efforts to arrogate only Welsh lands; it seems certain that he had a considerable disdain for his English properties. When he attempted to annex the Braose lordship of Gower, held by one of the oldest and most abrasive families in Wales, it provoked a constitutional controversy that enflamed the March and hurled the region into civil war.

<sup>39</sup> A.W. Goodman (ed.), *Registrum Henrici Woodstock, Dioc. Wyntoniensi, A.D. 1305-1316*, CYS 44 (Oxford 1941), ii, 902-3, 906.

<sup>40</sup> SC 8/15/727.

<sup>41</sup> Fryde, *Tyranny*, 31.

<sup>42</sup> M.A. Hicks, 'An escheat concealed: the Despenser forfeitures 1400-61', *Proceedings of the Hampshire Field Club and Archaeological Society* 53 (1998), 183-89.

<sup>43</sup> Davies, 'The Despenser War in Glamorgan', 21-64; T.F. Tout, *The Place of the Reign of Edward II in English History*, 2nd edn. (Manchester 1936), 136-41; GCH, 168-72; Fryde, *Tyranny*, 33-42. From a Welsh perspective: J.B. Smith, 'Edward II and the Allegiance of Wales', *Welsh Historical Review* 8 (1976-77), 157-64.

Edward II defeated the baronial alliance formed against the Despensers and recalled his favourites in May 1322. The crown's confiscation of the rebel Contrariant properties secured a financial windfall the like of which had rarely been seen in English history. Shortly after confiscation the crown placed the lands under control of centrally appointed officers, in anticipation of granting the majority to the Despensers. One of these officers, Sir Ralph Camoys, had been part of the elder Hugh's affinity since 1301; another, Richard Foxcote, was Hugh junior's steward; a third, William Aylmer, was pardoned in 1327 for allegiance to the regime.<sup>44</sup> As S.L. Waugh has established, the Despensers' influence over the Contrariant properties was absolute.<sup>45</sup> It was probably at the younger Hugh's instigation that Edward II turned his back on any long-term investment policy to enhance the royal income either through direct cultivation of demesne lands or by leasing them for annual rent. As we have already seen, taking thought for the morrow was not a Despenser characteristic. Instead they made systematic attempts to strip the Contrariant lands of their assets: livestock, farm machinery, grain, plus any valuables which could be appropriated or sold.<sup>46</sup>

Free from any hindrance, the Despensers constructed an empire in the March which ran almost unbroken from Herefordshire to the Irish Sea. Hugh senior held the great northern lordship of Denbigh, worth more than £1000 per year, whilst Hugh junior possessed Abergavenny, Blaenllyfni, Brecon, Caerleon, Chepstow, Cilgerran, Gower, Iscennen, Newport, Pembroke and Usk.<sup>47</sup> Between them, the Despensers, the king and the earl of Arundel controlled three-quarters of Wales. After 1326 various surveys were carried out by the exchequer, one of which valued the estates held by the Despensers, Arundel and Robert Baldock at just under £11000.<sup>48</sup> The younger Hugh alone held lands worth over £7150 per annum, a figure necessarily incomplete since it is impossible to estimate the immense income derived from many of his Welsh holdings.<sup>49</sup> His treasury

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<sup>44</sup> See above, chapter 4.

<sup>45</sup> S.L. Waugh, 'The confiscated lands of the "Contrariants" in Gloucestershire and Herefordshire in 1322: an economic and social study', unpublished PhD thesis (University of London 1975), 108-13.

<sup>46</sup> Waugh, "Contrariants", 18-22.

<sup>47</sup> R.R. Davies, *The Age of Conquest: Wales 1063-1415* (Oxford 1991), 406, Appendix.

<sup>48</sup> E 142/33, covering land in Berks., Gloucs., Surrey, Sussex, Cambs. and Hunts. My calculation of £10989 16s 4d is slightly above the enrolled amount of £10688 6s 11d (*ibid.*, m. 8). Other surveys of Despenser property survive: E 142/34; E 142/53-59; E 142/61-62; E 143/10/1-3. For accounts of Despenser lands taken in 1327-28: SC 6/762/17; SC 6/770/2; SC 6/909/9; SC 6/953/21; SC 6/957/17; SC 6/969/24; SC 6/1088/15; SC 6/1292/3/1.

<sup>49</sup> Fryde, *Tyranny*, 107.

at Caerphilly yielded £13295 in cash,<sup>50</sup> and he was by far the most important client of the two Florentine banking companies, the Bardi and the Peruzzi. In January 1324 he had a total of £5886 7s 8d deposited with them, and his average annual deposits during the 1320s were larger than the sums annually transferred from England to the papal chamber in Avignon.<sup>51</sup> Such was the Peruzzi's reliance on Despenser's business that after his execution they took up to eight years to recover, having been compelled to return his deposits to the crown.<sup>52</sup> By contrast, the elder Hugh held more than £1800 in coin at Loughborough, one of his favourite manors, which he did his best to move to Leicester Abbey in the days before Isabella's invasion. He also stored £1000 at Malmesbury Abbey and other monies in Leicestershire and Surrey.<sup>53</sup> Despenser senior, now earl of Winchester, was actually the greatest beneficiary of English Contrariant lands, receiving a host of grants totalling £1665 and emphasised his ancestral holdings in the Midlands and Wiltshire. By contrast, the younger Hugh received most of the Welsh Contrariant lands to augment his 'empire'.<sup>54</sup>

The 1320s were a money-making venture for the Despensers. Hugh junior's actions were driven by self-aggrandisement and an almost pathological greed. The actual exploitation of estates was over-shadowed only by the methods the Despensers used to bully, threaten and terrorise vulnerable landowners to get what they wanted. The most infamous cases are those of Elizabeth de Burgh, Alina Mowbray, Mary St Pol, Elizabeth Comyn and Alice Lacy, Thomas of Lancaster's widow, but the catalogue of extortion is endless.<sup>55</sup> The flood of petitions received by the crown after the Despensers' executions were testimony to the terror they conveyed during their lives.<sup>56</sup> It may also be significant

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<sup>50</sup> E 101/383/8, f. 5r-v.

<sup>51</sup> E.B. Fryde, 'The Deposits of Hugh Despenser the Younger with Italian Bankers', *EcHR* 4 (1951), repr. *Studies in Medieval Trade and Finance* (London 1983), 348. Nevertheless, this was nothing compared with the £60000 in hard cash held by the earl of Arundel in 1376: C. Given-Wilson, 'Wealth and Credit, Public and Private: The Earls of Arundel 1306-1397', *EHR* 106 (1991), 1.

<sup>52</sup> Fryde, 'Deposits', 347; E.S. Hunt, *The Medieval Super Companies: a study of the Peruzzi company of Florence* (Cambridge 2002), 160-63. In 1336 the Peruzzi appealed to Edward III that they were not impeached for any further payments owed by the younger Hugh: *CPR 1334-38*, 343.

<sup>53</sup> *VCH Wilts.*, iii, 271; Fryde, 'Deposits', 358.

<sup>54</sup> *CChR 1300-26*, 441-52; Fryde, *Tyranny*, 108.

<sup>55</sup> Fryde, *Tyranny*, 109-118; C. Valente, *The Theory and Practice of Revolt in Medieval England* (Burlington, VT 2003), 153-59.

<sup>56</sup> *CPR 1327-30*, 27, 31, 32, 37, 39-40, 153, 200, 330, 393, 426, 433, 468, 510-11, 518, 557-58, 565; *1330-34*, 14, 74, 110, 132, 170, 290, 298, 370, 456, 459, 470, 551; *1334-38*, 200, 204, 314, 326; *CFR 1327-37*, 103, 221. The total value of recognisances owed to the Despensers (calculated from these references alone) was a staggering £24929 14s 6d. To this must also be added the £22000 in bonds by which William Montagu and Hugh Audley had been bound to the younger Hugh, and for which they were later pardoned by Edward III (Bothwell, *Edward III and the English Peerage*, 100), and the £5000 damages assessed against John Maltravers junior (*JUST 1/792*, mm. 1-4, 6-8).

that Edward II never granted the principality of Wales to his son, as he was expected to do. The principality had been created by Edward I for his son in 1301, and was to become the traditional patrimony of the heir to the throne. Perhaps the future Edward III was too young,<sup>57</sup> but it is still somewhat surprising that Edward II did not award him the principality. Alternatively, is it impossible that Hugh the younger was trying to convince the king to give it to *him*? For the younger Despenser, a man of such ruthlessness and extraordinary ambition, a wish to become lord of all Wales can not be ruled out. The speed of the regime's fall and methods of execution chosen in 1326 prompted J.R. Lander to conclude that the Despensers' reign of terror aroused more hatred and fear than any period of English history before or since,<sup>58</sup> and Geoffrey le Baker wrote of Hugh junior's *spiritus ambicionis et cupiditatis a viduarum et orfanorum exheredacione in necem nobilium regis precipuorum*.<sup>59</sup> If this supposition were true, and Edward II really did intend to grant the principality of Wales to Despenser, it would certainly explain Edward III's determination to endow his eldest son (the Black Prince) with 'the most extensive collection of titles and territories held by a Plantagenet heir since the twelfth century, [to] guarantee the integrity of the royal patrimony in England, Wales, Ireland and Aquitaine'.<sup>60</sup> Never in his fifty-year reign would such a danger exist.

However, it is important to establish where the 1320s lie in the wider history of the Despensers, since it is for these years that the family is best known. In 1327 all their lands were declared forfeit, and properties obtained between 1317 and 1326 were never returned. Most of the illicit estates, as well as the Basset holdings in Wiltshire, went directly to Isabella and Mortimer, whilst the bulk of the Clare inheritance went to Edward III's uncles, the earls of Norfolk and Kent.<sup>61</sup> Yet when the new regime was itself destroyed in 1330, the young king began to look to those who would be his loyal supporters. He began to grant properties back piecemeal to descendants of the Despensers, beginning as early as 20 November 1331. On that date, the imprisoned Hugh III received the manor of Frithby (Leics.) as part of a promise of 200 marks per annum in land and rent.<sup>62</sup> On his release from prison in February 1332 Ashley and

<sup>57</sup> Given-Wilson, *English nobility*, 186 n.24.

<sup>58</sup> J.R. Lander, reviewing Fryde, *Tyranny*, in *American Historical Review* 85 (1980), 869 (cited above, chapter 2(b)).

<sup>59</sup> E.M. Thompson (ed.), *Chronicon Galfridi le Baker de Suynebroke* (Oxford 1889), 7.

<sup>60</sup> W.M. Ormrod, 'Edward III and His Family', *JBS* 26 (1987), 414.

<sup>61</sup> *CCR* 1327-41, 2-4; *CPR* 1327-30, 97, 246; *CCR* 1327-30, 67.

<sup>62</sup> *CCR* 1327-37, 289; 37-38, 46-47. Frithby had long been a Despenser manor: *CPR* 1258-65, 459.

Upsombourne (Hants.) were granted, and in October the crown added a further Hampshire manor, Mapledurwell, plus Thorley and Wellow (Isle of Wight). The following August the grant was extended in reward for Despenser's involvement in the young king's first military victory at Halidon Hill, thus marking another occasion in which service in war had assisted the family's fortunes. All were confirmed in perpetuity in 1337 when Hugh III took livery of his mother's lands.<sup>63</sup> It seems that by their very survival, the Despensers were destined to become great again, not by aggression this time, but by the king's preference for reconciliation over revenge.

### Minorities

Edward III's treatment of rebel estates deserves comment, as does the administration of the Despenser properties during a series of long minorities. Noticeably, Edward did not continue his father's policy of exploiting rebel lands, perhaps realising the inherent danger in alienating powerful members of the noble community whose support he needed. At the time of the Scottish and French wars, the crown's need for loyal and capable warriors had never been higher. It is more than a coincidence that Hugh III should have received livery of his mother's dower lands in 1337, the same year as Edward III's peerage elevations and the time that war began with France. The former was the clearest affirmation possible of the crown's intention to stand by its redistribution of forfeited lands.<sup>64</sup> Edward III's success in this regard came by gradually returning land to those families who wreaked havoc in the 1320s. He not only ensured that in the early years of his reign none of the potential troublemakers could establish a powerbase, but gradually harnessed the loyalties of the young, disinherited and fatherless.<sup>65</sup> Richard FitzAlan, son of the executed earl of Arundel, Roger Mortimer, infant grandson of the executed earl of March, and Hugh Despenser III all received varying degrees of favour from Edward III. Arundel was restored to his earldom as early as 1330 and in autumn 1331 Mortimer was allowed to retain Wigmore. Despenser, as we saw, received Frithby at the same time. All three went on to become loyal servants of Edward III. But whereas Arundel and Mortimer petitioned parliament in 1351 and 1354

<sup>63</sup> CPR 1330-34, 267, 342, 462, 551; 1334-38, 462.

<sup>64</sup> J.S. Bothwell, 'Edward III, the English Peerage and the 1337 Earls: Estate Redistribution in Fourteenth-Century England', in Bothwell, *Age of Edward III*, esp. 51.

<sup>65</sup> A more general discussion may be found below, chapter 6(b).

for a reversal of their ancestors' forfeiture, the Despensers, thrown into another minority by the death of Hugh III in 1349, were unable to do the same. It is usually assumed that the restitution of the Despensers was such a major event that only Richard II in his tyranny was prepared to meet the challenge. Instead it may be that the family always intended to have this reversed but were prevented by minority. Reversal of the judgement of treason on Arundel and Mortimer's ancestors was no more controversial than restoring the Despensers, and if Hugh III had survived it seems unlikely that the king would have turned down one of his most successful military commanders, particularly one who could support magnate status. In any case, it would be a mistake to assume that the Despensers were destined to suffer 'worse' treatment because of the legacy of 1322-26. Deaths in 1326, 1349, 1375, 1400 and 1414 interrupted any serious political momentum.

It should be emphasised that despite over sixty years of minorities, the estates were not actually out of the family's hands for all that time. Eleanor Despenser received her dower in 1328, less than eighteen months after her husband's execution, but she and William Zouche were compelled by an indenture of 30 December 1329 to grant the lordship of Glamorgan and the manors of Tewkesbury and Hanley (worth £1600 per annum) back to the crown. This was a blatant ploy by Roger Mortimer, now earl of March, to consolidate his own strength in the region, even at the expense of Zouche, the commander who had been instrumental in hunting down Edward II and subduing Caerphilly Castle. Mortimer passed Tewkesbury and Hanley to Isabella, and Glamorgan to the young king's new wife, Philippa of Hainault. Neither had much time to benefit from them, since after Mortimer's overthrow Eleanor recovered her estates. Together with Hugh III's piecemeal grants they ensured the family a foothold during these years of disgrace. This in turn was bolstered by Hugh's marriage to Elizabeth Montagu who brought significant dower lands in the March and manors in Devon, Hampshire and Sussex. Nevertheless, after Hugh's death in 1349 there was a real risk that the estates would be broken up due to the minority of the heir. However, his widow Elizabeth held a third of the manors in dower as well as a number of other manors as her jointure and her grandfather, Bartholomew Burghersh the elder, held considerable political influence.<sup>66</sup> The king also owed Despenser more than £2700 in wages of war. It was negotiated that after remitting an initial £1103 6s 5d, Despenser's executors would take

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<sup>66</sup> *CIPM*, ix, 328-42; *CCR 1349-54*, 15, 17-18, 31-32, 34-36.



custody of the residue of the estates for twelve months in return for the remaining debt of £1579 19s 11d.<sup>67</sup> However, Burghersh used his influence as chamberlain to increase this term, and on 8 February 1350, well before the twelve months was ended, the estates were committed in full to Burghersh and the young Edward Despenser.<sup>68</sup> On 27 September 1353 they transferred on the same terms to Edward and his mother Anne, who administered them during the remainder of the minority with Guy lord Brian, Elizabeth's new husband, and John Alveton, Hugh III's attorney.<sup>69</sup> They also controlled estates in Buckinghamshire and Wiltshire which had passed from Hugh's late brother, Edward I.<sup>70</sup> Despite the fact that no formal reversal of forfeiture had been announced, when Edward Despenser II came of age in 1357 his inheritance was actually greater than that which his uncle had held.

This surprising series of events provides an example of the way in which the nobility were beginning to take greater control of their lands during minorities.<sup>71</sup> The constrictions of war contributed to a subtle change in crown-noble relations, and in 1349 what could have become an extremely lucrative wardship for Edward III was given up in favour of ready money. It also underscores the benefit that came from having a daysman to mediate with the crown. This was true in the aftermath of Evesham, when Aline Despenser owed her eventual retention of the family patrimony to the good service of her father, Philip Basset.<sup>72</sup> Similarly, in 1400 Constance Despenser was quick to play on her kinship to Henry IV when she petitioned the crown for her estates.<sup>73</sup> On 19 February 1400 she was granted dower of 1000 marks, and the following day received the residue of all forfeit castles and lordships in England and Wales across six counties.<sup>74</sup> On

<sup>67</sup> E 401/397 *sub* 6 May 1349; CPR 1348-50, 293-94; CCIR 1349-54, 33.

<sup>68</sup> CFR 1347-56, 208.

<sup>69</sup> CFR 1347-56, 109, 257-58, 378-79; 1356-68, 47; CPR 1350-54, 351. On 6 May 1355 £100 of the £1000 farm owed for the lands was remitted: CPR 1354-58, 212.

<sup>70</sup> CIPM, viii, 265-66. Guy and Elizabeth were more than happy to take matters to court. In 1351 their efforts led to the issuing of a statute confirming the rights of those born overseas: Ormrod, *Edward III*, 102. In 1355 they successfully presented a case in the Court of Common Pleas against Margery Ros concerning lands that had originally been part of Elizabeth's dower from her first marriage to Giles Badlesmere: CP 40/380/215.

<sup>71</sup> See, for example, J.M.W. Bean, *The Decline of English Feudalism 1215-1540* (Manchester 1968), esp. 104-79.

<sup>72</sup> See above, chapter 2(a).

<sup>73</sup> SC 8/182/9051 (undated, but more likely to refer to this period than Constance's only other extant petition (SC 8/187/9329, printed *CAIP Wales*, 311, and (with errors) *Rot. Parl.*, iii, 533) which probably dates to 1405-6).

<sup>74</sup> CPR 1399-1401, 204; CFR 1399-1405, 48, 104.

3 March she recovered custody of her son Richard,<sup>75</sup> and in June was granted a stash of forfeit jewels and silver valued at £214.<sup>76</sup> By contrast, Isabella Russell, widow of Thomas's co-conspirator William Lescrope, received almost nothing owed her by the crown and ended up in virtual poverty.<sup>77</sup>

Further proof of the faith that successive monarchs placed in the family was shown after Edward Despenser II's death in 1375. Although certain manors were farmed out before Easter 1376, custody of all estates were granted to his wife Elizabeth the following year at an annual farm of £700.<sup>78</sup> As we shall see below, Elizabeth continued to resolutely manage her husband's properties, and on 6 December 1390 custody was confirmed jointly to her and Thomas, recently returned from Arundel's naval expedition but still only seventeen years of age.<sup>79</sup> Set against these efforts were the problems faced by Sir Edward Dalyngrigge, Edward Despenser's retainer and chief executor.<sup>80</sup> Dalyngrigge's responsibilities were made more difficult by his well-known disagreement with John of Gaunt, whose aggressive behaviour on his Sussex estates was resented by the prominent county landowners.<sup>81</sup> Dalyngrigge petitioned parliament in January 1377 to explain how he had been unable to obtain £1700 owed to Despenser in wages of war because of a financial irregularity which, he argued, had been caused by Gaunt's denial of justice. The petition eventually failed, but the incident – which was not laid to rest for more than a decade – is a striking example of how local arguments could be swung by magnate interest. Gaunt and Despenser had argued in the past,<sup>82</sup> and it is tempting to see the duke's incursions taking place only because the latter was no longer alive. However, despite these small infractions, it seems that minorities, for all their inherent danger, appear to have barely affected the lords of Glamorgan. They dictated a necessary period

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<sup>75</sup> CPR 1399-1401, 226. In May 1403 the duke of York petitioned for the wardship of Richard Despenser, and an undated petition from Joan of Navarre, wife of Henry IV (possibly made during Constance's rebellion in 1405), requested custody of certain Welsh manors: *CAP Wales*, 290, 382.

<sup>76</sup> E 404/15/440.

<sup>77</sup> A.J. Dunn, *The Politics of Magnate Power in England and Wales 1389-1413* (Oxford 2003), 92-93.

<sup>78</sup> CFR 1368-77, 341-42, 347-48; 1377-83, 46; see also *GCH*, 609 n.126.

<sup>79</sup> CFR 1383-91, 346.

<sup>80</sup> For Dalyngrigge, see above, chapter 4.

<sup>81</sup> S.K. Walker, 'Lancaster v Dallingridge: a franchisal dispute in fourteenth-century Sussex', *Sussex Archaeological Collections* 121 (1983), 87-94; updated in id., *The Lancastrian Affinity 1361-1399* (Oxford 1990), 127-41 (esp. p. 140).

<sup>82</sup> J. Tait (ed.), *Chronica Johannis de Reading et Anonymi Cantuariensis* (Manchester 1914), 175, the only mention of a land dispute from September 1366. Pugh suggests it could have been over the lordship of Ogmores (GCH, 607 n.85). Gaunt and Despenser were called to the royal council which successfully mediated between the two men, and by 1368 Gaunt and Despenser were operating together (DL 29/615/9836).

of silence but, except for 1327-30, there is no evidence whatsoever from their estates that the Despensers had withdrawn from political activity.

### Estate administration

Having examined the Despenser estates when out of the family's control, this final section is concerned with how they were administered during majorities. As lords of one of the wealthiest Marcher lordships, the Despensers had ample scope for attracting trade and economic activity. Border towns such as Hereford, Ludlow, Shrewsbury, and Tewkesbury were the focus for Welsh trade and Glamorgan itself had numerous outlets to the sea. The latter years of the fourteenth century saw the beginning of a shift in the pattern of maritime transport as ports in the south became busier. The Severn and Avon carried grain from Gloucester and Tewkesbury and wool from Cardiff to the great trading port of Bristol where many Welsh merchants lived.<sup>83</sup> Demand for high quality Cotswolds' wool was highlighted when Florentine merchants transferred their business from exporters in Yorkshire, Lincolnshire and the East Midlands.<sup>84</sup> Furthermore, 'March wool', the best in medieval England, was pastured along the Herefordshire and Shropshire border. It was hardly surprising that their Welsh estates put some of the leading magnates into the top category of landed wealth in the country.<sup>85</sup> A royal ordinance of June 1326 gave a monopoly of the wool trade to nine towns in England and Carmarthen and Cardiff in Wales, a decision attributed by the patent roll to the younger Despenser.<sup>86</sup> In Glamorgan the large flocks at the Cistercian abbeys of Margam, Tintern and Neath would all have contributed to further lining his pockets. However, this arrangement only survived a few years and in 1353 Carmarthen was made the only official Welsh staple town.

As a port, Cardiff suffered severely during the plague years of 1348, 1361 and 1369, and total revenue from years following the outbreaks fell considerably.<sup>87</sup> Income fell from £113 in 1316 to £53 in 1349.<sup>88</sup> By 1375 it was as low as £31 3s 11d.<sup>89</sup> Rents in the

<sup>83</sup> D.L. Farmer, 'Marketing the Produce of the Countryside, 1200-1500', in Miller (ed.), *AIHEW*, iii, 354-56.

<sup>84</sup> Fryde, *Landlords and Peasants*, 87-104.

<sup>85</sup> Davies, *Lordship and Society*, 188-89.

<sup>86</sup> CPR 1324-27, 274; H.E. Roese, 'Cardiff and its Port Facilities', *Morgannwg* 39 (1995), 63.

<sup>87</sup> W. Rees, *Cardiff: a history of the city* (Cardiff 1962), 38-39.

<sup>88</sup> Rees, *South Wales and the March*, 243 n.4.

<sup>89</sup> SC 6/1202/10, m. 1.

Severn Valley, at one time the highest in the West Midlands, also suffered.<sup>90</sup> A surviving compotus of 1351-52 describes the situation at St James Priory, Bristol, one of the dependencies of Tewkesbury Abbey.<sup>91</sup> Further evidence comes from the records of Margam Abbey, nine miles south of Neath, which relied on successive lords of Glamorgan for confirmation of its charters. At the end of the 1200s it had been the richest religious house in Wales, but an extent of 1336 described the effects of cattle murrain: 'our animals in which the greatest part of our *facultas* lies, are visited by a horrible mortality'.<sup>92</sup> In 1383, a papal bull from Urban VI spoke of the financial difficulties of the abbey and 'the inroads of the sea', although it blamed excessive hospitality as much as it did the encroachments from the Bristol Channel.<sup>93</sup> In consideration for these losses Edward Despenser *in absentia* awarded the abbey the advowson of the church of Aberavon, part of the lordship of Glamorgan,<sup>94</sup> but this was clearly not enough. In 1396 Thomas Despenser was compelled to take the abbey under his protection for a year.<sup>95</sup> A combination of heavy taxation, plague, falling demand for agricultural products, incessant war and subsequent isolation from the abbey's mother-houses in Cîteaux and Clairvaux had left the abbey at its lowest pitch ever.<sup>96</sup> Finally, the Glyn Dŵr rebellion led the abbot to write the following to the pope in 1412: 'Margam Abbey is utterly destroyed, so that its abbot and monks are obliged to wander around like so many vagabonds'.<sup>97</sup>

Towards the end of the thirteenth century, markets blossomed, manifesting what David Farmer has described as 'the optimism of an age of expansion'.<sup>98</sup> Gloucestershire had far above the average, and in the March, many of the emerging markets were in or near Glamorgan.<sup>99</sup> For lords such as the Despensers, markets and fairs provided direct income from tolls on goods sold and rents on stalls as well as an occasional outlet for produce from their demesne.<sup>100</sup> Not surprisingly, the enterprising Hugh the elder was granted yearly fairs on his manors of Ernesby (Leics.), Aberford (Yorks.) and two at

<sup>90</sup> C. Dyer, 'Social Structure: The West Midlands', in H.E. Hallam (ed.), *AHEW*, ii, 665.

<sup>91</sup> F.W. Potts Hicks, 'A Tewkesbury Compotus', *BGAST* 55 (1933), 249-55.

<sup>92</sup> F.G. Cowley, 'Margam Abbey, 1147-1349', *Morgannwg* 42 (1998), 18; Rees, *South Wales and the March*, 256 n.5; Clarke, *Cartae*, iv, 1199.

<sup>93</sup> W. de G. Birch, *A History of Margam Abbey* (London 1897), 320.

<sup>94</sup> *CPR 1381-85*, 483-84; Clarke, *Cartae*, iv, 1358-59.

<sup>95</sup> Clarke, *Cartae*, iv, 1383-84.

<sup>96</sup> G. Williams, 'The Last Days of Margam Abbey', *Morgannwg* 42 (1998), 24.

<sup>97</sup> *CPL 1404-15*, 282.

<sup>98</sup> Farmer, 'Marketing', 329.

<sup>99</sup> R.H. Britnell, 'The proliferation of markets in England, 1200-1349', *ECHR* 34 (1981), 210.

<sup>100</sup> Farmer, 'Marketing', 332.

Uphaven (Wilts.).<sup>101</sup> In 1323 Hugh the younger obtained permission for a weekly market and a yearly fair at Greteham (Lincs.), and the following year a fair at Tewkesbury and an extension to the existing fairs at Chipping Marlowe and Hameldon (Bucks.).<sup>102</sup> He also requested a weekly market at Dryslwyn, on behalf of his Welsh retainer Rhys ap Gruffydd upon whom he had conferred the manor.<sup>103</sup> In Cardiff, two annual fairs were held, each lasting a fortnight.<sup>104</sup> In a town of more than 2000, revenue from tolls would have been considerable. Surprisingly, there is an utter lack of petitions for markets and fairs after 1326, probably a result of the economic downturn embodied by the famine of 1315-17 and made infinitely worse by the Black Death. Transport costs to London rose after 1348 and the wider evidence from manorial accounts is that bailiffs made their urgent purchases at market towns within ten miles or so, rather than travelling long distance.<sup>105</sup> It is frustrating that there is not more detail about Despenser rule in Glamorgan. Even the charters of the city of Cardiff, the most extensive of which was granted by Hugh III in 1338, contain little.<sup>106</sup> We are left to generalise, knowing, for example, that market tolls declined significantly during the fourteenth century – in the case of Cheltenham from £3 under Edward III to £1 5s 1d in 1422 – but tentatively suggesting that the powerful Despensers weathered the storm.<sup>107</sup>

This suggestion can be substantiated by turning to the last quarter of the fourteenth century. Edward Despenser II was fortunate in making a prosperous marriage to a tenacious businesswoman. Elizabeth was skilled at upholding her rights on the estates and worked hard to protect the lands of her two-year old son after Edward's premature death in 1375. There is abundant evidence of her willingness to maintain, even augment, the enormous Despenser inheritance and she combined shrewd business acumen with a clear awareness of the problems that a long minority could bring.<sup>108</sup> This was a time when widows, as well as wives left at home during military campaigns, needed to be able to manage property. The French noblewoman Christine de Pizan wrote in *The Treasure of the City of Ladies* of the need for preparation for this task: 'they should have the responsibility of the administration and know how to make use of their revenues and

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<sup>101</sup> CChR 1257-1300, 424; 1300-26, 81, 468. The petition for Aberford is SC 8/200/9961.

<sup>102</sup> CChR 1300-26, 452, 463, 477.

<sup>103</sup> CChR 1300-26, 461.

<sup>104</sup> Rees, *Cardiff*, 33.

<sup>105</sup> Farmer, 'Marketing', 381.

<sup>106</sup> Clarke, *Cartae*, iv, 1240-44, 1298-99, 1409-11.

<sup>107</sup> Britnell, *The commercialisation of English society*, 156-59.

<sup>108</sup> Bundles of payments survive, mostly dated between 1386 and 1391: E 101/511/12; SC 6/1292/3/3-4.

possessions ... [and] they will be good managers of their estates'.<sup>109</sup> It was a call for female entrepreneurs, and Elizabeth Despenser was a woman after Christine de Pizan's heart. The trust that her husband placed in her is made apparent by his choice to remain in Italy when Bartholomew Burghersh died, trusting his wife to look after the enlarged patrimony. Ten Suffolk manors fell to the Despensers – Carlton, Middleton, Clopton, Little Welnetham, Blaxhall, Swilland, Witnessham, Cockfield, Fenhall and Chesilford – together with Ewyas (Heref.) and Bosworth (Leics.),<sup>110</sup> and the patrimony was greater than it had ever been.

After Edward's death Elizabeth vigorously pursued lands farmed out by the crown and within five years recovered control of Shipton, Burford, Sherston, Kimberworth, Caversham and Great Marlow, collectively worth over £100 per year.<sup>111</sup> She also obtained seisin of lands of her Despenser relatives, Gilbert (d. 1382), and Thomas, her brother-in-law (d. 1381). From Gilbert came the keeping of Broadtown (Wilts.); from Thomas various Lincolnshire lands and two-thirds of the manor of Mapledurwell (Hants.), which she later demised to her esquire Henry Yakesley.<sup>112</sup> Via her daughter Anne, married to Hugh Hastings, came the Norfolk manors of Gressenhall and East Lexham.<sup>113</sup> In 1392 Elizabeth obtained the wardship of Peter Veel after the death of his mother Eleanor, a tenant of the Despensers in Glamorgan.<sup>114</sup> She held onto this as long as she was able, and it was fully ten years later when Henry IV ordered her to release the lands to the heir.<sup>115</sup> In the meantime, Elizabeth had convinced Richard II to re-grant the Irish manor of Killoran, county Waterford, that had originally been held by her husband.<sup>116</sup> At the same time, she had to contend with paying out two major annual sums. The first came in 1378 when £200 from the farm of Glamorgan was ordered to

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<sup>109</sup> S. Lawson (ed.), *The Treasure of the City of Ladies, or The Book of the Three Virtues* (London 1985), 130-1; also R.E. Archer, "How ladies ... who live on their manors ought to manage their households and estates": women as landowners and administrators in the later Middle Ages', in P.J.P. Goldberg (ed.), *Woman is a Worthy Wight: Women in English Society c.1200-1500* (Stroud 1992), 149-81.

<sup>110</sup> *CIPM*, xii, 297-99; xiv, 214-27. Elizabeth was so eager she entered Ewyas without the king's licence: *CPR 1374-77*, 29.

<sup>111</sup> *SC 8/106/5288* (petition for Burford); *CFR 1368-77*, 349; *1377-83*, 178, 193. Other petitions are in *SC 8/85/4205*; *SC 8/106/5275*; *CAP Wales*, 166; *Rot. Parl.*, iii, 178a. Several pleas in the court of chancery were registered also at this time: *C 44/8/14*; *C 44/10/25*; *C 44/11/1*.

<sup>112</sup> *CFR 1377-83*, 276, 277-78; *1383-91*, 262-63; *CPR 1381-85*, 278.

<sup>113</sup> Norfolk RO, MR 317A 242x5; MR 77 241x3.

<sup>114</sup> *CFR 1391-99*, 51. Payments for this are in E 401/600 *sub* 7 February 1396; E 401/604 *sub* 31 January 1397; E 401/608 *sub* 4 December 1397; E 401/611 *sub* 5 February 1399; E 401/617 *sub* 4 February 1400.

<sup>115</sup> *CCR 1399-1402*, 537.

<sup>116</sup> SP 66/A 3A (since this was dated in 1395 in Dublin, it is probable that Thomas Despenser made the request to Richard II during the military campaign of that year).

be paid to Sir Degary Says. Says had sustained losses in Aquitaine and also made forced loans of gold to the crown for the upkeep of the English armies, and King Richard's regency council decided that recompense should be made from the Despenser estates.<sup>117</sup> The second came two years later, when Edmund earl of Cambridge, son of King Edward III, was awarded Thomas Despenser's wardship and 500 marks per annum from Elizabeth's dower lands.<sup>118</sup> Shortly before his death Edward Despenser spent his final military campaign in Brittany with the earl and it is possible that an arrangement was made at this time about Thomas's guardian. In 1384 Richard II gave permission for Thomas and the earl's daughter Constance to be married, and Elizabeth was then required to pay for her daughter-in-law's upkeep.<sup>119</sup> Some idea of the considerable annual turnover of the Despenser estates may be found from documents dated between April and October 1391, where expenditure on annuities alone totalled 1016 marks (£677 6s 8d).<sup>120</sup>

Elizabeth was vital to the continuing presence of the family in the last quarter of the century. Had she remarried after 1375, her dower lands would have been demised to her new husband and the Despenser inheritance impoverished. As it turned out, the ease with which Thomas took over the estates owed everything to her tireless efforts. She continued to pay annuities owed to members of Edward Despenser's retinue, and the fact that a number of these men served the family throughout this period tells us much about the advantages of continuity in estate management.<sup>121</sup> We know that she held court in Glamorgan in 1393, and doubtless did so on other occasions.<sup>122</sup> Her name also appears on two charters of 1397 confirming the privileges of the burgesses of Cardiff and Neath.<sup>123</sup> However, Elizabeth's longevity was eventually to cause problems for Thomas who never enjoyed full possession of his inheritance.<sup>124</sup> When he died at Bristol in 1400

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<sup>117</sup> CPR 1377-81, 211; A.D. Carr, 'A Welsh Knight in the Hundred Years War: Sir Gregory Sais', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1977), 49. Payments to Degary Says (and after November 1390 to his widow Ragona, when the grant was reduced to 200 marks) are in E 213/161; E 101/511/12/10, 13; SC 6/1292/3/3, nos. 3-4, 6-7; SC 6/1292/3/4, nos. 4-5.

<sup>118</sup> CPR 1377-81, 440-1. Payments to the earl are in E 101/511/12/3; SC 6/1292/3/4, nos. 6-8.

<sup>119</sup> E 101/511/12/5; SC 6/1292/3/3, nos. 12-13; SC 6/1292/3/4, nos. 11-12.

<sup>120</sup> E 101/511/12/1-5, 7-11, 13-15. McFarlane, 'The Beauchamps and the Staffords', repr. *Nobility*, 198, estimated the value of the estates in 1423 to be approximately £1250.

<sup>121</sup> See above, chapter 4.

<sup>122</sup> Bristol RO, MS 5139 '49.

<sup>123</sup> Clarke, *Cartae*, iv, 1409, 1418.

<sup>124</sup> Elizabeth died in 1409. For the problem of 'antediluvian' widows: R.E. Archer, 'Rich old ladies: the problem of late medieval dowagers', in A.J. Pollard (ed.), *Property and Politics: Essays in Later Medieval English History* (Gloucester 1984), 15-35.

she was still in possession of her dower as well as her own Burghersh inheritance. Other properties, such as Mapledurwell, had been safeguarded through grants to retainers or were held by cadet branches of the family. Only after Richard Despenser's early death in 1414 was the entire inheritance reunited under his sister Isabel and her first husband Richard earl of Worcester.<sup>125</sup> The survival of the patrimony was due in no small part to Elizabeth Despenser, whose efforts, in the context of incessant Marcher power struggles and the Glyn Dŵr revolt of 1400-8, should not be underestimated. It is a testament to her ability in the eyes of successive kings that in 1375 and 1400, unlike in 1349, no royal justices were appointed in Glamorgan to hear pleas of the crown.<sup>126</sup> Everything was left to the Despenser women. Like her earlier kinswoman Elizabeth de Burgh, Elizabeth Despenser proved the value of a dowager administrator.

Thomas Despenser, unlike his mother, had much more in common with his male forebears. Despite the Worcestershire lands that came to him in 1397 after Warwick's disinheritance, he too was reluctant to maximise the financial assets available to him. Dunn remarks upon the ease with which he could have controlled the Beauchamp estates from his own castle at Hanley, but the reeve and issue rolls for Elmley Castle indicate little administrative disruption.<sup>127</sup> Considering his lavish spending on enhancing his personal image in 1399, this is surprising.<sup>128</sup> While on one hand, it made sense to limit disruption, on the other it would appear to underline yet again Despenser's preference for display over substance. But was this attitude entirely unexpected? If Richard II was prepared to endow Thomas with an earldom, a prominent place at court and an income greater than £2000 per annum, surely there was no sense in bothering with the more mundane aspects of life. Estate management was left to those who were concerned about such things. Ominously, as it turned out, Thomas Despenser was not.

After King Richard's seizure of Appellant lands in 1397, Despenser was granted the castles of Gloucester and St Briavels, together with the Forest of Dean and a substantial bloc of Beauchamp lands in Worcestershire worth almost £300.<sup>129</sup> His ambitions in the Severn Valley were virtually identical to those of his forebear, the only difference being that Thomas clearly had his designs on English lands. Perhaps he recognised the

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<sup>125</sup> Hicks, 'An escheat concealed', 186-87.

<sup>126</sup> *GCH*, 183.

<sup>127</sup> Worcester RO, 899: 95/BA 989, Boxes 1 & 4, cited by Dunn, *Magnate Power*, 159, 160.

<sup>128</sup> E 153/1907, m. 6; E 101/511/28/1, 3, 6, 11; E 101/511/29/1-3, 7, 9-10.

<sup>129</sup> *CJM 1392-99*, no. 302; *CPR 1396-99*, 186, 219, 224.



potential difficulty of a Welsh empire, setting his sights primarily on Gloucestershire, a county where, unlike the Marches, the king's writ was recognised and Despenser's lordship could thrive. Alternatively he saw Gloucestershire and Herefordshire as a region without a magnate presence, one that could be exploited at will at the expense of the lords Berkeley. It was probably at Thomas's instigation that Richard II issued a royal charter to the city of Gloucester in 1398.<sup>130</sup> Whatever the case, no additional Welsh lands were annexed to the Despensers in the 1390s. At parliament in 1398 Thomas obtained a full reversion of the sentences of forfeiture passed in 1327, an event carrying potentially calamitous consequences for the entire upper nobility, since almost all of them held properties that the younger Despenser had coveted seventy years before.<sup>131</sup> Nevertheless, these political shenanigans owed more to the crown's attempt to reassert its authority in the March than to any genuine promise that Despenser would rebuild his great-grandfather's empire.<sup>132</sup> In the spring of 1398 Thomas was compelled to make quitclaims for various lands to holders of the disputed territories and the Justices of the King's Bench adjudged on 20 July that the matter was closed.<sup>133</sup> The second major attempt to increase the Despenser patrimony had failed.

### Conclusion

In so many ways, the history of the Despenser estates is the history of the southern March. The family inherited at a stroke lands which successive Clare earls had painstakingly built up, only to lose them just as swiftly when Richard Despenser died in 1414. But what can be made of the estates? Perhaps the answer lies in the Despensers' durability. By remaining in the political arena they kept other means of income open, rather than retiring to their estates to live off the land. In the economic climate of the fourteenth century the latter option was impractical. It would have meant cutting into fixed assets that were already being squeezed by the effects of plague, war and famine, with little prospect of recovery. By their continued political presence, the Despensers ensured their survival by access to 'the very heart of the distinctiveness of Marcher

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<sup>130</sup> They were certainly both present (C 53/167, mm. 11-10; Saul, *Richard II*, 473), and Despenser's office as keeper of Gloucester Castle meant that he had a considerable interest in the city's profits.

<sup>131</sup> *Rot. Parl.*, iii, 360-68.

<sup>132</sup> Dunn, *Magnate Power*, 142.

<sup>133</sup> DL 27/217; DL 42/15, f. 410; BL Add. MS 6041, f. 37; *CCR 1396-99*, 278, 284, 298, 329.

lordship', the on-going profits from justice and casual revenue.<sup>134</sup> It did not lead to greatness, in the way that the Mortimer and Arundel estates became greater than anything existing before, because the series of debilitating minorities constantly interrupted their progress after 1349. Nor did it stave off the ever-present need for an heir. Yet, due in no small part to the abilities of successive dowagers, the family's Welsh holdings were as substantial as those of Lancaster, Hastings and Bohun. This all leads to the conclusion that the Despencers' political strength, tendency towards overseas adventuring and remarkable ability to land wealthy heiresses against the odds guaranteed their wealth in spite of, rather than because of, their skills in managing their estates.

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<sup>134</sup> Davies, *Lordship and Society*, 187.

## 6

## The Despensers and the Wheel of Fortune

**T**HIS final chapter takes a more conceptual approach than those preceding it. It examines the ways in which the Despensers represented themselves, through their religion and political ambition, and explores – in comparison with similar fourteenth-century families – whether or not they aspired to any particular political status. It also assesses the significance of memory within the late medieval polity, whilst continuing to test the accepted view that the family intended to be successful at all costs. The chapter is in three parts: first, the Despensers’ religion and ideology; second, the expectations and dynamics of noble patronage; and third, an analysis of the royal favourite in medieval England. It concludes with an investigation into how later generations viewed the Despensers.

### (a) Ideology and religion

#### *Tewkesbury: the power of the spiritual home*

Since the twelfth century, successive Clare earls had been laid to rest beneath the choir floor at Tewkesbury Abbey, establishing it as a mausoleum of some reputation. After the partition of the Clare estates in 1317, it is unsurprising that the Despensers should have sought to emphasise their connection with the earls of Gloucester (and, in the case of the younger Hugh, to press a claim to the earldom itself).<sup>1</sup> Tewkesbury served a dual purpose. It was the Despensers’ spiritual home, a place for worship, devotion and

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<sup>1</sup> The claim to the Gloucester earldom is considered in section (b), below.

burial.<sup>2</sup> Other magnates did the same: the Beauchamp Chapel at Warwick, the FitzAlan Chapel at Arundel, and the Percy tomb at Beverley are striking examples. Yet in an age of display, when an upwardly mobile family needed to market themselves to the crown, Tewkesbury was also a place in which the Despencers could draw attention to their illustrious heritage-by-marriage. Throughout the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, they made extensive alterations to the fabric of the building, and their continuing endowment made Tewkesbury one of the richest and most gloriously decorated of all Benedictine abbeys. The tombs and chantry chapels of five generations of Despencers ring the high altar and their images in stained glass look down from above. There is no better place to search for the significance of powerful physical statements of ancestry and political might in the life of a baronial family than at Tewkesbury.

When he became lord of Glamorgan, the younger Despenser evidently had serious ambitions for Tewkesbury. He intended the abbey to outshine the burial places of other Marcher lords at Bristol and Wigmore, and to defend his own position in the eyes of the crown.<sup>3</sup> At first, however, the burial plans went awry. The elder Hugh's body was fed to the dogs at Winchester and Eleanor could only reclaim the mutilated remains of the younger Hugh in 1330.<sup>4</sup> It is a mark of the fervent hatred throughout the country that

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<sup>2</sup> The concept of Tewkesbury as a 'Despenser mausoleum' was first mooted by R.K. Morris, 'Tewkesbury Abbey – the Despenser Mausoleum', *BGAST* 93 (1974 for 1975), 142-55; updated by R.K. Morris with M. Thurlby, 'The Gothic Church: Architectural History', in R.K. Morris and R. Shoesmith (eds.), *Tewkesbury Abbey: History, Art and Architecture* (Logaston 2003), 109-30. One dissenting voice to Morris's earlier conclusions is J.P. McAteer, 'Tewkesbury Abbey in the Later Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries', *BGAST* 110 (1992), 78. Other comments may be found in A. Hartshorne, 'Observations upon certain monumental effigies in the west of England, and particularly in the neighbourhood of Cheltenham', *BGAST* 4 (1879-80), 231-47; D.H. Dean, 'The Despencers and Their Chantries', *Westminster Cathedral Chronicle* 41 (1947), 212-13; N.E. Saul, "'Forget-me-nots": Patronage in Gothic England', *History Today* 37 (1987), 19-21; T.A. Heslop and V.A. Sekules (hon. eds.), *Medieval art and architecture at Gloucester and Tewkesbury*, British Archaeological Association Conference Transactions 7 (Leeds 1985), *passim*, and more generally in J.T. Rosenthal, *The Purchase of Paradise: Gift-Giving and the Aristocracy, 1307-1485* (London 1972); B. Golding, 'Burials and Benefactions: an Aspect of Monastic Patronage in Thirteenth-Century England', in W.M. Ormrod (ed.), *England in the Thirteenth Century: Proceedings of the 1984 Harlaxton Symposium* (Woodbridge 1984), 64-75; A.M. Morganstern, *Gothic Tombs of Kinship in France, the Low Countries and England* (Philadelphia 2000), esp. 103-16; B. and M. Gittos, 'Motivation and Choice: the Selection of Medieval Secular Effigies', in P.R. Coss and M.H. Keen (eds.), *Heraldry, Pageantry and Social Display in Medieval England* (Woodbridge 2002), 143-67.

<sup>3</sup> J. Brown, "'Peut-on Assez Louer Cet Excellent Ministre?'" Imagery of the Favourite in England, France and Spain', in J.H. Elliot and L.W.B. Brockliss (eds.), *The World of the Favourite* (New Haven 1999), 223-35, outlines the use of imagery by three royal favourites, Buckingham, Olivares and Richelieu, and argues that the excessive power they wielded led to a need for their rule to be defended, not merely immortalised. Despenser's own plans for Tewkesbury may also be read in the same light: perhaps at first he intended the abbey to be a canvas for apologetics (the justifying of his position), not merely for publicity.

<sup>4</sup> 'One of the quarters of hym was buried by the lavatory of the high altare in Twekesbyry' (L. Toulmin Smith (ed.), *The Itinerary of John Leland in or about the years 1535-1543* (London 1964), iv, 140), and long afterwards, the rest of his limbs were brought there (Dugdale, *Baronage*, i, 394).

Hugh junior had not only been executed with such savagery, but his head was displayed for almost four years above London Bridge. When he was finally interred, the younger Despenser's tomb was significant by its muted appearance: no effigy remains (although there is space above the tomb) and there are none of the soaring arches and intricate details that mark out other Tewkesbury tombs. Facing away from the high altar and looking south-east, there is a sense that the work was done quickly. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that he was buried with little ceremony as a political expedient.<sup>5</sup> The last thing that the recently rehabilitated Hugh III and Tewkesbury's new abbot (Abbot Kempsey having died in 1328) would have wished to do was draw attention to a disgraced man. This awareness and observation of royal opinion on an individual burial is important. After Thomas Despenser's execution in 1400, his burial was equally modest: he lies under the choir floor 'beneath a lamp that burns before the host',<sup>6</sup> in stark contrast with the splendid chantries of his father and great-uncle. Not even a memorial brass survives. For the sake of the next generation, in times of forfeiture and disgrace it made sense to avoid exposure.

Richard Morris has suggested that the Despenser building work at Tewkesbury took place in four phases, albeit with breaks and temporary suspensions.<sup>7</sup> These correspond roughly to the domination of the younger Hugh (c.1315-28); the post-exilic Despenser tyranny and disgrace, plus the later life of Eleanor Despenser (c.1322-37); the rehabilitation and career of Hugh III (c.1335-49); and the early career of Edward (c.1350s-60s). However, Morris admits it is difficult to be certain of the strength of individual influence for early changes to the abbey. Despite the ambitions of the younger Hugh, there is no documentation accounting for his involvement in the work, and the apparent break in building at the end of the 1320s may be due as much to the death of Abbot Kempsey of Tewkesbury (1282-1328) than to the execution of the Despensers. Furthermore, we should be tentative in supplying too much architectural acumen to the younger Hugh. Thus far in this study he has been characterised as a man who threw caution to the wind, uncaring of the foundation for his power, more concerned with making money than the establishment of a legacy. Purely in terms of motivation, the

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<sup>5</sup> Perhaps the ultimate insult, Despenser shares his burial place with Abbot John Coles, whose coffin was later placed over his own.

<sup>6</sup> Bodl. MS Top. Glouc. d.2, f. 26r. The best chronicle account records his head was removed from London Bridge on request of his mother and was buried *iuxta patrem suum*. G.B. Stow (ed.), *Historia Vitae et Regni Ricardi Secundi* (Philadelphia 1977), 165.

<sup>7</sup> Morris with Thurlby, 'Architectural History', 117-19.

gradual recovery of Hugh III after 1331 is a much more appealing reason for major structural developments at Tewkesbury. He needed to portray his ancestors in an appropriate light in order to facilitate his own political restoration. It was at this time that the ambulatory was substantially remodelled and a series of enormous traceried windows erected in the clerestory. Hugh III's influence upon this has not received enough attention from Tewkesbury scholars, who attribute most of the impetus to Eleanor Despenser. Her marriage to William Zouche in 1329 ultimately led to the latter's own inclusion in a southern window. It is difficult to know Zouche's aims when he abducted Eleanor from Hanley Castle but his assimilation of the title of lord of Glamorgan (and therefore lord of Tewkesbury) and subsequent inclusion in the stained glass roll of honour implies he was well aware of the significance of Tewkesbury as a public place of display. Sarah Brown argues that Zouche could not have been included in the window scheme before his death in 1337,<sup>8</sup> and since Eleanor only briefly outlived him, it must have been Hugh III who was instrumental in finalising the gallery of figures. However, the illustrated *Chronica de Theokesburie*, which includes an image of every lord of Glamorgan, has no depiction of Zouche. The cloistered monk who compiled the *Chronica* rightly or wrongly considered him unworthy of inclusion. Perhaps he was viewed as an 'intruder' into the lineage, or more probably was left out because he made no material contributions to the abbey.

There are seven clerestory windows, five of which, above and either side of the altar, have religious designs. The remainder, above the site of the choir screen (denoted NIV and SIV by the *Corpus Vitrearum Medii Aevi*) contain secular figures who were instrumental in the life of the abbey. In SIV, three Clare earls stand beside William Zouche. NIV is more potent as it contains the founder, Robert FitzHamon, beside two Clare earls and the younger Despenser. Most of the glass dates from the second quarter of the fourteenth century, which was a critical time for the Despensers, and an attempt to draw attention to the Conqueror's kin is deeply symbolic. FitzHamon was a favourite of King William Rufus and from him received the great estate that would become known as the honour of Gloucester, including the abbey church at Tewkesbury.<sup>9</sup> Both windows NIV and SIV are on the outermost ends of the series, and are designed to lead the eye from founder to earl to Despenser and thence to the figures of prophets and Old

<sup>8</sup> S. Brown, 'The Medieval Stained Glass', in Morris and Shoemith (eds.), *Tewkesbury Abbey*, 190.

<sup>9</sup> For FitzHamon and Rufus, see below, section (c).

Testament kings. Ultimately, the observer arrives in the east window at the Last Judgement, where Christ rewards the faithful and delivers the unjust to eternal death. The entire series of windows is fascinating, for it supplies a chronology in glass of successive lords of Glamorgan. There is an inherent legitimacy writ large in the design – a deliberate statement of succession vital in the aftermath of Edward II's deposition. The heraldry suggests a date before 1340,<sup>10</sup> and it is possible to pinpoint the immediate cause to the decision of Edward III to raise Hugh Audley to the earldom of Gloucester in 1337. Audley never held the honour of Tewkesbury but his elevation automatically associated him with the Clares. The perceived threat to Despenser ambitions may well have led to the design of such a grand window scheme, either to compete with Audley, or to vie for the king's attention. Perhaps the stained glass scheme needs to be more firmly rooted in the secular – and, particularly, the political – world in which the Despensers operated. Once again the importance of 1337 as a pivotal year in the rehabilitation of the Despensers becomes apparent, and we must credit Hugh III with a shrewd architectural awareness. This is substantiated by the heraldry of other noble families that are included in the glass. Faced with the need for self-promotion, an association with powerful Marcher families, earls and members of the royal family was an important proclamation of the Despensers' pride in their status. The arms of Bradestone, Mowbray, Berkeley, d'Amory and even Audley would be expected in a Marcher context, but others – Warenne, Hastings, FitzAlan, Grandison and Montagu – not only drew attention to Despenser marriages, but stressed their connection with some of the richest and most noble families in the land.<sup>11</sup> All five families held Marcher estates, but being magnates their intrinsic power was greater by far. Three royal coats of arms are also depicted: John of Eltham, earl of Cornwall (d. 1336), Thomas Brotherton, earl of Norfolk (d. 1338), and Edmund Woodstock, earl of Kent (d. 1330). Eltham, of course, had been Eleanor's ward and Hugh III's patron, and Brotherton held many of the Despenser estates after forfeiture. Woodstock's inclusion is the most interesting. He had been one of the younger Despenser's closest allies, but was implicated in a plot against Mortimer and Isabella and executed for treason in March 1330, making him an

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<sup>10</sup> Brown, 'Medieval Stained Glass', 190. See also P.R. Coss, 'Knighthood, Heraldry and Social Exclusion in Edwardian England', in id. and Keen (eds.), *Heraldry, Pageantry and Social Display*, 39-68, esp. 48-49, which differs from some of the dates suggested here but maintains the importance of Tewkesbury as 'an excellent example of an aristocratic tendency to project their values back into a pre-heraldic past, in the interests of lineage' (p. 49).

<sup>11</sup> A similar heraldic scheme has been identified in Etchingam Church, Sussex: N.E. Saul, *Scenes from provincial life: knightly families in Sussex 1280-1400* (Oxford 1986), 148-52.

unlikely patron. Yet the presence of Woodstock's arms suggests the Despensers intended to convey a sense of empathy, perhaps even solidarity. The events of 1326-30 not only instilled in Hugh III a need to be image-conscious, making him acutely aware of the fine line between success and failure at the highest level. It left him with a lasting sense of family tragedy, which found its expression in the Tewkesbury stained glass.

Hugh III was the first Despenser lord to be buried with honour, interred on the right side of the high altar, where his wife Elizabeth joined him ten years later. Such a position – ‘set down at the right hand of the throne of God’ – must be seen as a deliberate statement about the Despensers' recovery. It not only marked a move away from the burial place of the Clare earls, who had all been buried before the altar, but also began a process of surrounding the altar with substantial monuments, something which would continue for the next ninety years. L.L. Gee has argued that the Despensers observed a strict code of decorum at Tewkesbury by allowing the Clares pride of place before the altar and reserving the space around the side of the choir for themselves.<sup>12</sup> While there is no doubt that the Despensers' contributions to the abbey were designed in part to honour their ancestors, it is more likely that the soaring pinnacles and imposing chapels were intended to eclipse everything that had gone before. Hugh III died suddenly from plague in the spring of 1349, having made few burial arrangements, and it is unsurprising that the *Chronica de Theokesburie* only makes reference to the couple's alabaster tomb after Elizabeth's death in 1359.<sup>13</sup> It was presumably constructed in the early 1350s. The mourners on the base of the tomb have long disappeared, but it is tempting to search for parallels with the Elsing Brass, upon which Hugh had been commemorated together with Edward III and his companions-in-arms from Crécy and other French campaigns.<sup>14</sup> The window of the Lady Chapel at St. Augustine's, Bristol, which also dates to the 1340s, contains a host of heraldic devices belonging to families whose military experience was rooted in the wars of Edward III.<sup>15</sup> Hugh III's three-tiered canopy also bears similarities to the tomb of Edward II at Gloucester, and Nigel Saul has remarked upon the

<sup>12</sup> L.L. Gee, *Women, Art and Patronage from Henry III to Edward III: 1216-1377* (Woodbridge 2002), 88.

<sup>13</sup> ‘... she was buried with her husband from her first [*sic*] marriage in a tomb made of beautiful white marble’: Bodl. MS Top. Glouc. d.2, f. 23r.

<sup>14</sup> See above, chapter 3(b).

<sup>15</sup> A. Sabin, ‘The fourteenth-century heraldic glass in the eastern Lady Chapel of Bristol Cathedral’, *The Antiquaries Journal* 37 (1957), 54-70.



considerable irony that more than twenty years after the turmoil of the 1320s, a memorial to a murdered monarch should have been the template for Hugh and Elizabeth.<sup>16</sup>

Other influences can be sought for the Trinity Chapel, the chantry tomb of Edward Despenser. After his death in 1375, Edward was buried on the south side of the sanctuary before the door of the vestry, his chapel possibly providing a thoroughfare from the vestry to the high altar for chantry priests.<sup>17</sup> His will stressed the need to be buried ‘near to the bodies of my ancestors’, emphasising the importance of dynastic continuity in death.<sup>18</sup> Atop the Trinity Chapel Edward’s figure kneels in perpetual prayer, a rare English example of the rare devotional image known as the *priant*.<sup>19</sup> His wife Elizabeth, a widow for thirty-four years until her own death in 1409, chose to be buried beneath the sanctuary floor rather than in the chapel with Edward.<sup>20</sup> Both, however, are depicted within the chapel in a series of devotional wall paintings. Angels flank the Trinity, which is housed in a painted niche, besides which Edward and Elizabeth pray towards the image. Edward’s will makes no mention of the chapel or the paintings, but, as we shall see, it is likely that the artwork was influenced by the time he spent in Italy. The inclusion of the Trinity may possibly be traced to the particular devotion of Edward, the Black Prince, in whose retinue Despenser fought on his first expedition abroad. The prince lies in his own canopied tomb at Canterbury looking up towards an image of the Trinity, and contemporary chroniclers paid ample attestation to his devotion to the cult which was growing in popularity during the fourteenth century. David Green has identified a number of the prince’s friends and retinue members who founded institutions or gave patronage to buildings with links to the Trinity, and it is possible that Despenser also saw it as a fashionable symbol of devotion.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, the entire Tewkesbury structure speaks of considerable effort and devotion, hinting at a husband and wife whose religious conviction and appreciation of the arts outranked many others.

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<sup>16</sup> Saul, “Forget-me-nots”, 20; also D.C.St.V. Welander, *The history, art and architecture of Gloucester Cathedral* (Stroud 1991), 147-50. In addition, the tomb of Pope John XXII at Avignon is similar to (although smaller than) Edward II’s Gloucester tomb: see J.J.G. Alexander and P. Binski (eds.), *Age of Chivalry: Art in Plantagenet England 1200-1400* (London 1987), no. 497; Morganstern, *Gothic Tombs of Kinship*, 82-91. I am grateful to Professor Seymour Phillips for pointing out the significance of this connection.

<sup>17</sup> P. Lindley, ‘The Later Medieval Monuments and Chantry Chapels’, in Morris and Shoesmith (eds.), *Tewkesbury Abbey*, 170.

<sup>18</sup> Lambeth Palace, Reg. Sudbury, f. 89v.

<sup>19</sup> B.H. Meyer, ‘The First Tomb of Henry VII of England’, *The Art Bulletin* 58 (1976), 362-64.

<sup>20</sup> Lambeth Palace, Reg. Arundel, ii, f. 108v.

<sup>21</sup> D.S. Green, *The Black Prince* (Stroud 2001), 121; also R. Barber, *Edward, Prince of Wales and Aquitaine* (London 1978), 236-37, 240-41; C. Wilson, ‘The Medieval Monuments’, in P. Collinson, N. Ramsey and M. Sparks (eds.), *A History of Canterbury Cathedral* (Oxford 1995), 494-97.

Further evidence of Edward's piety may be found in his bequests to the abbey. The *Chronica de Theokesburie* states that he gave 'a costly chalice of purest gold and a most precious jewel made with surpassing craftsmanship'; according to his will he bequeathed 'two whole sets of my best clothes, two gilt chalices, a gilt hanaper *ove le treippe*, and a ewer, given to me by the French king, in which the body of Christ should be placed on Corpus Christi day'.<sup>22</sup> Like the wall paintings in his chapel, the ewer echoes Edward's successful career: he must either have received it during the brokering of the Treaty of Brétigny, or during the period King John was at the English court. He also made a series of smaller gifts to local priories, requesting that they say alms for his soul: £10 each to Llanthony, Neath, Little Marlow and Canons Leigh.<sup>23</sup>

At the end of the fourteenth century, the decision was made to re-inter the abbey's founder, Robert FitzHamon. The motive for reburial is usually attributed solely to Abbot Parker,<sup>24</sup> but it is highly probable that Elizabeth Despenser was involved. FitzHamon's Founder's Chapel bares striking similarities to the Trinity Chapel, and as Lindley suggests, may be a critique of the earlier structure. They sit in perfect symmetry on the north and south sides of the sanctuary. Since Elizabeth had organised the erection of the Trinity Chapel,<sup>25</sup> it is not unlikely she was involved in this equally major piece of work. It would certainly account for the similarities between the two chapels, and demonstrates a surprising level of interaction between the secular and ecclesiastical authorities at the abbey. The plans for the new chapel were laid during Thomas Despenser's formative years and, according to the *Chronica*, it was completed in 1397. This, of course, was an auspicious year for the Despensers when Thomas was raised to the earldom of Gloucester. Coincidence or not, all that Elizabeth had undertaken came to fruition that year. Little wonder Tewkesbury played an enormous part in the consciousness of the lords of Glamorgan. It became the means of displaying their elevation for all to see.

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<sup>22</sup> Bodl. MS Top. Glouc. d.2, f. 25r.; Lambeth Palace, Reg. Sudbury, f. 89v. Edward patronised the London goldsmith, Nicholas Twyford, from whom a number of gifts were bought for visiting envoys between 1378 and 1384, and just before his death had commissioned a gold seal for the lordship of Glamorgan and Morgannwg: F. Devon (ed.), *Issues of the Exchequer, Henry III to Henry VI* (London 1847), 201; C.M. Barron, 'Richard II and London', in A. Goodman and J.L. Gillespie (eds.), *Richard II: the Art of Kingship* (Oxford 1999), 139 n.46.

<sup>23</sup> Lambeth Palace, Reg. Sudbury, f. 89v.

<sup>24</sup> M.A. Hicks, *Warwick: the Kingmaker* (Oxford 1998), 60; Morris with Thurlby, 'Architectural History', 129; Lindley, 'Medieval Monuments and Chantry Chapels', 171.

<sup>25</sup> '... his wife raised a stone chapel constructed with remarkable skill, which is dedicated in honour of the Holy Trinity': Bodl. MS Top. Glouc. d.2, f. 25r.

This provides an interesting angle on the motivation behind Thomas's burial. As we have seen, he had no chantry chapel and was buried inconspicuously beneath the choir floor. However, physically less may be symbolically more. Whilst the visual restraint of this is undeniable, Thomas's tomb lies amongst those of the former earls of Gloucester. Could this have been deliberate? Thomas, Richard (d. 1414), Isabel and Elizabeth all lie between the Clares and the high altar.<sup>26</sup> This return to the original burial place of the earls may be purely aesthetic – after all, space had to be at a premium in the abbey – but it is tempting to see it as an intentional statement. The Despensers saw Gloucester as 'their' earldom, and by slotting in these four tombs they now surrounded the altar entirely. Perhaps Isabel Beauchamp tried to catch this mood when she buried her first husband at Tewkesbury and arrayed his chapel with twelve mourners. She chose statues of Clare earls (including Gilbert, the last earl), Hugh Despenser the younger and Thomas Despenser. The fact that the latter two were considered politically expedient says much about the family's private influence in the abbey, but also about the legacy that Isabel, as the last surviving Despenser, wished to leave.

This leads us into a consideration of the Despenser women, whose patronage of the abbey is the best evidence we have of their cultural and religious lives. Their piety was not merely restricted to widowhood. Many noblewomen possessed relics, books of hours and psalters, and showed devotion to particular saints. Isabel Beauchamp made lavish bequests to shrines of the Virgin Mary at Tewkesbury, Caversham, Worcester and Walsingham, and made pilgrimage to Canterbury on her way home from France in 1431.<sup>27</sup> She was also a great patron of the arts, commissioning John Lydgate to translate 'Fifteen Joys of Our Lady', a rosary poem of devotion to the Virgin.<sup>28</sup> When she died, she requested burial with her family and first husband at Tewkesbury, rather than at Warwick with her second husband.<sup>29</sup> Isabel's funeral arrangements were extensive: she ordained six new monks at the abbey and bequeathed jewels and dresses of silk and gold

<sup>26</sup> I have relied on Figure 13.1 in Lindley, 'Medieval Monuments and Chantry Chapels', 162, for the tomb placements.

<sup>27</sup> J.C. Ward, *English Noblewomen in the later Middle Ages* (Harlow 1992), 145–46.

<sup>28</sup> It was dedicated to 'the worshipfull Prynmesse Isabelle nowe Countasse of Warr lady Despenser': K.K. Jambeck, 'Patterns of Women's Literary Patronage: England, 1200-ca.1475', in J.H. McCash (ed.), *The Cultural Patronage of Medieval Women* (Athens, GA 1996), 246; D. Pearsall, *John Lydgate* (London 1970), 168, 274; D. Brindley, *Richard Beauchamp: Medieval England's Greatest Knight* (Stroud 2001), 110, 129. See also D.D. Egbert, 'The "Tewkesbury" Psalter', *Speculum* 10 (1935), 377.

<sup>29</sup> Bodl. MS Top. Glouc. d.2, f. 31r.

valuing 300 marks.<sup>30</sup> Within a year a rare style of effigy was installed over her tomb. She requested a cadaver effigy, representing her body as a corpse, with the burial shroud pulled back to reveal her naked decaying body. Her head was bare, with hair pulled backwards from her face, the whole intended to convey in death a deliberate contrast from the richness she had enjoyed in life. Around her were mourners, griffins and statues of the poor. Such an effigy was usually reserved for clergy, and Isabel's will contains genuine concern for the reaction of the abbey and convent: her jewels were to be sold for the highest possible price and the money delivered to the monks 'that they are not grudged with my burial there or anything I have done about my body'.<sup>31</sup> Her effigy was dramatic, intended to shock the viewer into reflection and prayer.

Other Despenser women made substantial contributions to the abbey fabric. Eleanor's participation in the re-styling of the abbey in the 1320s and 1330s was eclipsed only by her younger sister, who was one of the most generous patrons of her time.<sup>32</sup> Elizabeth de Burgh's foundation of Clare College, Cambridge, the Greyfriars at Walsingham, and gifts to Denny Abbey, Anglesey Abbey and Clare Priory all came about during her lengthy period of widowhood. It makes for an interesting comparison with Edward Despenser's widow Elizabeth. As we have previously seen,<sup>33</sup> both women's management of their estates was impressive, but their patronage of buildings differed. De Burgh's widowhood was marked by open-handed generosity, whereas it is Despenser's single-minded devotion to her family that stands out. Unlike others of her wealth, she founded no monasteries, colleges or hospitals. We know of no particular saint to whom she was attached, and her involvement at Tewkesbury is the most prominent 'cultural' feature of her widowhood. It seems that promotion of Tewkesbury, its architecture, heritage and ownership, was more important than any purely religious motivation. Her will – where she styled herself Elizabeth Burghersh, Lady Despenser – echoed her life. It differs from those of de Burgh and her own grand-daughter Isabel because it is essentially concerned with her family. There is no mention of any handouts to the poor, unlike – to chose a comparative example – Beatrice, lady Roos, who died in

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<sup>30</sup> Bodl. MS Top. Glouc. d.2, ff. 31r, 32r.

<sup>31</sup> Lindley, 'Medieval Monuments and Chantry Chapels', 176-78; *TV*, i, 239; F.J. Furnivall, *The Fifty Earliest English Wills*, FETS, old series 78 (1882), 116-17.

<sup>32</sup> Gee, *Women, Art and Patronage*, 29; Ward, *English Noblewomen*, 153; F.A. Underhill, *For Her Good Estate: The Life of Elizabeth de Burgh* (New York 1999), 135-48; id., 'Elizabeth de Burgh: Connoisseur and Patron', in McCash (ed.), *Cultural Patronage*, 266-87.

<sup>33</sup> See above, chapter 5.

1414 and left a litany of gifts to her tenants and the convents and lazar-houses of York.<sup>34</sup> Instead, Elizabeth pardoned son-in-law Sir Thomas Morley and Edward Hastings for monies owed her, and left a series of gifts to her daughters Anne and Margaret, and to several retainers.<sup>35</sup> She requested interment ‘between my lord and husband, Edward lord Despenser, and my son, Thomas’:

I desire that I be buried within three days after my decease, and that a black cloth with a white cross be laid over my body, with five tapers about it, and no more, during the office of burial. Likewise that a stone of marble should be placed over my grave, with my portraiture thereon. Also I will that seven of the most honest priests that can be found sing for me for one whole year next after my death and that each of them for so doing receive one hundred shillings; and I desire that one thousand masses should be sung for my soul.<sup>36</sup>

Regrettably it is almost impossible to ascertain genuine motivation or piety from a will.<sup>37</sup> Outward signs of devotion may or may not be indications of internal conviction; similarly, omissions, like those above, may be misconstrued. Only occasionally is it possible to get behind the source, as we can with Thomas Despenser’s sister Elizabeth, lady Zouche, who died in 1408.<sup>38</sup> She left £20 to the abbey in her will and requested burial ‘where the bodies of my brothers are buried’.<sup>39</sup> This seemingly inconsequential statement tell us of two other children of Edward and Elizabeth who were buried at Tewkesbury: their eldest son Edward, who died at Cardiff aged twelve, and second son Hugh, who died in infancy. Although the dates of the boys’ deaths are unknown, they probably died in the 1360s, the fourth period of construction identified by Richard Morris. The loss of two potential male heirs was a hereditary and personal tragedy, made worse by the death of their third child and first daughter Cecile shortly afterwards. Three surviving daughters preceded Thomas’s birth in 1373. The dedication shown by Elizabeth Despenser to her son’s cause should be viewed with this in mind; Edward’s death in 1375 must have ushered in a time of great worry over the likelihood of dynastic survival. Little wonder lady Zouche, having witnessed this, wished to spend eternity with her family. Her decision tells us that the abbey was not merely a place for the family to display their greatness, but also a haven of peace in an age when so many children died

<sup>34</sup> York, Borthwick Institute for Archives, Archiepiscopal Register 18, f. 358r-v.

<sup>35</sup> Lambeth Palace, Reg. Arundel, ii, ff. 108v-109r.

<sup>36</sup> Lambeth Palace, Reg. Arundel, ii, f. 108v.

<sup>37</sup> R.C. Swanson, *Church and Society in Late Medieval England* (Oxford 1989), 265-68.

<sup>38</sup> A similar attempt is made in M.A. Hicks, ‘Piety and Lineage in the Wars of the Roses: The Hungerford Experience’, in R.A. Griffiths and J.W. Sherborne (eds.), *Kings & Nobles in the Later Middle Ages: a tribute to Charles Ross* (Gloucester 1986), 90-108.

<sup>39</sup> *TT*, i, 172.

young. Tewkesbury for the Despensers was more than a sacred space. It was a sanctuary of rest.

Tewkesbury exerted a magnetic force over its benefactors. Not only were consecutive Despenser lords interred in the abbey along with their wives, but various second husbands also chose to be buried there. So did Hugh Mortimer of Weldon, a retainer of Edward and Elizabeth whose will, made forty years after Edward died, requested that his remains be placed beside theirs.<sup>40</sup> William Zouche, as we saw, was buried in the now-destroyed Lady Chapel and his image appears in the south clerestory window.<sup>41</sup> Elizabeth Montagu, wife of Hugh III, chose to be buried beside him rather than with her first husband, Giles Badlesmere, or her third, Guy Brian. Brian himself is buried across the aisle from Hugh and Elizabeth's twin alabaster effigies. Richard Beauchamp of Worcester, Isabel Despenser's first husband, desired to be buried at Tewkesbury, and the chapel that Isabel constructed for him is an extravagant illustration of their wealth and appreciation of grandeur.<sup>42</sup> It sits beside the Founder's Chapel on the north side of the sanctuary and on the west end is constructed on two vertical levels, echoing William Wykeham's chantry tomb in Winchester Cathedral.<sup>43</sup> The lower section has extravagant fan vaulting and a tiny face on the underside of the roof amidst the vaulting may be that of Isabel herself.<sup>44</sup> She, as we have seen, chose to be buried nearby. Her second husband Richard Beauchamp of Warwick was interred at Warwick, but desired the Tewkesbury priests to say a mass for him every day and an obit every year 'for ever more'.<sup>45</sup> Their son duke Henry (d. 1446) was buried between the choir stalls beneath the tower. In choosing to be interred at Reading, Constance Despenser, also a member of the royal family, was the first principle family member not buried at Tewkesbury in over a century.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> There is no mention of this in any recension of the *Chronica*. For Mortimer, see above, chapter 4.

<sup>41</sup> The absence of any tomb for Eleanor had led to suggestions that she and Zouche were buried together in the now-destroyed Lady Chapel (J.H. Blunt, *Tewkesbury Abbey and its Associations* (London and Tewkesbury 1875), 66; Gee, *Women, Art and Patronage*, 21), but there is no hard evidence for this.

<sup>42</sup> '... Isabel his wife arranged for a beautiful chapel which was constructed with remarkable skill': Bodl. MS Top. Glouc. d.2, f. 28r.

<sup>43</sup> Lindley, 'Medieval Monuments and Chantry Chapels', 173.

<sup>44</sup> I am grateful to the head verger of Tewkesbury Abbey for showing me the face.

<sup>45</sup> 'My desire is that [the mass] may be the first mass, if it may be, or else I would it were the last': 'The Last Will and Testament of Richard Beauchamp, Earle of Warwick and Aumarle ...', in T. Hearne (ed.), *Historia Vitae et Regni Ricardi II. Angliae Regis* (Oxford 1729), 242-43.

<sup>46</sup> Bodl. MS Top. Glouc. d.2, f. 27r-v.

Tewkesbury was a place for display of public and private piety, a locus for those of noble and comital rank. Burial within its walls associated a person with the great families that had gone before. It shows us the Despenser's vibrant use of the visual to reinforce their status and lineage, and, in some cases, to express their religious devotion. Such ideas were evident when Edward II visited Tewkesbury in January 1324 and placed a cloth of bright green and gold upon Gilbert Clare's tomb.<sup>47</sup> Despite all the significance of a royal visit, this was less a visit to honour the late earl than a carefully engineered propaganda exercise to publicly announce the Despensers' heritage. Unlike the experience of the Hungerfords, where a haphazard understanding of pedigree was disregarded for religious reasons (the mortgaging of part of the family inheritance),<sup>48</sup> there was no tension between the Despensers' grasp of the spiritual and dynastic. Although the family focus shifted after their experiences in 1326, they were clearly aware of what a family had to do to be seen.

### Chivalry and Crusade

There are other ways that religion was relevant to noble families in this period, and the aim of this section is to consider the Despensers in light of the crusading *mentalité* of the fourteenth century. Certain pieces of evidence have already come to attention in this study. We have seen Edward Despenser's experiences in Italy in 1368-72, and briefly examined how the military career of Hugh V comprised a trip to Prussia in 1391 with Henry Bolingbroke. We also saw how Thomas Despenser sealed a life indenture that included the caveat that his retainer may be asked to serve him overseas.<sup>49</sup> Here these issues are examined again in the context of the chivalric culture of the period.

Both Maurice Keen and Anthony Luttrell have advanced reasons why we should take seriously the notion that Englishmen continued to appreciate the scope for crusading long into the fourteenth century.<sup>50</sup> For men who wished to take the cross the opportunities were almost boundless, with fronts opening up in Iberia, Prussia, North

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<sup>47</sup> BL Add. MS 35114, f. 7v.

<sup>48</sup> Hicks, 'Piety and Lineage', 97-100.

<sup>49</sup> See above, chapters 2(c), 3(b) and 4.

<sup>50</sup> M.H. Keen, 'Chaucer's Knight, the English Aristocracy and the Crusade', in V.J. Scattergood and J.W. Sherborne (eds.), *English Court Culture in the Later Middle Ages* (London 1983), 45-61; A. Luttrell, 'Chaucer's Knight and the Mediterranean', *Library of Mediterranean History* 1 (1994), 127-60.

Africa, Italy and Palestine. King Edward I himself was on crusade when his father died in 1272,<sup>51</sup> and over the next hundred and thirty years Englishmen took part in action both against the Moors as well as in publicly proclaimed crusades against other Christian powers.<sup>52</sup> The problem remains ascertaining motive. Keen wrote that ‘Christianity and bellicosity were woven together inseparably in the structure of chivalry from its beginning’, and to delineate between genuine crusaders and mercenaries is tricky since ‘the good and ill in its ethic were products of a single framework of ideas’.<sup>53</sup> In Christopher Tyerman’s words, ‘men reacted politically to what they saw increasingly as political operations’.<sup>54</sup> The expeditions to Prussia provide a good example of this. The 1360s saw an almost annual exodus of warriors and their retinues to Eastern Europe, which just happened to coincide with a period of peace in the war between England and France. It is hard to see a consistent higher motive in these mass departures. Yet religion was just one facet of chivalry. While Christian rituals and church law did much to underscore the significance of the crusade, the knightly life, with all its aristocratic trappings, was in itself seen as a road to redemption.<sup>55</sup> Exploring the Despensers on these terms proves how this culture – in all its complexity – was relevant to them.

The Despensers had a good pedigree in the crusading arena. During the Barons’ Wars, Simon de Montfort had long believed that he was defending a sacred cause. His men had themselves tonsured in April-May 1263,<sup>56</sup> and in December, the Dunstable annalist records how the baronial forces – including, we may presume, Hugh Despenser the justiciar – trapped outside the gates of London on the Southwark side of the Thames

in the name of God signed themselves, front and back, with the cross [*ante et retro cruce signate*], and having confessed their sins, they all took of the body of Christ in preparing for their enemies’ attack.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> S. Lloyd, ‘The Lord Edward’s Crusade, 1270-2: its setting and significance’, in J.B. Gillingham and J.C. Holt (eds.), *War and Government in the Middle Ages: essays in honour of J.O. Prestwich* (Cambridge 1984), 120-33; M.C. Prestwich, *Edward I* (London 1988), 66-85; and more generally, id., ‘The Piety of Edward I’, in Ormrod (ed.), *England in the Thirteenth Century*, 120-28.

<sup>52</sup> For crusading against Catholics: N.J. Housley, *The Later Crusades, 1274-1580: from Lyons to Alcazar* (Oxford 1992), 234-66; id., ‘France, England and the “National Crusade”, 1302-1386’, in G. Jondorf and D. Dumville (eds.), *France and the British Isles in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: essays by members of Girton College, Cambridge, in memory of Ruth Morgan* (Woodbridge 1991), 183-98.

<sup>53</sup> M.H. Keen, *Chivalry* (New Haven 1984), 55; id., ‘Chivalry, Nobility and the Man-at-Arms’, in C.T. Allmand (ed.), *War, Literature and Politics in the Late Middle Ages* (Liverpool 1976), 45.

<sup>54</sup> C.J. Tyerman reviewing N.J. Housley, *The Italian Crusades: the Papal-Angevin Alliance and the Crusades against Christian Lay Powers, 1254-1343* (Oxford 1982), in *EHR* 99 (1984), 863.

<sup>55</sup> Keen, *Chivalry*, 56, 62-63.

<sup>56</sup> H. Ellis (ed.), *Chronica Johannis de Oxenides*, RS 13 (London 1859), 226.

<sup>57</sup> ‘Annales Prioratus de Dunstaplia’, in *AM*, iii, 226.



Five months later at Lewes, the baronial army again wore white crosses fore and aft. When they did likewise at Evesham the following year, Prince Edward's royalist forces countered by wearing red crosses.<sup>58</sup> Images of holy war were everywhere in England in those years – Urban IV had promulgated an expedition to the Holy Land in 1263 – and it would be an exaggeration to say that Hugh Despenser was a *crucesignatus* in the full sense of the word. The white crosses became as much a symbol of anti-royalist faction as of personal conviction. However, the chronicle account preserved in the College of Arms attributes a significant statement to Despenser the justiciar. When given the chance by de Montfort to flee the battle, he responded by saying: 'My lord, my lord, let it be. Today we shall all drink from one cup, just as we have in the past.'<sup>59</sup> Maybe this was just poetic licence on the part of the author, but the eucharistic language is expressive of the religious conviction that both de Montfort and Despenser apparently held dear.

Most of the attention of this section must be directed towards the middle and later parts of the 1300s. It is possible that Hugh III was at the siege of Algeciras (1343-44), and thus fought 'the enemies of God and the Christian' with the earl of Derby, who was wounded, and Despenser's father-in-law, the earl of Salisbury, who was imprisoned briefly.<sup>60</sup> This formed an interesting precursor to Edward Despenser's journey to Italy as steward of Lionel of Clarence in 1368.<sup>61</sup> After Lionel's death Edward remained in Italy until 1372, where his service in the papal army 'won great praise in those parts for many years to come'.<sup>62</sup> At first glance, it is difficult to explain why Edward stayed overseas, especially considering the souring of relations which had occurred between king Edward III and the pope.<sup>63</sup> One explanation is that Edward followed the example of so many after Brétigny, and spent three years as a mercenary in the papal armies. However, the *condottieri* who joined the free companies in the 1360s were usually men of diminished

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<sup>58</sup> S. Lloyd, "Political Crusades" in England, c.1215-17 and c.1263-5', in P.W. Edbury (ed.), *Crusade and settlement: papers read at the First Conference of the Society for the Study of Crusades and the Latin East and presented to R.C. Smail* (Cardiff 1985), 116; C.J. Tyerman, *England and the Crusades, 1095-1588* (Chicago and London 1988), 146-51.

<sup>59</sup> O. de Laborde, J.R. Maddicott and D.A. Carpenter, 'The Last Hours of Simon de Montfort: A New Account', *EHR* 115 (2000), 410. This account is quoted more fully above, in chapter 2(a).

<sup>60</sup> K.A. Fowler, *The King's Lieutenant: Henry of Grosmont, First Duke of Lancaster 1310-1361* (New York 1969), 45; M.W. Warner, 'The Montagu earls of Salisbury circa 1300-1428: a study in warfare, politics and political culture', unpublished PhD thesis (University College, London 1991), 21-22.

<sup>61</sup> Also see above, chapter 3(b).

<sup>62</sup> *Polychronicon*, viii, 371, 419.

<sup>63</sup> See J.J.N. Palmer and A.P. Wells, 'Ecclesiastical Reform and the Politics of the Hundred Years War during the Pontificate of Urban V (1362-70)', in Allmand (ed.), *War, Literature and Politics*, 169-89.

noble families who were impoverished by the break in the war and prepared to sell their services to the highest bidder. Men of the 'Great Company' in France and the 'White Company', which appeared in Italy by June 1361, were seasoned warriors. Filippo Villani wrote that they were 'all young men, yet bred in the long wars of England and France, fierce, enthusiastic, quite used to the routine of killing and looting'.<sup>64</sup> In the service of the church from 1361 to 1364, the 'White Company' set new standards for barbarity, ransacking Milan and Lombardy. It was to situations like this that Keen referred when he spoke of religion and warfare being inextricably bound together.

Such a picture of brutality does not accord well with a Garter Knight with an impeccable service record. However, the trip to Italy did coincide with an upsurge in crusading interests which occurred in chivalric circles during the 1360s.<sup>65</sup> Urban V had preached the liberation of Jerusalem in 1363, and Froissart records that when Pierre Lusignan, king of Cyprus, visited England the following year, Edward Despenser was one of the nobles sent to greet Lusignan at Dover.<sup>66</sup> Not long afterwards, Despenser petitioned the pope for a portable altar and permission to hold private masses when visiting regions placed under interdict.<sup>67</sup> There can be little doubt he hoped to be granted permission to leave England and go on crusade. Unfortunately, the prospect never arose and for the next few years he remained in England. However, in May 1368, threatened by Bernarbò V, Urban revived the crusade against the Lombardians. By remaining in Italy after Lionel's death, Edward not only helped to defeat the Visconti, but also fulfilled his earlier ambition. It was not the liberation of Jerusalem, but it was the next best thing, especially because Urban had forbidden the preaching of the cross in the Holy Land until 'the matter of the heretic [Bernarbò] has been brought to a successful conclusion'.<sup>68</sup> Soldiers were enlisted from Italy, Germany and Bohemia, and Walsingham wrote that in

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<sup>64</sup> Quoted in J. Sumption, *The Hundred Years War, II: Trial by Fire* (London 1999), 468; J. Temple-Leader and G. Marcotti, *Sir John Hawkwood* (London 1889), *passim*; K. Fowler, 'Sir John Hawkwood and the English *condottieri* in Trecento Italy', *Renaissance Studies* 12 (1998), 131-48; id., 'Condotte et *condottieri*: mercenaires anglais au service de Florence au XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle', in J. Paviot and J. Verger (eds.), *Guerre, pouvoir and noblesse au Moyen Age: Mélanges en l'honneur de Philippe Contamine* (Paris 2000), 283-90; W. Caferro, 'Slaying the Hydra-Headed Beast: Italy and the Companies of Adventure in the Fourteenth Century', in L.J.A. Villalon and D.J. Kagay (eds.), *Crusaders, Condottieri and Cannon: medieval warfare in societies around the Mediterranean* (Leiden and Boston 2003), 285-304.

<sup>65</sup> A. Luttrell, 'English Levantine Crusaders, 1363-1367', *Renaissance Studies* 2 (1988), 143-53; N.J. Housley, *The Avignon Papacy and the Crusades, 1305-1378* (Oxford 1986), 77-79; id., 'The Mercenary Companies, the Papacy and the Crusades, 1356-1378', *Traditio* 38 (1982), 253-80.

<sup>66</sup> Froissart, *Oeuvres*, vi, 380-81; N. Iorga, *Philippe de Mézières, 1327-1405, et la croisade au XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris 1896), 179.

<sup>67</sup> CPL 1362-1404, 47.

<sup>68</sup> Quoted in Housley, *Avignon Papacy*, 114-15.

1369 Despensers performed distinguished service in the papal armies and 'on behalf of the true pope, conducted himself in an admirable way after the death of the duke of Clarence'.<sup>69</sup> We do not know Edward's exact movement in these years, but he must have been with the Florentines when Urban wrote to him from Rome in January 1370, telling him not to come to him until the affairs of the Florentines were in a safer condition.<sup>70</sup> The monk who illustrated the *Chronica de Theokesburie* apparently understood Despensers' exploits and portrayed him with a huge *menorah* (a seven-branched candlestick) in his hand.<sup>71</sup> Some have suggested that this unusual image represents the Jewish liberator Judas Maccabeus, who, as one of the knightly exemplars known as the 'Nine Worthies', was a popular chivalric role model at this time.<sup>72</sup> If so, it underlines the argument presented throughout this thesis that Edward Despensers deserves much greater recognition for his chivalric activities.

This is further strengthened by a fourteenth-century fresco which survives in the church of Santa Maria Novella, Florence.<sup>73</sup> Attributed to Andrea di Bonaiuto, it was commissioned by the prior and convent of the church, and painted in the late 1360s. Part of the fresco is entitled 'The Church Militant and Triumphant', and possibly depicts Edward Despensers.<sup>74</sup> Although the main purpose behind its design was to glorify the papal victories, the fresco also includes two crusading 'greats', the king of Cyprus and the count of Savoy, together with Juan Fernández de Heredia, castellan of Amposta, who defended Avignon against the mercenary companies.<sup>75</sup> If the identifications are accurate, there can be little doubt that Despensers was included after the conquest of the Visconti in recognition of his achievements and in fulfilment of his crusading aspirations. It also gives an interesting angle on Edward's decision-making, since Lionel's marriage was the result of the English crown's failure to secure an alliance with the Flemish. In anger at

<sup>69</sup> H.T. Riley (ed.), *Thomae Walsingham Historia Anglicana 1272-1422*, RS 28 (London 1863-64), i, 309.

<sup>70</sup> CPL 1362-1404, 28.

<sup>71</sup> Bodl. MS Top. Glouc. d.2, f. 24r. See Figure 5.

<sup>72</sup> J.M. Luxford, 'The Founders' Book', in Morris and Shoemith (eds.), *Tewkesbury Abbey*, 63; Keen, *Chivalry*, 121-24.

<sup>73</sup> J. Gardner, 'Andrea di Bonaiuto and the Chapter House frescoes in Santa Maria Novella', *Art History* 2 (1979), 107-38; J. Polzer, 'Andrea di Bonaiuto's *Via Veritas* and Dominican thought of late Medieval Italy', *Art Bulletin* 77 (1995), 262-89. I am grateful to Dr Amanda Lillie for references.

<sup>74</sup> M.A. Devlin, 'An English Knight of the Garter in the Spanish Chapel in Florence', *Speculum* 4 (1929), 270-81. This is given short shrift by Gardner ('Andrea di Bonaiuto', 116) and an alternative view is advanced by Luttrell ('English Levantine Crusaders', 152-53). However, the lack of attention paid to Edward Despensers' career means that his identification is by no means unlikely. See Figure 6.

<sup>75</sup> Devlin, 'An English Knight of the Garter', 277; A. Luttrell, 'A Hospitaller in a Florentine fresco, 1366/68', *Burlington Magazine* 114 (1972), 365; id., 'Juan Fernández de Heredia at Avignon: 1351-1367', in E. Verdera (ed.), *El Cardenal Albornoz y el Colegio de España* (Bologna 1972), i, 311-12.

the papacy Edward III prohibited men and money from leaving England without royal licence, and arranged the marriage with the Milanese. Consequently, after Lionel's death Edward Despenser was faced with a choice – to side with his king against Urban V, or to avenge Lionel's death and side with the pope. His decision to remain in Italy speaks volumes about his personal convictions. Staying overseas long after war with France restarted was in direct contrast to the men of the mercenary companies who returned to the battlefields. This provides the context for a letter written on 10 March 1370 by Urban V to John of Gaunt, in which the pope commended Despenser to the king, explaining how 'he has won a glorious name in the battles of Lombardy'.<sup>76</sup> Maybe the reason for this letter – bearing in mind the animosity that still existed between England and the papacy – was to provide justification for Despenser's absence. Froissart, who accompanied his patron to Italy, tells us Edward spent two years based in Venice and only returned to England at Gaunt's request in advance of the 1372 expedition to France.<sup>77</sup>

It is not impossible that the young Geoffrey Chaucer, who was in Genoa and Florence in 1372-73 and may even have travelled with Lionel's party from England in 1368, also came into contact with Despenser.<sup>78</sup> He certainly would have seen di Bonaiuto's completed fresco at Santa Maria Novella. Maybe there was something of Edward Despenser in Chaucer's celebrated knight. In the prologue to the *Canterbury Tales* Chaucer wrote of

a worthy man  
That fro the tyme that he first bigan  
To riden out, he loved chivalrie,  
trouthe and honour, fredom and curteisie.<sup>79</sup>

The similarity to Froissart's description of Despenser ('the most handsome, the most courteous and the most honourable knight of his time') is striking. Since too many scholars of the second half of the 1300s have tried to 'claim' Chaucer's knight for their own particular purpose, it would be unwise to push the comparison further than is

<sup>76</sup> *CPL 1362-1404*, 28. A grant places Edward at Viterbo on 3 May 1370: *CPR 1399-1402*, 432.

<sup>77</sup> Froissart, *Oeuvres*, viii, 112. Edward's activities led to a number of letters from Urban V and Gregory IX requesting safe conducts for men of the papal household, and urging him to use his influence over Gaunt to limit the hostilities between England and France (*CPL 1362-1404*, 127, 131, 132).

<sup>78</sup> M.M. Crow and C.C. Olsen (eds.), *Chaucer Life-Records* (Oxford 1966), 30, 32-40; M. Jones, 'Froissart, Jean (1337? - c.1404)', in *Oxford DNB*, xxi, 58-59.

<sup>79</sup> L.D. Benson (general ed.), *The Riverside Chaucer* (Oxford 1987), 24.

credible, yet there *is* a literary, if not an actual, likeness. In any case, the effects of Edward's years in Italy resonated throughout the family. The *Polychronicon* recorded that Despenser's brother Henry, who also took part in the crusade against Bernarbò V and would lead his own crusade in 1383, was made bishop of Norwich that year 'because of the favour of [Edward] with the pope in his wars at that time'.<sup>80</sup> We may go so far to suggest that Edward's experiences in Italy formed the backdrop to the 1383 Flanders crusade.<sup>81</sup> His youngest brother Hugh IV was also infused by the crusading fervour, and in 1367 (in the wake of the Flanders marriage failure) received special licence to leave England and travel to Prussia.<sup>82</sup> He was away until at least mid-1369, but apparently returned when the French wars recommenced.<sup>83</sup> Hugh V also took part in the Prussian crusades, being excused from staying on his Irish lands in May 1383.<sup>84</sup> He was mentioned in a letter from Richard II to Conrad Zöllner, general master of the Teutonic Knights, in 1386.<sup>85</sup> It is probable that it was this Hugh, not Thomas Despenser, who was the 'lord Despenser' who received licence from Richard II in 1391 to take a retinue of fifty men to Prussia with Henry Bolingbroke.<sup>86</sup>

The mid-1390s brought a truce between England and France, the climax, J.J.N. Palmer has argued, of a long-term diplomatic effort to redirect energy against the Turks.<sup>87</sup> The aged Philippe de Mézières had returned to England and gained considerable support among the chivalric nobility for his *Nova Religio Passionis*, including Hugh Despenser V.<sup>88</sup> Ambitious contemporaries had predicted Richard II would be the king who would fulfil prophecy and lead an apocalyptic campaign.<sup>89</sup> Richard Davies, on the other hand, wrote that Richard would have been 'politely sympathetic and personally inactive in this respect as in so many others', and that de Mézières was nothing more than a 'deluded veteran'.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>80</sup> *Polychronicon*, viii, 369. For bishop Henry's career, see above, chapter 2(c).

<sup>81</sup> Some have even posited that Chaucer's squire who 'hadde been sometyne in chyvachie / in Flandres in Artoys and Pycardie' may have been a reference to this crusade (C. Brown, 'Author's Revision in the Canterbury Tales', *PMLA* 57 (1942), 36-37).

<sup>82</sup> *CPR 1364-67*, 34, 58; Keen, 'Chaucer's Knight', 54 n31.

<sup>83</sup> *CPR 1370-74*, 260.

<sup>84</sup> *CPR 1381-85*, 274.

<sup>85</sup> E. Perroy (ed.), *The Diplomatic Correspondence of Richard II*, Camden 3<sup>rd</sup> series, 48 (London 1933), no. 61.

<sup>86</sup> *CPR 1388-92*, 413. For this campaign: F.R.H. Du Boulay, 'Henry of Derby's Expeditions to Prussia 1390-1 and 1392', in id. and C.M. Barron (eds.), *The Reign of Richard II: Essays in Honour of May McKisack* (London 1971), 153-72.

<sup>87</sup> J.J.N. Palmer, *England, France and Christendom, 1377-99* (London 1972), 180-210.

<sup>88</sup> Iorga, *Philippe de Mézières*, 491; G.W. Coopland (ed.), *Letter to King Richard II: A Plea Made in 1395 for Peace between England and France* (Liverpool 1975).

<sup>89</sup> L.A. Coote, *Prophecy and Public Affairs in Later Medieval England* (Woodbridge 2000), 156.

<sup>90</sup> R.G. Davies, 'Richard II and the Church', in Goodman and Gillespie (eds.), *Richard II*, 96.

Nevertheless, the crusade remained a 'live' issue in the 1390s, even after the western alliance was soundly defeated at the Danubian fortress of Nicopolis (1396). When Richard II held his Christmas court at Lichfield in 1398, the kinsman of the emperor of Constantinople sought him out, seeking resources to defend the city against Sultan Bayezid I, the victor at Nicopolis.<sup>91</sup> Shortly afterwards Thomas Despenser, together with the earls of Salisbury and Westmoreland, sent 100 marks each as a gift for Emperor Manuel II.<sup>92</sup> Perhaps this conviction was carried into the autumn of 1399 when Despenser sealed an indenture with William Hamme, making allowance for travel to Prussia, Rhodes and other parts beyond the realm.<sup>93</sup> We cannot tell whether this was motivated by anything more than political expediency: in the context of Richard II's overthrow, it is understandable that his followers should have wanted to diffuse the situation and, in some cases, to leave the country. It may even have been a financial decision: Thomas's love of finery is apparent from purchases he made as earl of Gloucester, and demotion from his earldom must have hurt his pocket.<sup>94</sup> Perhaps the clearest indication of his motivation comes from the actions of Henry Bolingbroke and Thomas Mowbray who were exiled in 1398. Froissart tells us that Bolingbroke considered taking the cross and going to Granada, Friesland or Hungary, and we know that Mowbray hired a galley in Venice to take him on pilgrimage to the Holy Land.<sup>95</sup> That neither Bolingbroke or Despenser ever carried out their plans should not deflect us from the issue: taking the cross was clearly seen as a useful way to let the political dust settle.<sup>96</sup>

At a time when most men could only boast martial experience from the Anglo-French wars, a great many families connected with the Despensers took part in the crusades. As we have seen, William Montagu, Hugh III's father-in-law, was at Algeciras in 1343. Henry Ferrers, bastard son of lord Ferrers of Groby, father-in-law of Edward Despenser I, crusaded in Prussia, and Sir Hugh Hastings, who married Anne Despenser, was at

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<sup>91</sup> Housley, *The Later Crusades*, 80.

<sup>92</sup> E 401/614, *sub* 30 June.

<sup>93</sup> M. Jones and S.K. Walker, 'Private Indentures for Life Service in Peace and War', *Camden Miscellany* XXXII, 5<sup>th</sup> series, 3 (London 1994), no. 93.

<sup>94</sup> E 101/511/28-29; E 153/1907, mm. 4-6.

<sup>95</sup> Froissart, *Oeuvres*, xvii, 107-8, 132-33; J.A. Tuck, 'Henry IV and Chivalry', in G.J.A. Dodd and D.L. Biggs (eds.), *Henry IV: the Establishment of the Regime, 1399-1406* (Woodbridge 2003), 68; *Calendar of State Papers: Venetian, 1202-1509*, 38.

<sup>96</sup> Tuck, 'Henry IV', 68, says that Bolingbroke's eagerness to go on crusade was tempered by his father's illness and approaching death.

Rhodes sometimes before his death in 1386.<sup>97</sup> Sir Robert Morley, kin to Thomas Morley who later married the same Anne, died on crusade. Finally, Sir Richard Beauchamp, earl of Warwick, who, as we saw above, inherited the Despenser estates in 1422, crusaded as a young man; his grandfather went to Venice after Peter of Cyprus's rallying call in 1363.<sup>98</sup> Maybe it is just coincidence to find such a high proportion of crusading men related by marriage to the Despensers. Yet it shows the extent to which the Despensers were truly part of the crusading culture.

Were these aspirations personal, or was crusading merely another opportunity for the fourteenth-century nobility to take up arms? Did they feel the need to take the cross in order to portray themselves in a particular light? In most cases, the crusading *mentalité* was nothing more than an outworking of a pragmatism that centred around a family's need to be seen. Like the tombs at Tewkesbury, a sense of religious display can be detected. The crusades brought a host of temporal benefits that often outweighed anything else: Thomas Despenser, Hugh IV and Hugh V all made decisions about crusades which were rooted in the secular. In this sense they were a product of their age. But Edward Despenser's controversial decision to stay in Italy against all the bounds of political sense hints at something deeper. In fighting the Visconti he showed that there was more to the crusade than merely a love of fighting. There was a religious ebullience that brought him high favour with the pope and found its ultimate expression in the wall paintings in his Tewkesbury tomb.

### **(b) The dynamics of noble patronage**

Having seen their ambitious visual promotion at Tewkesbury, it is indisputable that the Despensers wished to be seen as one of the great families of the realm. But where did they actually stand in comparison with other members of the fourteenth-century nobility? Scholars and popular writers alike have looked to the 1320s for an answer to this question but, as this study has argued, the only real answer comes from an assessment of the family as a whole. Consequently this section will assess the dynamics of both crown and noble patronage, examining the expectations of reward, promotion and inheritance

<sup>97</sup> Luttrell, 'English Levantine Crusaders', 150 n.61.

<sup>98</sup> Iorga, *Philippe de Mézières*, 205, 243, 254; Keen, 'Chaucer's Knight', 54; Luttrell, 'English Levantine Crusaders', 147-48.

that a family such as the Despensers may have had, whilst providing comparisons with other contemporary families in similar situations.

We must first ascertain whether the crown had any strategy of noble creation, and, if so, what the nobility understood by it. New creations brought both benefits and hazards for a monarch. On one hand, they could provide a powerful clutch of supporters upon whom the king could rely for counsel and friendship; on the other, the fragile support of the established nobility could be threatened if they saw their exclusivity being undermined.<sup>99</sup> Successful promotion into the upper nobility depended on how the individual conducted himself, and on the king's generosity towards his existing magnates. Edward I's patronage was limited and often grudging, especially in the second half of his reign, whilst neither Edward II and Richard II had any real policy of promotion.<sup>100</sup> Almost without exception, the noble creations of the latter were ill-judged, with little consideration either for the feelings of the hereditary magnates or the abilities of their new men. If any pattern can be established it was the preference of both Edward II and Richard II for promoting their friends at the expense of other, more deserving cases. Edward raised just three men to English earldoms – Piers Gaveston (1308), Hugh the elder (1322) and Andrew Harclay (1322) – each of whom were executed within four years of their respective promotions.<sup>101</sup> Gaveston's elevation to the earldom of Cornwall was the first creation outside the royal family for nearly a century. He was entirely unsuited to such a position both in temperament and lineage, and scholars have drawn attention to his promotion as the first to 'give rank and authority to one whose only significance lay in the king's personal confidence and predilection'.<sup>102</sup> As one who had given loyal and consistent service since the 1290s, Despenser was perhaps more deserving of his Winchester earldom, but the circumstances in which this came about made him deeply unpopular. Harclay's elevation to the earldom of Carlisle was an instant reaction to the royal victory at Boroughbridge, where his intervention had been decisive, but his execution within twelve months, for intrigue with the Scots, was another poor reflection

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<sup>99</sup> Given-Wilson, *English nobility*, 30.

<sup>100</sup> M.C. Prestwich, 'Royal Patronage under Edward I', in P.R. Coss and S.D. Lloyd (eds.), *Thirteenth Century England I* (Woodbridge 1986), 41-52; J.A. Tuck, 'Richard II's System of Patronage', in F.R.H. Du Boulay and C.M. Barron (eds.), *The Reign of Richard II: Essays in Honour of May McKisack* (London 1971), 1-20; J.A. Tuck, *Richard II and the English Nobility* (London 1973), 71-72, 84-86; Given-Wilson, *English nobility*, 29-54; id., 'Richard II and the Higher Nobility', in Goodman and Gillespie (eds.), *Richard II: the Art of Kingship*, 117-22.

<sup>101</sup> I am ignoring the hereditary passage of Edward II's two half-brothers to the earldoms of Norfolk and Kent, which excited no comment.

<sup>102</sup> Powell and Wallis, *House of Lords*, 265.



on Edward II's decision-making. In 1385-86, Edward's great-grandson Richard II made similar mistakes in promoting his contemporaries, Michael de la Pole and Robert de Vere. De la Pole was the son of a Hull merchant who became chancellor in 1383 and was made earl of Suffolk two years later. De Vere was hereditary earl of Oxford, but was created marquis of Dublin in 1385 (a new position that ranked above an earl) and the following year made duke of Ireland. Thomas Walsingham wrote of the anger that met only the second dukedom outside the immediate royal family,<sup>103</sup> and the magnates' reaction culminated in the permanent exile of both men in the Merciless Parliament of 1388. Finally, of course, there was Richard's promotion of the counter-Appellants in the parliament of September 1397 (including Thomas Despenser), a move which led to accusations that the king was devaluing the system by elevating too many men at once and ultimately led to his downfall.

A recent examination of the patronage policies of Edward III has shown, in stark contrast with those who went before and after him, an intelligent programme of promotion and restraint.<sup>104</sup> Partly as a reaction to the overindulgence of his father's reign, Edward's favour was distributed to a specific combination of old and new families who would strengthen the crown's rule at home, improve defence near the Welsh and Scottish borders and lead the king's armies abroad. In 1337, his unprecedented six promotions into the upper nobility were influenced strongly by the problems that had previously come from holders of earldoms – Gaveston, Despenser, Harclay and Roger Mortimer – and a need to regain influence over this section of the nobility. This did not mean that Edward's promotions were received 'without a murmur',<sup>105</sup> but the limited adverse reaction to his patronage programme was due to the quality of his 'new men', the details of the way this favour was shown, the overall packaging of the programme and Edward's judicious, but selective, patronage to his existing magnates.<sup>106</sup> To a lesser extent, Henry IV was to do the same. He too needed to recover the realm after a deposition (albeit with the additional, self-inflicted, problem of justifying regicide). Henry's chief success, and that of his son, was the recognition that the upper nobility

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<sup>103</sup> Riley (ed.), *Historia Anglicana*, ii, 140-41.

<sup>104</sup> J.S. Bothwell, *Edward III and the English Peerage: royal patronage, social mobility and political control in fourteenth-century England* (Woodbridge 2004).

<sup>105</sup> S.L. Waugh, *England in the reign of Edward III* (Cambridge 1991), 118.

<sup>106</sup> Bothwell, *Edward III and the English Peerage*, 138-53. Ormrod, *Edward III*, 94-101, emphasises 'ten years of political mismanagement' prior to 1341 and locates the king's process of reconciliation more pointedly in his 'middle years' (1341-60).

defined themselves 'by their perceived obligations to give counsel, to discharge weighty offices and to lead the kingdom in war'.<sup>107</sup> It enabled them to buy into the polity in a way forbidden under Richard II to all but the *duketti*.

The magnate policies, such as they were, of Edward III and Henry IV tell us much about the role of memory in determining royal patronage strategy. Yet overall, the existing historiography focuses on the 'set-piece' peerage creations, especially those of 1337, 1377 and 1397, whilst omitting dozens of families who, for whatever reason, were left out in the cold. One such family was the lords Mauley from Mulgrave in Cleveland.<sup>108</sup> They were continuously summoned to parliament from 1295 to 1414 (almost exactly the same dates as the Despensers) before their male line failed, but despite being involved in both local and national affairs, never attained the lofty heights of the upper peerage. There were other, greater, success stories: Sir Walter Mauny and Sir Reginald Cobham, both of whom made their fortunes in war; Sir Guy Brian, one of Edward III's household knights who married into the Despenser line; and Sir Thomas Ughtred, a grizzled career soldier from an older generation.<sup>109</sup> These men were Edward stock-in-trade supporters, many of whom received their greatest accolade when they were admitted to the Order of the Garter. Yet they never attained the rank of earl. Did this matter to them? Certainly there were financial benefits from promotion: five of the six 1337 earls were granted lands worth a thousand marks, and the earl of Northampton, who had a meagre inheritance, £1000.<sup>110</sup> These years, however, saw what Maurice Keen describes as 'a shift in the line of demarcation separating the gentle from the non-gentle' as a consequence of the near-permanent state of war in which men fought side by side with little distinction of rank.<sup>111</sup> One of the ways this was expressed was through the institution of the Order of the Garter, which brought together men from different backgrounds. Although a certain number of stalls were reserved for the great men of the realm, the criteria laid down in the earliest known statutes stressed that each companion should be selected not only on the basis of his martial renown, but also on the gentleness of his birth and the unblemished nature of his reputation (*gentil homme de sang et*

<sup>107</sup> A.J. Dunn, *The Politics of Magnate Power in England and Wales 1389-1413* (Oxford 2003), 180.

<sup>108</sup> Given-Wilson, *English nobility*, 67-68. They were distant relatives of the Despensers: Peter, fourth lord Mauley (d. 1348), married a niece of the elder Hugh.

<sup>109</sup> For Ughtred: A. Ayton, 'Sir Thomas Ughtred and the Edwardian Military Revolution', in Bothwell, *Age of Edward III*, 107-32.

<sup>110</sup> Powell and Wallis, *House of Lords*, 326; Given-Wilson, *English nobility*, 37-40.

<sup>111</sup> M.H. Keen, 'Heraldry and Hierarchy: Esquires and Gentlemen', in J. Denton (ed.), *Orders and Hierarchies in Late Medieval and Renaissance Europe* (Basingstoke 1999), 100.

*chevalier sans reproche*).<sup>112</sup> This enabled relatively obscure knights to be included at the expense of established magnates, such as the earls of Arundel and Huntingdon. Such was the prestige of the Order that Arundel advanced several enormous loans to the crown, apparently in an attempt to buy himself a place. This was not an indication that an earldom was unimportant in comparison, but offers an interesting glimpse at an alternative form of prestige in the second half of the century. Nevertheless, it should not diminish the lofty position the magnates held: they knew it, the other barons knew it, and the king forgot it at his peril.

There were other families who, like the Despensers, were baronial in 1300 but who were permanently<sup>113</sup> elevated to the upper nobility through a combination of reliable service, loyalty and, as often as not, the sheer good fortune of being in the right place at the right time. The Montagus are perhaps the most obvious example of this: G.A. Holmes wrote that ‘the lifetime of the first earl of Salisbury is perhaps the most conspicuous case in the fourteenth century of a sudden rise to greatness by royal favour and patronage’.<sup>114</sup> However, as Mark Warner has shown, despite his promotion from household knight to comital rank, Montagu’s role changed very little.<sup>115</sup> He acted already as counsellor, soldier and diplomat; indeed, it was to this service that he owed his promotion. So too Robert Ufford, raised to the earldom of Suffolk in 1337, who had already made his mark as steward of the royal household and who acted as admiral of the northern fleet before he was created earl.<sup>116</sup>

Yet, as observed in the introduction to chapter three, the bestowal of a hereditary title did not guarantee continuing prosperity. Each generation needed to prove its worth, and, consequently, almost all families went through cycles of good and bad fortune. In an age where begetting a male heir was paramount, predicting who would survive and who would founder must have been virtually impossible. The great Lancastrian inheritance held by Henry of Grosmont almost died with him in 1360, yet his daughter’s

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<sup>112</sup> L. Jefferson, ‘MS Arundel 48 and the Earliest Statutes of the Order of the Garter’, *EHR* 109 (1994), 377. Jefferson puts forward a convincing case that the extant statutes in College of Arms, MS Arundel 48 (which she dates to 3 Henry V), are representative of earlier redactions.

<sup>113</sup> ‘Permanently’ is a loaded term in this context. I am using it to mean ‘barring perpetual forfeiture, or until they failed in the male line’.

<sup>114</sup> Holmes, *Estates*, 26.

<sup>115</sup> GEC, xi, 385-88; Warner, ‘Montagu Earls’, 22; Bothwell, *Edward III and the English Peerage*, 24-26.

<sup>116</sup> GEC, xii(i), 429-32; J.M. Parker, ‘Patronage and Service: The Careers of William Montagu, Earl of Salisbury, William Clinton, Earl of Huntingdon, Robert Ufford, Earl of Suffolk, and William Bohun, Earl

marriage to John of Gaunt not only ensured that the estates survived intact, but led to the bestowal of the dukedom on Gaunt and, eventually, Henry IV's use of the duchy as an integral part of his lordship.<sup>117</sup> By contrast, the Ufford earls of Suffolk died out in 1382 and the title and estates were used to enrich Michael de la Pole three years later. John Hastings, earl of Pembroke, died overseas leaving an underage heir he had never met, who in turn was killed at a tournament in 1389. The title fell into abeyance and the estate, following some dispute, was divided.<sup>118</sup> By contrast, there were other families who fell away from favour, but did not die out, and could always hold out a hope of return to their previous position. Although the second earl of Salisbury lost his estates at a speed comparable only with the way in which they had been accumulated under the first earl, by their longevity the family survived long enough to regain some of their former prominence in the 1420s.<sup>119</sup>

Even disgrace and forfeiture did not automatically mean permanent ignominy. The most interesting example of this in the higher nobility is that of the Mortimers. Their accession to the earldom of March had been somewhat unorthodox, awarded to Roger Mortimer by the young Edward III in October 1328.<sup>120</sup> After March's execution in 1330, the family spent almost quarter of a century without their earldom, but the death of the first earl of Salisbury (1344) and the rise of Mortimer's grandson – typified by his inclusion in the Order of the Garter in 1348 – ushered in better times. It was now 'open season'<sup>121</sup> for the Mortimer heir, who successfully argued in the 1354 parliament that his ancestral title should be returned. Edward III's motivations are well worth considering at this juncture. The 1354 restoration is remarkable for the king's willingness to remove land from the son of his greatest ally in order to reward the grandson of his greatest enemy. It had, after all, been William Montagu I who encouraged the young king to overthrow the earl of March in 1330.<sup>122</sup> Perhaps Edward wished to show favour to the

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of Northampton', unpublished MA dissertation (University of Durham 1986), 20-22; Bothwell, *Edward III and the English Peerage*, 22-24.

<sup>117</sup> As outlined by H. Castor, *The King, the Crown and the Duchy of Lancaster: Public Authority and Private Power, 1399-1461* (Oxford 2000), 22-50.

<sup>118</sup> R.I. Jack, 'Entail and descent: the Hastings inheritance 1370 to 1436', *BIHR* 38 (1965), 1-19; Given-Wilson, *English nobility*, 146-47.

<sup>119</sup> Warner, 'Montagu Earls', 129-170.

<sup>120</sup> P. Dryburgh, 'The Career of Roger Mortimer, first Earl of March, c.1287-1330', unpublished PhD thesis (University of Bristol 2003), contains further detail.

<sup>121</sup> J.S. Bothwell, 'Edward III, the English Peerage and the 1337 Earls: Estate Redistribution in Fourteenth-Century England', in Bothwell, *Age of Edward III*, 50. The 1354 restorations are also mentioned in conjunction with the death of Hugh Despenser III (1349) in chapter 5, above.

<sup>122</sup> H.F. Maxwell (ed.), *The Scalacronica of Sir Thomas Grey* (Glasgow 1907), 157.

family instrumental in the overthrow of the Despensers in 1326, or even to offer a belated apology for the executions of 1330.<sup>123</sup> Mortimer's rehabilitation did, after all, come less than two years after the Statute of Treasons (1352) which, among other things, prevented a repeat of the judgements of 1330 by making such verdicts illegal.<sup>124</sup> On the other hand, it was not in Edward's interests to reward those who had usurped his father. He hardly needed to make apologies to the families of former traitors. Neither does this explain his willingness to disinherit Salisbury. Holmes suggested that the crown was in collusion with Mortimer and the earl of Arundel (who similarly sought the annulment of his father's forfeiture at this time), citing the betrothal of Mortimer's infant son to Arundel's infant daughter as proof.<sup>125</sup> Yet even this overlooks both a previous marriage between Arundel and Montagu and a future alliance between Montagu and Mortimer.<sup>126</sup> The most likely motivation behind these restorations is that Edward III was using this as an opportunity to reassert control over the outlying regions of his kingdom. By rehabilitating Mortimer and granting back lands that had formed the nucleus of their estates in the Marches, as well as arbitrarily ignoring any attempts after 1354 to prevent this, he ensured loyalty and obedience on that most troublesome of frontiers.<sup>127</sup> It was after all the proving ground both for the Despenser's tyranny in 1322-26 and Roger Mortimer's domination in 1328-30. Edward then extended his influence over both the family and the region by marrying his granddaughter Philippa of Ulster to Edmund Mortimer, son of the restored earl of March, in 1358.<sup>128</sup> The entire saga shows the extent to which royal favour did more than anything else to determine the relative standing of aristocratic families in fourteenth-century England. Yet the decidedly capricious nature of the royal prerogative does not mean Edward was unsure of how to manage his magnates. In fact, it is difficult to see what else he could have done, once he had decided to restore Mortimer, since it followed naturally that after annulling the sentence on his grandfather the March lands had to be restored (although whether Edward would ever

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<sup>123</sup> M.V. Clarke, *Fourteenth Century Studies* (Oxford 1937), 130-32.

<sup>124</sup> For the statute, see J.G. Bellamy, *The Law of Treason in England in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge 1970), esp. 59-101, which challenged the interpretations of Clarke, *Fourteenth Century Studies*, 124-32; T.F.T. Plucknett, *A Concise History of the Common Law*, 5<sup>th</sup> edn. (London 1956), 444; M. McKisack, *The Fourteenth Century* (Oxford 1959), 255-57.

<sup>125</sup> Holmes, *Estates*, 15-16.

<sup>126</sup> Arundel's eldest son Edmund, from his first marriage to Isabel Despenser, married Sibyl Montagu in 1349: GEC, i, 244n; and see above, chapter 2(d). Mortimer himself married Philippa Montagu, sister of the second earl, during the 1350s: GEC, viii, 445; xi, 388n.

<sup>127</sup> Davies, *Lordship and Society*, 269-73. The Montagus continued to seek the restoration of Denbigh until 1397: Warner, 'Montagu Earls', 61-68.

<sup>128</sup> W.M. Ormrod, 'Edward III and His Family', *JBS* 26 (1987), 410 n.46.

have treated the first earl of Salisbury in this way is doubtful).<sup>129</sup> What this example shows is that we can look away from the 1337 peerage creations and still find the crown encouraging his nobility to provide loyal service. Most importantly, it indicates that disgrace did not necessarily signal the end for aspirations to earldom restoration. We can now take this forward to a more specific discussion of the Despensers.

The Despensers form a fascinating case study since they existed on the fringe of the upper nobility, having married into comital families on no less than four occasions (namely, the daughters of the earls of Warwick, Gloucester, Salisbury and Cambridge, two of whom were also granddaughters of kings). While the fall of Edward II marked the beginning of a period of almost seventy years spent outside the upper nobility, they could always count themselves as a family of ex-earls. It is also true that the legacy of the 1320s was to give them a certain kudos in later years. Consciously or unconsciously, they were always remembered by others as the family that brought down Edward II. Partly this was due to the long-running disputes that followed the estate reallocation after 1326: many cases continued into the 1340s and 1350s. Certainly the scribes who wrote out the charter witness lists and the parliament rolls regularly placed Hugh III or Edward at the top of the ranks of barons, directly below the earls, even when there seems little reason to have done so.<sup>130</sup> Perhaps this was pure coincidence, but it seems that there was something about the name 'Despenser' that made people take notice, whether due to the infamy of the 1320s or simply an extraordinary family resilience that surprised those who observed it. Holmes characterised this when he wrote that 'the Despensers never entirely lost the eminence they had acquired in the reign of Edward II',<sup>131</sup> although his intention was to show that the family rode the coattails of this success for the rest of the century. It has been the contention of this study that it was the early loyal service of Hugh the elder which paved the way for later success, and that the pre-eminence of Hugh III and Edward was due as much to their own abilities and willingness to conform to a culture of service than to anything else. We must therefore approach this in two parts: pre-1322 aspirations and post-1326 recovery.

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<sup>129</sup> Given-Wilson, *English nobility*, 39.

<sup>130</sup> Examples of this are in Appendix 1, where Hugh III and Edward were made triers of parliamentary petitions, and in C. Given-Wilson, 'Royal Charter Witness Lists 1327-1399', *Medieval Prosopography* 12 (1991), Appendix, Tables 3-4.

<sup>131</sup> Holmes, *Estates*, 39.

It is usually assumed that the Despensers desired a title as a consequence of their affinity to Edward II. An earldom was a status symbol – unequivocal evidence of a baronial family’s accomplishment – as well as being financially lucrative. As they later demonstrated at Tewkesbury, it was deemed a natural fulfilment of the younger Hugh’s marriage into the Clare line and gave the Despensers a strong claim to the earldom of Gloucester. This is mentioned in the Ludlow Annal,<sup>132</sup> and is strongly hinted at by the author of the *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, who ‘counted both men amongst the magnates of the land’:

[Hugh the younger] set traps for his co-heirs; thus, if he could manage it, each would lose his share through false accusations and he alone would obtain the whole earldom.<sup>133</sup>

The claim also occurs in one version of the 1321 charges against the Despensers, preserved at Durham. The language is similar to that of the *Vita*. Despenser was accused of seizing the estates of Hugh Audley and Roger d’Amory, *pur aver ataynt par tels faus compassemenz destre count de Gloucestr’ en desheritanz des piers de la terre*.<sup>134</sup> Further hints of Despenser’s ambition may be found in a roll of arms in which he bore the arms of Richard Clare, heir of the late earl of Gloucester.<sup>135</sup> In light of these attempts by Hugh junior to assimilate himself into the Clare line, it is curious that the only Despenser promotion during Edward II’s reign was the elevation of the elder Hugh to the earldom of Winchester. As we have seen already, there is enough evidence to support his deserving this, although coming as it did after the Despensers’ return from exile it was understandably unpopular.

The earls of Winchester were an ephemeral breed. The earldom had been created in 1207 by King John, the first lay earldom founded since Stephen’s reign, and awarded to Saher de Quency IV by right of his wife.<sup>136</sup> This line died out in 1264 and the title ignored until it was held by Hugh the elder, when its annuity was taken from

<sup>132</sup> BL Cotton MS Nero A.IV, f. 53v.

<sup>133</sup> *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, 114-15.

<sup>134</sup> Durham, Dean and Chapter Muniments, Locellus I, no. 61; printed in M.C. Prestwich, ‘The Charges Against the Despensers, 1321’, *BIHR* 58 (1985), 99. The official version, by comparison, reads: *par aver atteint per tieux faux compassement al entier du Countie de Glouc’* (*Statutes*, i, 183).

<sup>135</sup> BL Cotton MS Caligula A.XVIII, printed in N.H. Nicolas (ed.), *A Roll of Arms of Peers and Knights in the Reign of Edward II, from a contemporary MS* (London 1828), 2-3.

<sup>136</sup> *GE*, xii(ii), 748-50; Powell and Wallis, *House of Lords*, 111; S. Painter, ‘The House of Quency, 1136-1264’, *Medievalia et Humanistica* 11 (1957), repr. F.A. Cazel (ed.), *Feudalism and Liberty: Articles and Addresses of Sidney Painter* (Baltimore 1961), 234-39; corrected in part by L. Wilkinson, ‘Pawn and Political Player: Observations of the Life of a Thirteenth-Century Countess’, *Historical Research* 73 (2000), 108-9.

Hampshire.<sup>137</sup> Perhaps due to the infamy of its holder, it then fell into disuse for a further 146 years before Edward IV granted it to a Fleming, Louis de Bruges, seigneur de la Gruthuyse, in 1472. This was a reward for specific service rendered: Louis had given hospitality to the king and the duke of Gloucester during their exile on the continent in the winter of 1470 (the title, which never included a parliamentary summons, was cancelled in 1500).<sup>138</sup> In short, the earldom of Winchester appears something of a ‘catch-all’ title, awarded for different reasons. This raises a number of questions. How, for example, did the other magnates view Winchester? Did they recognise any significance when Edward awarded it to his loyal companion? Second, why did Edward II choose Winchester to reward Despenser? There were other less caricatured titles he could have bestowed. Finally, what did this do to the chances of the younger Despenser becoming earl of Gloucester? He faced an immediate problem if his father held a different earldom, not least the fact that it was a far less prestigious one.<sup>139</sup>

One possible reason for the choice of the Winchester earldom lies in the genealogy of the de Quencys.<sup>140</sup> The eldest son of Saher IV predeceased him, but not before begetting a daughter, Margaret, who married John de Lacy, earl of Lincoln.<sup>141</sup> However, before leaving on crusade in 1218, Saher arranged that his heir would be his younger son, Roger, who duly inherited when his father died the following year. Since Margaret was under age, this was a pragmatic, if somewhat controversial move, since it was usually assumed that a granddaughter would succeed before an uncle. This questionable decision may hold the solution to why Despenser received Winchester. Among other issue, Margaret and John de Lacy had an elder daughter, Matilda, and an elder son, Edmund. Matilda married Richard Clare, earl of Gloucester (d. 1262), whose granddaughter Eleanor married the younger Hugh. Edmund de Lacy’s granddaughter, Alice, married Thomas of Lancaster. Since at her marriage Matilda became countess of Gloucester, the line of Winchester – had it still remained on this side of the family – would have transferred through Edmund de Lacy to Alice and Thomas of Lancaster. No doubt the Despensers

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<sup>137</sup> *CChR 1300-26*, 443-44.

<sup>138</sup> Powell and Wallis, *House of Lords*, 520.

<sup>139</sup> M. Altschul, *A Baronial Family in Medieval England: the Clares, 1217-1314* (Baltimore 1965), 205, shows that in c.1250, the Clare income was £3700 per annum; by contrast, the annual income of Roger de Quency, earl of Winchester, was just £400.

<sup>140</sup> See family tree 4.

<sup>141</sup> Wilkinson, ‘Pawn and Political Player’, 107-111; D.A. Carpenter, *The Minority of Henry III* (London 1990), 103; G.G. Simpson, ‘An Anglo-Scottish baron of the 13th-century: the acts of Roger de Quincy, earl of Winchester and constable of Scotland’, unpublished PhD thesis (University of Edinburgh 1966), 22-27.



knew of this: in an age when primogeniture was so important it was the responsibility of any baron to know his family tree.<sup>142</sup> Is it possible that the elder Hugh wished to revive the dormant earldom of Winchester via this distant claim? On one side of the family tree, Despenser could trace his ancestry, via his mother's second marriage to Roger Bigod, back to Maud, sister-in-law to Margaret de Lacy through Margaret's second husband. On the other side, the younger Hugh could also trace his lineage through Matilda of Gloucester to Margaret's first marriage. If Despenser junior continued his estate-building in the Marches and obtained the remainder of the Clare estates, and Despenser senior could overturn the century-old ruling on Margaret de Lacy, they could present a *fait accompli* to their enemies. Then, *mutatis mutandis*, the younger Hugh would inherit everything on his father's death.

Without doubt this was an audacious claim. The earldom of Winchester did not merely bring the Despensers a 'country cousin' title, but provided the opportunity to overturn a decision made more than one hundred years earlier. It also constituted a major assault on the estates of Thomas of Lancaster, whose hostility to the Despensers had been evident for all to see in the years leading up to 1322. Lancaster's widow Alice was appallingly abused after the earl was executed, and immediately surrendered most of her lands to the crown.<sup>143</sup> To the elder Hugh went the great lordship of Denbigh, which had been in Lacy hands since the conquest of Wales and constituted a major additional part of the estate.<sup>144</sup> Almost overnight, the Despenser claim to the earldom had become stronger. Other factors were in their favour too. In 1218, the decision over the Winchester lineage had been made in favour of a younger son at the expense of a grandchild. In the light of King John's assumption of the throne in 1199, the triumph of a cadet branch was important. John was the youngest of four sons, and the royal succession itself would have been open to criticism if a ruling was made in favour of a grandchild, especially a female.<sup>145</sup> In 1322 none of this mattered, since both Edward I

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<sup>142</sup> G. Tscherpel, 'The Political Function of History: the Past and Future of Noble Families', in R. Eales and S. Tyas (eds.), *Family and Dynasty in Late Medieval England: Proceedings of the 1997 Harlaxton Symposium* (Donington 2003), 87-104. Many Marcher families had a strong sense of family history. See, for example, the Mortimer cartularies (C. Given-Wilson, 'Chronicles of the Mortimer Family, c.1250-1450', in *ibid.*, 67-86), the Despenser monuments at Tewkesbury (above, section (a)) and the Berkeley tombs at St Augustine's, Bristol (B. Golding, 'Burials and Benefactions', in Ormrod (ed.), *England in the Thirteenth Century*, 71-73).

<sup>143</sup> Fryde, *Tyranny*, 113.

<sup>144</sup> Davies, *Lordship and Society*, 27.

<sup>145</sup> R.V. Turner, 'The Mandeville inheritance, 1189-1236: its legal, political and social context', *Haskins Society Journal* 1 (1989), 147-72, esp. 154; J.C. Holt, 'The *casus regis*: the law and politics of succession in the Plantagenet dominions, 1185-1247', repr. *Colonial England, 1066-1215* (London 1997), 307-10, 313.

and Edward II had followed their fathers directly onto the throne. Indeed, Edward I had taken great care in 1290 to ensure the descent of his own kingdom could not be divided amongst heiresses.<sup>146</sup> The time was ripe for a reconsideration of the de Quency inheritance.

How much of a say Hugh senior actually had in the choice of title he received is hard to say. It would be curious if the impetus came entirely from Edward II, since Winchester carried overtures of revolt against the crown, Saher de Quency IV having played a major role in drawing up Magna Carta. In the light of the 1321-22 civil war, it would have been extremely short-sighted of Edward to overlook this. However, the elder Despenser's friendship with and proximity to the king, plus the genealogical overtones explored above, imply that the decision was made by the favourite. In fact, Despenser may have entertained such thoughts for several years. In 1304, he was made executor of John of Pontoise, bishop of Winchester, and in February 1315 faced a commission of oyer and terminer due to alleged intrusions into the city of Winchester.<sup>147</sup> His ancestral lands in Wiltshire bordered the county of Hampshire, from which the Winchester annuity was paid. Had everything gone according to plan, the Despensers would have held two earldoms with estates stretching almost unbroken from Southampton to mid-Wales. Moreover, with a valid claim to the Lancaster inheritance established, the Despensers could have taken over half of England. Regrettably, this entire case remains conjecture, since we have no evidence that the de Quency claim was ever reopened. Yet the ancestry is clear enough. Unfortunately for them, neither the elder or younger Hugh lived long enough after 1322 to present their challenge, and when Despenser senior was summarily tried and executed, it was fitting that his head was sent to Winchester.

After the executions of 1326 ambition was forgotten, at least temporarily. The family had to fight for its survival. Yet, as seen in chapter 5, a trickle of land grants showed that by the mid-1330s the Despensers were returning to favour. It is interesting to consider whether Hugh III ever expected – albeit after a probationary period – to be granted his grandfather's earldom of Winchester, or his father's 'potential' earldom of Gloucester.<sup>148</sup>

<sup>146</sup> M.J. Bennett, 'Edward III's Entail and the Succession to the Crown, 1376-1471', *EHR* 113 (1998), 591.

<sup>147</sup> A.W. Goodman (ed.), *Registrum Henrici Woodstock, Dioc. Wyntoniensi, A.D. 1305-1316*, CYS 44 (Oxford 1941), ii, 902-3, 906; *CPR 1313-17*, 309.

<sup>148</sup> If the grudge borne since Evesham (see above, chapter 2(a) and (b)) had been passed down successive generations, perhaps there was also an element of trying to 'keep up with the Mortimers'.

There was good precedent for this: Richard FitzAlan had received the earldom of Arundel in 1330. He was son of the Despensers' ally who, according to the Ludlow annalist, had been hacked to death in 1326 by rebels who took twenty-two strokes to sever his head.<sup>149</sup> By contrast, Hugh III received neither Winchester or Gloucester, and in 1337 Edward III awarded the Gloucester earldom to Hugh Audley, husband of Margaret, the second Clare heiress. With an income of over £2000 per annum Audley could theoretically well support his new title, but was plagued with debt and was granted various annuities 'for the burden and honour of supporting [his] earldom'.<sup>150</sup> The Despensers again received nothing, despite a better claim to the title, although the charter bestowing the earldom on Audley made no mention of any hereditary claim.<sup>151</sup> Apparently Edward III intended no association between the grant and Audley's claim through his wife, but it is hard to imagine that the connection went unnoticed. It is likely that despite their gradual rehabilitation, the Despensers were still not considered reliable enough for a return to the higher nobility. Edward III's intention in 1337 was to impress upon his barons that he, not his council, nor his parliament, was in control of the machinery of patronage. Promoting Hugh III would not have been a risk (he had already shown, and would continue to show, loyalty), but it would have sent out the wrong message.

The peerage creations of 1337, and Audley's promotion in particular, tell us a great deal about how Edward III viewed the crimes of the old generation. Audley, after all, stood out from the five other new earls. He was older than the rest, and whereas they forged a relationship with the new king through service in his household, Audley had been a court favourite of Edward II. Raising him to the earldom of Gloucester was perhaps more a statement of intent that Edward III would not raise the Despensers than it was a recognition of Audley's potential. Gloucester was too important an earldom to leave dormant for too long. As it turned out, Audley died in 1347, and the title with him. That Edward did not choose to award it to anyone else could suggest that for the moment the Despensers had missed their opportunity. But it might also imply that the title was deliberately being left open for endowment at some later date. Hugh III soon became one of the king's companions-in-arms and proved beyond all doubt that he

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<sup>149</sup> BL Cotton MS Nero A.IV, 57v.

<sup>150</sup> Bothwell, *Edward III and the English Peerage*, 31-32, 57, 81, 89.

<sup>151</sup> Powell and Wallis, *House of Lords*, 325. However, the suggestion (*ibid.*) that Hugh III received a compensatory grant of land in 1337 is erroneous. The grant was prompted by Eleanor Despenser's death.

would never attempt to follow in his father's footsteps. Did Edward have in mind to raise him to the peerage at a later date? Ultimately we shall never know, because Despenser died prematurely of plague in 1349, but the idea is worth consideration. When making his peerage creations, Edward steered clear of awarding the earldom of March, despite the fact that several of his new men had lands in the area that made such a title feasible. There are two reasons why this may have been so. First, because the March title brought controversy with it – no one wanted the stigma of Mortimer so soon after his execution. Second, it may be supposed that the king was already thinking several years in advance. He knew the restlessness of the March, and he was perfectly aware of the need to control the frontier. Maybe he determined early on that the best way of doing this was, albeit in good time, to restore the Mortimers. Edward did similarly with the earldom of Pembroke, which had fallen into the king's hands following the death of John Hastings. Rather than franchise out the earldom to his friends, Edward III choose to leave it open until the Hastings heir came of age in 1339. Again, the common denominator was the Hastings' proximity to the Welsh March, since the Pembroke earls held the lordships of Abergavenny and Cilgerran. On the other hand, Edward had made his eldest son duke of Cornwall in 1337, thus firmly expunging any memories of Piers Gaveston's brief tenure as earl of Cornwall in 1307-12.<sup>152</sup>

If the crown was prepared to leave the door ajar for March and Pembroke to reassume their earldoms, we must ask why the Gloucester earldom was never awarded to Edward Despenser. When he came of age shortly after the battle of Poitiers, England was a different place from that in which his father Hugh III had so successfully returned to favour. The next three years saw further changes, as a number of the king's supporters died in the Rheims campaign of 1359-60 and the plague of 1360-61. Consequently, Edward III's focus had altered. He now began an ambitious plan of providing European matches for his numerous offspring and shoring up his dynasty by preventing political discord at home.<sup>153</sup> He replenished the ranks of earls by endowing his sons, who had come of age, rather than other members of the nobility. In this changed political climate, it would be easy to think that the king had forgotten Edward Despenser. Instead, the king found an alternative. Edward was elevated, at the age of

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<sup>152</sup> John of Eltham, Edward III's brother, had been made earl of Cornwall in 1328, a title which he held until his death in 1336 (thus leaving the position open for Edward to promote the Black Prince). Eltham's promotion may be seen as an even more transparent means of erasing Gaveston's memory.

<sup>153</sup> Ottmrod, 'Family', 398-422.

just twenty-four, to the Order of the Garter, in the prominent stall of Henry of Grosmont. In part, it honoured a man who had recently been involved in the negotiations over Brétigny, but also reflects the favour in which Hugh III had been held before his death. A wider view also suggests that admittance to the Order was a replacement for the Gloucester earldom. Outside the royal family, there were no other promotions into the upper nobility during this time, and the crown's strategy of integrating a number of the nobility into the royal line was clearly not an option for the already-married Despenser. This evidence suggests that the foundation of the Order of the Garter allowed an alternative policy of promotion to be followed. McFarlane contended that

the fighting man's highest reward, if he were a fighting man and nothing more, was the Garter; other qualifications were needed for admission to the higher grades of the nobility.<sup>154</sup>

But Edward Despenser, as he proved throughout the 1360s, was also a loyal counsellor, parliamentarian and administrator,<sup>155</sup> and might subsequently have expected better fortune in his later years. However, on his return from Italy in 1372, the political situation had changed again. The king was slipping into senility and the court was full of friction between the older and younger magnates. Edward's decision to remain in Italy after the resumption of war must have met with suspicion in England, but he was chosen to captain retinues in the 1373-74 and 1375 campaigns. In the former, only the dukes of Lancaster and Brittany led larger retinues; in the latter, Despenser was the only non-titled captain. It is just possible that a final, extra, barrier to promotion was the additional cost to an impoverished exchequer of paying another earl's wages on campaign.<sup>156</sup> Had Edward lived just two years longer, he may have been fortunate when Richard II's regency council conferred five new titles on the new king's coronation day. The elevations of Henry Percy and John Mowbray to the earldoms of Northumberland and Nottingham were overdue, but no more so than that of Edward Despenser. Richard II's council did what they could: the betrothal the following year of Thomas Despenser to Constance, daughter of the earl of Cambridge, was surely a belated reward for service consistently and capably rendered. In the same way that the Garter was bestowed on

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<sup>154</sup> McFarlane, 'Extinction and Recruitment', repr. *Nobility*, 162.

<sup>155</sup> See above, chapter 3(a).

<sup>156</sup> A.E. Prince, 'The Payment of Army Wages in Edward III's Reign', *Speculum* 19 (1944), 158-59, has details of these campaigns.

Edward in light of Hugh III's achievements, the council now wished to visit on his son the reward that he himself deserved.

The popular view of the Despencers is of a grasping family determined to be successful at all costs, characterised by a reading of the 1320s as the definitive period in the family's development. The evidence, however, suggests otherwise. Hugh the elder (in his early career), Hugh III and Edward knew that ultimately royal approval was essential for promotion. Despite two untimely deaths in 1349 and 1375, and a long minority following, there was a real sense of expectation. This found its outlet by visual means, such as the Tewkesbury improvements and the Elsing Brass in Norfolk, in which Hugh III was portrayed with the king and other Garter Knights.<sup>157</sup> After 1330, Hugh III sought royal approval and obtained it, thus laying a foundation for future success. This is not to imply that any baron could expect promotion, nor that every baron sought advancement. The great soldiers of fortune, like Cobham and Mauny, were no doubt aware that only a powerful marriage would lift them higher. But for the Despencers, with the earldom of Winchester in the background, future promotion must have seemed a realistic hope. However, when no earldom was forthcoming, they did not rise up in rebellion, but simply carried on conforming. Such a response tells its own story.

### **(c) The Despencers as royal favourites**

The aim of this last section is to engage with the popular image of the Despencers – the widely-held view that they were nothing more than royal favourites who gained access to the monarch by illicit and underhand means. It looks at the vocabulary used to condemn the favourite in general and the Despencers in particular, and analyses the way contemporaries constructed their criticism. It then considers some of the post-medieval interpretations of the family and the way in which sixteenth- and seventeenth-century commentators, playwrights and poets draw comparisons with the Despencers when they saw similar influences upon the Elizabethan, Jacobean and Caroline courts.

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<sup>157</sup> Discussed above, chapter 3(b).

The politics of intimacy

It was the complaint of a great many medieval chroniclers and moralists that monarchs too often chose inappropriate favourites. This was particularly true of Edward II and Richard II, and since these were the two monarchs under whom the Despensers gained their earldoms, any discussion must naturally centre on them. The chroniclers, as innately conservative as the barons themselves, wrote of men raised from the dust to dazzling pre-eminence against all the strictures of the establishment.<sup>158</sup> Walter of Guisborough used just this language when he referred to Piers Gaveston having been ‘raised up as if from nothing’.<sup>159</sup> It was also a common refrain that kings spurned the counsel of the hoary heads. Both Edward II and Richard II were warned against repeating the errors of King Rehoboam, who ‘followed the counsel of youths [and] lost the kingdom of Israel’.<sup>160</sup> The Kirkstall chronicler drew an explicit comparison between the two men, when he wrote that Richard ignored mature advice in favour of inexperience, ‘rather like Edward of Caernarvon’.<sup>161</sup> The continuator of the *Eulogium Historiarum* was similarly unimpressed with the flatterers at Richard II’s court, and Thomas Walsingham famously showed his disgust at Richard’s 1397 peerage creations by scathingly describing them as ‘mini dukes’ (*duketti*).<sup>162</sup> Those who stood up to the favourites were lauded. Henry Knighton, canon of St Mary’s abbey, Leicester, described the Appellants of 1386-88 in glowing terms: they were ‘friends of the king and kingdom, defenders of the truth, and stalwart guardians, with God’s help, of the poor’.<sup>163</sup> In other words, they were everything a king’s minion was not. There was also a deeper concern that the king’s affection for his favourite adversely affected his government of the realm. Ranulf Higden’s *Polychronicon* saw Edward II as being

passionately attached to one particular person, whom he cherished above all, showered with gifts, and always put first; he could not bear being separated from

<sup>158</sup> The phrase was coined by Orderic Vitalis: M. Chibnall (ed.), *Historia Ecclesiastica* (Oxford 1968-80), vi, 16; see also R.V. Turner, *Men raised from the dust: administrative service and upward mobility in Angevin England* (Philadelphia 1988), esp. 1-19; J.A. Green, *The Government of England under Henry I* (Cambridge 1986), 139-43.

<sup>159</sup> H. Rothwell (ed.), *The Chronicle of Walter of Guisborough*, Camden Society 89 (London 1957), 382.

<sup>160</sup> *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, 18, 36; C. Given-Wilson (ed.), *The Chronicle of Adam Usk 1377-1421* (Oxford 1997), 76. J. Ferster, *Fictions of Advice: The Literature and Politics of Counsel in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia 1996), 123-26, examines the tradition of using Rehoboam as a warning.

<sup>161</sup> J. Taylor (ed.), *The Kirkstall Abbey Chronicles*, Thoresby Society 42 (1952), 83.

<sup>162</sup> F.S. Haydon (ed.), *Eulogium Historiarum sive Temporis ...*, RS 9 (London 1858-63), iii, 367; H.T. Riley (ed.), *Annales Ricardi Secundi et Henrici Quarti*, RS 28 (London 1866), 223.

<sup>163</sup> G.H. Martin (ed.), *Knighton’s Chronicle 1337-1396* (Oxford 1995), 406.

him and honoured him above all others. As a result the loved one was hated, and the lover involved himself in odium and ruin.<sup>164</sup>

Whether Higden intended his words to be understood as referring to one person only throughout the reign, or (as seems more plausible) one person only at any one time is less important than the point he draws out: that Edward's favourites brought ruin on themselves and on the king himself. Indeed, all three medieval English kings who were excoriated for their favourites (Edward, Richard and Henry VI) eventually met the same fate as those they cherished. Edward's concern for his companions is depicted in a Bodleian manuscript showing the king on his throne, flanked by two attendant dogs, one on either side of him.<sup>165</sup> This is possibly meant to depict Gaveston and the younger Hugh, but more likely represents both Despensers, who were usually shown together in contemporary illustrations.

Such themes may also be seen in political prophecies of the period.<sup>166</sup> Interpretation of such prophecy was often highly intellectual, but as a vehicle for propaganda could strikingly illustrate contemporary opinion. In 'The Last Kings of the English', Henry III is seen as a lamb (denoting innocence and piety, through connection with Christ), Edward I as a dragon (denoting a reign of war and turbulence) and Edward II as a goat (the bestial imagery indicating the sexual tension of the reign).<sup>167</sup> The Despensers are represented as two owls. The idea of a nocturnal bird of prey that hunts smaller animals after nightfall was obviously intended to draw attention to their continuing greed and disinheriting of others. Gaveston is likewise a bird of prey, this time an eagle. That all three men are shown in this light indicates the lasting impression of Edward's reign: he has ever been characterised by his infatuation for his favourites and his miserable defeat at the hands of his wife and son.

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<sup>164</sup> *Polychronicon*, 298-300; using the translation in A. Gransden, *Historical Writing in England, II: c. 1307 to the Early Sixteenth Century* (Ithaca, NY 1982), 1.

<sup>165</sup> Bodl. Rawlinson MS D.329, f. 7. I owe this identification to Dr Anthony Musson's forthcoming article, 'Edward II: the Public and Private Face of the Law'.

<sup>166</sup> Coote, *Prophecy and Public Affairs*, 102-4; Haines, *King Edward II*, 25-35; J.R.S. Phillips, 'Edward II and the Prophets', in W.M. Ormrod (ed.), *England in the Fourteenth Century: Proceedings of the 1985 Harlaxton Symposium* (Woodbridge 1986), 189-201.

<sup>167</sup> Edward II's identification as a he-goat can be traced to *Liber Gomorrhianus*, a tract written in the 1050s by reclusive monk Peter Damian, and addressed to Pope Leo IX: F. Barlow, *William Rufus*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (London 1990), 108.



The regularity with which commentators mentioned issues of favouritism reflects one of the issues raised in section (b); namely, that the concept of access to the monarch was constantly under debate. In 1322, as the relationship between Edward II and the younger Despenser deepened, the *Gesta Edwardi Secundi* graphically described the ruin of England:

Behold, how our sins are increasing the evil days for us, just as it is written in the Apocalypse: "And the red horse went forth, and he who sat upon him, it was given to him that he would take up peace from the earth and all would kill one another".

Thus it is at the present time, because Englishmen are fighting among themselves.<sup>168</sup>

In this text, the king's predilection for favourites has not merely isolated his magnates and led to a temporary shift in the balance of power in the kingdom, but it has resulted in a catastrophe of apocalyptic proportions. The argument has been carried outside the court, household and parliament (those arenas of interaction seen in chapter 3(a)) and directly affects the social fabric of the kingdom.

Edward II was not the first monarch to have suffered this treatment. In the reign of William Rufus, Ranulf Flambard was widely criticised for dissolute behaviour as the king's right-hand man.<sup>169</sup> Flambard was at the centre of government, and R.W. Southern has gone so far as to count his alliance with Rufus as being 'among the great partnerships between a king and his minister'.<sup>170</sup> The significance of such terminology will become clearer towards the end of this section, but for now it is enough to note that Flambard rose to stand at the very head of late eleventh-century royal administration. Henry III later came under fire for his over-generous gifts to his own foreign favourites, most notably the Savoyards and Provençals who came to England after his marriage in 1236 to Eleanor of Provence. His attempts to 'build up a large circle of royal clients [and] rule them with the light rod of patronage' led to Matthew Paris characterising Henry as a fool whose liberality to money-grabbing courtiers resulted in instability in the realm.<sup>171</sup> In the

<sup>168</sup> *Gesta Edwardi de Carnarvan, auctore canonico Bridlingtoniensi*, in Stubbs, *Chronicles*, ii, 76.

<sup>169</sup> R.W. Southern, 'Ranulf Flambard', repr. *Medieval Humanism and Other Studies* (Oxford 1970), 183-205; J.O. Prestwich, 'The career of Ranulf Flambard', in D.W. Rollason, M.M. Harvey and M.C. Prestwich (eds.), *Anglo-Norman Durham, 1093-1193* (Woodbridge 1994), 299-310.

<sup>170</sup> Southern, 'Ranulf Flambard', 187-88.

<sup>171</sup> H.W. Ridgeway, 'Foreign Favourites and Henry III's Problems of Patronage, 1247-1258', *EHR* 104 (1989), 590-610; see also D.A. Carpenter, 'King, Magnates and Society: the Personal Rule of Henry III,

1380s Thomas Walsingham similarly railed against the Bohemian household clientele of Richard II's queen.<sup>172</sup> However, foreign nationality did not inevitably lead to problems. The clerical administrative-favourites, such as Edward III's chancellor William Wykeham, also caused considerable trouble.<sup>173</sup> Yet these men were tolerated for longer because they only sought personal advancement, in contrast with men such as Despenser junior or Robert Burley. Any favourite who rose from the ranks of the barons were liable to use their position to prop up their families. Not only were the magnates' cherished privileges being eaten away, but there was also the danger that they could be saddled with a grasping, unpopular family for generations to come.

If the most commonly used argument against the favourite concerned patronage, the most personal and controversial accusations concerned sexual preference and the intimate relations between the favourite and the monarch. Although, as we have seen, the reign of Edward II has traditionally been the place to look for this, he was not the first to suffer such admonition. More than two centuries earlier, the private life of William Rufus came under scrutiny from Eadmer of Canterbury, William of Malmesbury and Orderic Vitalis.<sup>174</sup> They believed that a general moral corruption had set in during Rufus's reign, manifest by the extravagance of new fashions in clothes and hair-styles.<sup>175</sup> According to Eadmer, the young men at court grew their hair long like women and minced around the court like girls, a fashion that drew a bewildered response from William of Poitiers, who looked on 'the long-haired sons of the northern world' in astonishment. Orderic saw them as 'foul catamites [who] shamelessly gave themselves up to the filth of sodomy'.<sup>176</sup> Robert FitzHamon, the king's closest friend and the founder of Tewkesbury Abbey, has long been considered to be the focus of Rufus's affection (which, having considered the desire of the younger Despenser to draw attention to his lineage at Tewkesbury, is decidedly ironic). Coming from below the

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1234-58', *Speculum* 60 (1985), repr. *The Reign of Henry III* (London 1996), 75-106; M.T. Flanagan, 'Household favourites: Angevin royal agents in Ireland under Henry II and John', in A.P. Smyth (ed.), *Seanchas: studies in early and medieval Irish archaeology, history and literature in honour of Francis J. Byrne* (Dublin 2000), 357-80.

<sup>172</sup> Davies, 'Richard II and the Church', 89-90.

<sup>173</sup> Ormrod, *Edward III*, 88-91.

<sup>174</sup> Barlow, *William Rufus*, 102-10.

<sup>175</sup> C.S. Jaeger, *The Origins of Courtliness: Civilising Trends and the Formation of Courty Ideals 939-1210* (Philadelphia 1985), esp. 176-94 ('The Clerical Rebellion Against Courtliness'); R.J. Bartlett, 'Symbolic meanings of hair in the Middle Ages', *TRHS*, 6<sup>th</sup> series, 4 (1994), 43-60.

<sup>176</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica*, iv, 188. Compare this language with the apostle Paul's denunciation of homosexuality in his letter to the Romans: 'God gave them up [*tradidit*] to the desires of their heart ... God delivered them up [*tradidit*] to shameful affections ... God gave them up [*tradidit*] to a reprobate mind' (Romans 1:24, 26, 28).

ranks of the baronage, FitzHamon was automatically under suspicion, although no proof really exists: 'We can not tell if FitzHamon, his constant friend, was a lover, another Piers Gaveston or Buckingham'.<sup>177</sup> In addition, Stephen Jaeger has argued that, rather than seeing these new fashions as leading men into sodomy, we should understand that such customs were pursued, in part, that they might please women. The court appeared foppish only because the chroniclers were reactionaries, not because luxury was a terrible vice.<sup>178</sup> Nevertheless, it is not unreasonable to see the eleventh- and twelfth-century chroniclers' conservative outlook becoming the model for later reproaches.

Whether or not Edward II's favourites were homosexual has been discussed by every historian of the reign in the past thirty years. As Michael Prestwich remarked in 1980, the fact that this has only recently begun to happen owes more to the visibility of gay subculture than to any new evidence. Prestwich wrote of Edward II that 'it is hard to doubt a sexual element in his friendships with Gaveston and Despenser', a view shared by John Maddicott, Seymour Phillips, Jeff Hamilton and Roy Martin Haines.<sup>179</sup> On the other hand, Pierre Chaplais has argued that no major contemporary evidence exists for Gaveston, preferring instead to see the relationship between the king and his favourite as a bond of brotherhood,<sup>180</sup> and in a review of recent publications on the reign Jonathan Sumption was adamant that Edward II's relationship with Despenser was 'certainly not sexual'.<sup>181</sup> In many ways, the circumstantial evidence is most compelling: in July 1326, the king gave his confidante a copy of *Tristan and Iseult* (*un grant livre appelle Tristrem*), perhaps the most famous of all tales of doomed love.<sup>182</sup> However, rather than revisit the alleged *factual* activities between Edward and his favourites – a debate which is ultimately futile, due to the difference between medieval and modern interpretative language – it is more interesting to consider the motivations behind such accusations. Those concerning William Rufus were made by celibate churchmen, whose work also reveals that the king was irreligious and profane. He ill-treated the church and was sympathetic to Jews. In a sense, it is small wonder that the accusations flew around. For Edward II, recent

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<sup>177</sup> Barlow, *William Rufus*, 436.

<sup>178</sup> Jaeger, *Origins of Courtliness*, 176-94.

<sup>179</sup> M.C. Prestwich, *The Three Edwards* (London 1980), 80; Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster*, 83; J.R.S. Phillips, *Aymer de Valence, Earl of Pembroke* (Oxford 1972), 290; J.S. Hamilton, *Piers Gaveston, Earl of Cornwall 1307-1312: Politics and Patronage in the Reign of Edward II* (Detroit 1988), 16-17, 109-10; id., 'Menage à Roi: Edward II and Piers Gaveston', *History Today* 49 (1999), 26-31; Haines, *King Edward II*, 374 n.88.

<sup>180</sup> P. Chaplais, *Piers Gaveston: Edward II's Adoptive Brother* (Oxford 1994), 6-22; and more generally, E.A.R. Brown, 'Ritual Brotherhood in Western Medieval Europe', *Traditio* 52 (1997), 357-81.

<sup>181</sup> *Guardian*, 5 April 2003.

<sup>182</sup> SAL MS 122, f. 46v.

interpretations challenging traditional (that is, heteronormative) readings of important political and chivalric texts have enabled different lines of approach to be opened up.<sup>183</sup> It has allowed discussion of chronicle accounts that previously had been (rightly) dismissed due to queries over their factual accuracy, such as Jean le Bel's record of the younger Despenser's execution at Hereford (borrowed by Froissart), in which Hugh's genitals were cut off and burnt before his eyes 'because he was a heretic and a sodomite, even, it was said, with the king'.<sup>184</sup> We should not forget that this graphic physical defamation is more likely to have been driven by political expediency than by sexual 'revenge' – Dafydd of Wales (1283) and William Wallace (1306) both suffered the same fate, and neither of them were alleged homosexuals – but it is significant that le Bel and Froissart drew attention to Despenser's possible relationship with Edward in this way.<sup>185</sup> The description may be read in two ways: first, a moralistic approach, whereby the reader is to view the action in a way akin to Biblical circumcision – a cutting off the flesh symbolising (literally in this case) removal of the old, sinful, way of life; or second, a pejorative attack on the act of sodomy itself. For Froissart, this far outweighed the adultery of Isabella and Mortimer, who, as successors to Edward and the Despenser regime, portrayed the 'triumph' of heterosexuality. A clandestine homosexual relationship with the monarch was an illicit 'penetration' into the higher corridors of power, collapsing the traditional boundaries between king and subject.

Even in the fourteenth century, these images were not restricted to Gaveston and the younger Despenser. Similar accusations were made concerning Richard II's relationship with Robert de Vere, whose actual position at court appears more in line with that of Gaveston than Despenser. Certainly Richard treated him more favourable than any other: a grant of 1385 concluded 'the curse of God and Saint Edward and the King on any who do ought against this grant'.<sup>186</sup> Whilst the near-contemporary opinion of their association was decidedly negative, it was not until the end of the reign that Richard

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<sup>183</sup> For example, C. Sponsler, 'The King's Boyfriend: Froissart's Political Theater of 1326', in G. Burger and S.F. Kruger (eds.), *Queering the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis 2001), 143-67; R.E. Zeikowitz, *Homoeroticism and Chivalry: Discourses of Male Same-Sex Desire in the Fourteenth Century* (New York 2003), esp. 113-18; W.M. Ormrod, 'The Sexualities of Edward II' (forthcoming). I am not engaging with 'gender theory' or 'queer theory' in this thesis: for its background and relevance to the medievalist's debate, see J. Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago 1980), *passim*, 'Introduction', in Burger and Kruger (eds.), *Queering the Middle Ages*, xi-xxiii.

<sup>184</sup> J. Viard and E. Déprez (eds.), *Chronique de Jean le Bel*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (Paris 1977), 27-28; Froissart, *Oeuvres*, ii, 78-80.

<sup>185</sup> This point is also made by Ormrod, 'Sexualities of Edward II'.

<sup>186</sup> *CPR 1381-85*, 542.

came under sustained attack. George Stow has demonstrated the manner in which Walsingham reworked his different manuscripts in order to emphasise the supposed *familiaritatis obscoenae* taking place between the king and his favourite.<sup>187</sup> The chronicler criticised Richard's foppish courtiers by contrasting the masculine, martial values with which knights ought to occupy themselves – and could not, since Richard was seeking peace with France – with the feminised arena of courtly love, to which he felt they were now enslaved. They became 'knights of Venus rather than Mars' (*Bellone*).<sup>188</sup> It was much the same as the accusations made in the days of William Rufus; indeed, since the earliest Middle Ages writers had regarded peace as a potential threat to court morality.<sup>189</sup> Adam of Usk, in another Lancastrian narrative, also mentioned these supposed sodomitical acts, as did Henry Knighton, who referred to Richard's favourites as *nephandi seductores regis*.<sup>190</sup> Froissart, who wrote his account of the younger Despenser's gruesome execution at the time of de Vere's ascendancy, made an implicit comparison between the two reigns.<sup>191</sup> However, as John Taylor has demonstrated, the reworking of the Lancastrian narratives after 1399 have done much to colour our view, and Walsingham's own frustration at the apparent hypocrisy of the royal household knights led him to over-dramatise the intimacy of the court.<sup>192</sup>

For both Edward II and Richard II, the fierce competition for access to the king's public body was overwhelmed – by reputation, at least – by the tacit acquiescence to access to his private body. This was the interminable dichotomy faced by every monarch. Classical and Christian thought stressed the divine origin of kingship and the sacral nature of political authority; custom emphasised how the king was still subject to the law he himself enforced.<sup>193</sup> The classic description of the king's 'two bodies' by Kantorowicz demonstrated that the king's 'natural' or 'private body' was subordinate to the decrees and dictates of the realm, but his 'public body' (the 'body politic') was not.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> G.B. Stow, 'Richard II in Thomas Walsingham's Chronicles', *Speculum* 59 (1984), 86-87; id., 'Chronicles versus Records: the Character of Richard II', in J.S. Hamilton and P.J. Bradley (eds.), *Documenting the Past: Essays in Medieval History presented to George Peddy Cuttino* (Wolfeboro, NH 1989), 160-61.

<sup>188</sup> J. Taylor, W.R. Childs and L. Watkiss (eds.), *The St Albans Chronicle: the Chronica Maiora of Thomas Walsingham, I, 1376-1394* (Oxford 2003), 814-15. On this comment, see W.M. Ommrod, 'Knights of Venus', *Medium Ævum* 73 (2004), 290-305. I am grateful for an advance copy of the article.

<sup>189</sup> Jaeger, *Origins of Courtliness*, 177.

<sup>190</sup> *Adam Usk*, 62-63; *Knighton*, 392.

<sup>191</sup> Sponsler, 'The King's Boyfriend', 150-51.

<sup>192</sup> J. Taylor, 'Richard II in the Chronicles', in Goodman and Gillespie (eds.), *Richard II*, esp. 16-19.

<sup>193</sup> K. Pennington, 'Law, legislative authority and theories of government, 1150-1300', in J.H. Burns (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought c.350-c.1450* (Cambridge 1988), 426-27.

<sup>194</sup> E.H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton, NJ 1957).

These conflicting ideas not only underpin the fourteenth century, but may be seen in existence in any age. A seventeenth-century publication crystallised the issue perfectly:

We ought to make a difference betwixt persons who *delight* us, and those who are *profitable* to us; betwixt the Recreations of the mind, and the necessities of the State.<sup>195</sup>

When a king had an unpopular favourite, onlookers saw the body politic become informed by, even indistinguishable from, the natural. No monarch could rule when his impartiality, the very commodity that marked him out, was eroded. In symbol, by the fusing of two different territories, these sexual charges not only meant that the king's body natural became politically meaningful, but demanded an equality of status impossible when a political role had to be played by the monarch. By showing the favourite and the king in these situations, the chroniclers demonstrated their belief that neither were fit for their current responsibilities. It could only lead to rivalry, jealousy, and ultimately, usurpation.

Ultimately, whether or not anything took place between kings and their favourites is largely irrelevant. It is much more important that in every reign where intimates of the monarch were a contested presence, an untoward relationship was suggested to discredit them. There was every advantage to the Mortimer regime for Edward II's court to be seen as a hotbed of intrigue, just as there was for Henry IV's propaganda to paint Richard II with as black a brush as possible. In the 1320s, a rumour circulating the Low Countries even held that Despenser had given his wife Eleanor to the king for sex.<sup>196</sup> Again, the facts are second to the attempt to place this construction on the king's activities.

Not even successful kings were excused from this scrutiny. Edward III, usually considered to be one of the most successful medieval monarchs, was similarly attacked in his last years due to his relationship with Alice Perrers.<sup>197</sup> Perrers and her associates cut

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<sup>195</sup> Anon., *The Character of an Ill-Court-Favourite: Representing the Mischiefs that flow from Ministers of State, when they are more Great than Good* (London 1681), 17.

<sup>196</sup> P.C. Doherty, 'Isabella, Queen of England, 1296-1330', unpublished D.Phil thesis (University of Oxford 1977), 138-39. On 2 December 1325, Eleanor received a gift of 100 marks when Edward made a night visit by boat from Westminster to Sheen: SAL MS 122, f. 20v.

<sup>197</sup> J.S. Bothwell, 'The Management of Position: Alice Perrers, Edward III and the Creation of a Landed Estate 1362-77', *JMH* 24 (1998), 31-51.

off wider access to patronage and became almost as powerful as a traditional favourite before she was eventually 'deposed' by the Good Parliament of 1376. The language Walsingham used to describe 'that harlot and her supporters' is as colourful as anything he wrote: Perrers was 'an evil enchantress', 'a dog returning to its vomit' and a wolf in the face of whom the church would do nothing to protect its flock. In Walsingham's view, it was Edward's passion for Perrers that constrained his ability to govern:

How distressing for the whole of England was the king's fickleness, his infatuation, and his shameful behaviour! O king, you deserve not to be called master, but slave of the lowest order. ... Or is a man considered free who takes orders from a licentious woman and cannot refuse any demand of hers lest he spoil his own pleasures and ruin the stronghold of Love?<sup>198</sup>

Other monarchs renowned for their 'accessibility' found themselves subject to a similar kind of sexual charge. Edward IV was portrayed by Philippe de Commynes as thinking of women far more than is reasonable (*trop plus que de raison*).<sup>199</sup> Whilst it was good for the king to have women, it was reasoned that too much sex demonstrated a problem with personal self-discipline, and subsequent inability to rule.<sup>200</sup> No longer a master of his emotions, he became a slave to lust. Charles II too suffered from being 'too public'. In the theatrical age that followed his restoration in 1661, the rampant sex drive of the monarch, his brother and his chief courtiers took centre stage: the diaries of Samuel Pepys and John Evelyn are full of intimate details about the king's sexual conquests and the size of the royal genitalia.<sup>201</sup> Even heterosexual relations, if bordering on lechery, could endanger the health of the body politic. But there was no monopolisation of Charles, who, in the famous satire of the earl of Rochester, 'roaled about from Whore to Whore'.<sup>202</sup> Whatever moral comments were made about this over-sexed king, no one controlled him.

A third means of constructing criticism against the king and his favourites involved the charge of witchcraft. In the case of Edward II and Richard II, this often built upon

<sup>198</sup> *St Albans Chronicle*, 56-59.

<sup>199</sup> M. Jones (ed.), *Memoirs: the Reign of Louis XI 1461-83* (Harmondsworth 1972), 188.

<sup>200</sup> I owe this point to an paper given by Dr Katherine J. Lewis at the International Medieval Congress, Leeds, in July 2004: "He was a very handsome prince and tall": masculinity and sexuality in the reign and reputation of Edward IV.

<sup>201</sup> B. Weiser, *Charles II and the Politics of Access* (Woodbridge 2003), 20-23.

<sup>202</sup> Quoted by Weiser, *Politics of Access*, 23. At one time during his reign, radical pamphleteers, seeing Charles's women as alternate royal favourites, did suggest assassinating the mistresses: R. Weil, 'Sometimes a Sceptre is only a Sceptre', in L. Hunt (ed.), *The Invention of Pornography* (New York 1993), 152.

the previous assertion that the king was engaged in illicit sexual acts with a favourite. Such accusations were not uncommon in England or France in the late middle ages, particularly on the heels of the graphic denunciation of the Knights Templars: Piers Gaveston was thought to have used magic to bewitch the sovereign and Alice Perrers' hold on the ageing Edward III was similarly ascribed to a magician.<sup>203</sup> Walsingham's reworking of his *Chronicon Angliae*, also suggesting that de Vere's hold over Richard II was due to black magic, appears to have been part of his attempt to paint a damning picture of Richard's courtiers acting according to the very antithesis of the warrior clique.<sup>204</sup> Yet for all the rumours of sorcery and black magic ascribed to various favourites, the only serious incident involving the Despensers actually concerned a conspiracy *against* them.<sup>205</sup> It was preceded by a letter written by Hugh junior to the pope, in which he claimed to have been threatened by 'magical and secret dealings'. The pope, in reply, merely told him to 'turn to God with a whole heart and make confession. No other remedies are necessary'.<sup>206</sup> Shortly afterwards, a case was brought before the King's Bench in the Hilary term of 1325, in which it was uncovered that certain men of Coventry had paid £20 to one master John of Nottingham, a necromancer, to kill the king and the two Despensers, together with other local officials. Master John agreed to make wax figures of each man and apparently succeeded in killing his test case, one Richard de Sowe, by thrusting a pin through the heart of the image. However, before the plot could continue one of the conspirators leaked information to the authorities and all parties were arrested and imprisoned.

This was an surprising exception to the allegations of witchcraft made against royal favourites. The same arguments made against Gaveston and de Vere were repeated in later centuries. The anonymous libel known as *Leicester's Commonwealth* (1584) portrayed Robert Dudley as sexually voracious, a poisoner, a sorcerer and a cunning Machiavel holding Queen Elizabeth in his absolute authority.<sup>207</sup> The duke of Buckingham was

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<sup>203</sup> W.R. Jones, 'Political Uses of Sorcery in Medieval Europe', *Historian* 34 (1971), 675-76.

<sup>204</sup> Stow, 'Richard II in Thomas Walsingham's Chronicles', 87-88; Ormrod, 'Knights of Venus', 296.

<sup>205</sup> KB 27/259 Rex m. 24, printed in G.O. Sayles, *Select Cases in the Court of King's Bench: Edward II*, Selden Society 74 (1955), 154-56; *Parl. Writs*, II(i), 403-4; also discussed by Fryde, *Tyranny*, 162-64; Haines, *King Edward II*, 440 n.188; J.G. Bellamy, *Crime and Public Order in England in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford 1973), 61-62.

<sup>206</sup> CPL 1305-42, 461.

<sup>207</sup> D.C. Peck (ed.), *Leicester's Commonwealth: The Copy of a Letter written by a Master of Art of Cambridge (1584) and Related Documents* (Athens, OH 1985).



supposed to have used similar means in his hold over James I.<sup>208</sup> In France, the *Histoire tragique et mémorable de Pierre de Gaveston* (1588), probably written by preacher Jean Boucher and dedicated to Henri III's chief favourite, the duc d'Epemon, began a storm of criticism.<sup>209</sup> Epemon's furious rebuttal was met with accusations of Satanic practices: he was blamed for 'having taken for your subject the study of witchcraft and necromancy, of which science the first precepts are to renounce Jesus Christ and adore the devil'.<sup>210</sup> Further pamphlets portrayed the king as enmeshed in a coven of sorcerers, rapists and vampires. As before, whether the authors ever believed these events to have taken place is less important than the fact they felt able to write about them. Against the backdrop of the French religious wars, the king's favourites became, as Charlotte Wells explains, parasites on the body politic: they sucked it dry of patronage and political duty. The only way the body could survive was via a thorough purging of the system.<sup>211</sup> Although the language is different, the sentiment is that of the 1320s and the result identical: death of the favourite and overthrow of the monarch.

*The 'Despenser legend', or, 'Monkies caressed in Kings Cabinets'*

Almost without fail, whenever a crisis of favourites arose in sixteenth- or seventeenth-century England or France, the younger Despenser or Piers Gaveston were used as a model for blame. Neither Elizabeth I, James I, Charles I nor Charles II were exempt from comment although the majority of criticism came in four main waves: Essex's ascendancy (1590s), Buckingham's ascendancy (1620s), the Civil War (1640s) and the Exclusion Crisis and Glorious Revolution (1680s). This tendency to enhance the 'Despenser legend' is a fascinating concomitant to the changing religious and political scenery.<sup>212</sup> Firstly, the Reformation had served to alter northern European perceptions of the monarch: in Protestant countries, they were quickly elevated to quasi-divine status. Secondly, the peripatetic nature of medieval government had disappeared entirely and

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<sup>208</sup> C. Perry, 'The Politics of Access and Representations of the Sodomite King in Early Modern England', *Renaissance Quarterly* 53 (2000), 1058.

<sup>209</sup> D. Teasley, 'The Charge of Sodomy as a Political Weapon in Early Modern France: The Case of Henry III in Catholic League Polemic, 1585-89', *The Maryland Historian* 18 (1987), 17-30.

<sup>210</sup> C. Wells, 'Leeches on the Body Politic: Xenophobia and Witchcraft in Early Modern French Political Thought', *French Historical Studies* 22 (1999), 372.

<sup>211</sup> Wells, 'Leeches', 376-77.

<sup>212</sup> The remainder of the paragraph comes from Weiser, *Politics of Access*, 5-12; I.A.A. Thompson, 'The Institutional Background to the Rise of the Minister-Favourite', in Elliott and Brockliss (eds.), *The World of the Favourite*, 13-25.

centralisation of royal bureaucracy had led to the need for kings to become administrators. Few had the ability, stamina or inclination for such tasks and, consequently, someone with the complete backing of the king often acted as an *alter rex*, a conduit between king and subject who filtered out unwanted suits and relieved the monarch of tedious duties. These were the chief ministers who drew such animosity.

An accompanying social change was the growing print culture that enabled plays and tracts denouncing favouritism to be distributed at lightening speed, something well nigh impossible in the era of the medieval chronicler. Many of these used the example of Edward II and the Despensers and were reprinted at subsequent times of political crisis. One account of this trend remarks that ‘a disproportionate amount of space seems to be given to Edward II’.<sup>213</sup> It is not the intention here to provide a comprehensive survey of early modern favourite literature; rather, to outline the motivations behind the writings that include the Despensers. The foundations for these were laid in Elizabeth I’s last years when Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine* and *Edward II* were first performed in 1590 and 1592 respectively. At the same time the anonymous *Woodstock* (describing the downfall of Richard II) was written, and, slightly later, Ben Jonson’s uncompleted *Mortimer His Fall* and Shakespeare’s *Richard II* illustrate the continuing interest in the genre.<sup>214</sup> With its ode to princely power, *Tamburlaine* sets the scene for us:

Usumcasane:        To be a king is half to be a god.  
 Theridamas:        A god is not so glorious as a king.  
                           I think the pleasure they enjoy in heaven  
                           Cannot compare with kingly joys on earth:  
                           To wear a crown enchased with pearl and gold,  
                           Whose virtues carry with it life and death;  
                           To ask, and have; command, and be obeyed;  
                           *When looks breed love, with looks to gain the prize –*  
                           *Such power attractive shines in princes’ eyes.*<sup>215</sup>

Here, wielding power is all about appearances. In *The Favourite*, John Marston put the following words into the mouth of his Mendoza:

<sup>213</sup> M. McKisack, *Medieval History in the Tudor Age* (Oxford 1971), 174.

<sup>214</sup> B. Worden, ‘Favourites on the English Stage’, in Elliott and Brockliss (eds.), *The World of the Favourite*, 173-74; C. Forker, ‘Sexuality and Eroticism on the Renaissance Stage’, *South Central Review* 7 (1990), 1-22. Michael Drayton’s work on Edward II’s reign also appeared at this time: *Mortimeriados. The lamentable ciuell warres of Edward the second and the barrons* (London 1596), reworked and republished as *The barrons wars in the raigne of Edward the second. With Englands heroicall epistles* (London 1603).

<sup>215</sup> C. Marlowe, *Tamburlaine the Great: Part One*, 2.5.56-64 (my italics).

Now good Elizium, what a delicious heaven it is for a man to be in a Prince's favour. O sweet God! O pleasure! O fortune! O thou best of life! What should I think? What say? What do? To be a favourite! A minion! To have a general timorous respect observe a man; a stateful silence in his presence; solitariness in his absence; a confused hum and busy murmur of obsequious suitors training him; the cloth held up and way proclaimed before him; petitionary vassals licking the pavement with their slavish knees; whilst some odd palace lampreys that ingender with snakes and are full of eyes on both sides, with a kind of insinuated humbleness fix all their delights upon his brow. O blessed state! What a ravishing prospect doth the Olympus of favour yield.<sup>216</sup>

In the background of Marlowe and Marston's work was Elizabeth's court faction, particularly that generated by the earls of Leicester and Essex, Sir Walter Raleigh and Sir Christopher Hatton.<sup>217</sup> It was these men who were seen as having 'petitionary vassals licking the pavement with their slavish knees'. The sensitivity of such material was shown following the publication of Sir John Hayward's *The First Part of the Life and Raigne of King Henrie III* (1599), which was dedicated to Essex in excessively flattering terms. The book was burned and suppressed, and the following year, after Essex's disgrace, Hayward was imprisoned in the Tower where he remained until Elizabeth's death in 1603. The queen was not surprisingly unimpressed with attempts to compare her with Richard II – 'a simple and sluggish man, a dastard, a meycocke, and one altogether unworthy to bear rule'<sup>218</sup> – and Essex with Bolingbroke. Her sense of identity with Richard II, and refusal to allow Shakespeare's *Henry IV Part I* to be performed after Essex's rebellion, are well known. In August 1601, during a private audience in her privy chamber at East Greenwich, Elizabeth famously announced to antiquary and keeper of the records William Lambarde, 'I am Richard II, know ye not that?'<sup>219</sup> In addition, the portrait of Richard in Westminster Abbey may well have been the basis for the portrait

<sup>216</sup> J. Marston, *The Favourite*, 1.5; cited by R. Lockyer, *Buckingham: The Life and Political Career of George Villiers, First Duke of Buckingham, 1592-1628* (London 1981), 2.

<sup>217</sup> S. Adams, 'Favourites and Factions at the Elizabethan Court', in R.G. Asch and A.M. Birke (eds.), *Princes, Patronage and the Nobility: The Court at the Beginning of the Modern Age c.1450-1650* (Oxford 1991), 265-287; P.E.J. Hammer, "'Absolute and Sovereign Mistress of her Grace"? Queen Elizabeth I and her Favourites, 1581-1592', in Elliott and Brockliss (eds.), *The World of the Favourite*, 38-53; R.P. Shepherd, 'Royal Favourites in the Political Discourse of Tudor and Stuart England', unpublished PhD thesis (Claremont University 1985), *passim*.

<sup>218</sup> J.J. Manning (ed.), *The First and Second Parts of John Hayward's The Life and Raigne of King Henrie III*, Camden 4<sup>th</sup> Series 42 (London 1991), 120. A 'meycocke' is 'an effeminate person, a coward, a weakling' (*ibid.*, n.79).

<sup>219</sup> J. Nichols (ed.), *The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth*, (London 1823), iii, 552-53. For background: R.M. Warnicke, *William Lambarde: Elizabethan Antiquary, 1536-1601* (London 1973), 136-37; W.M. Ormrod, 'Richard II's sense of English history', in G.J.A. Dodd (ed.), *The Reign of Richard II* (Stroud 2000), 110.

of Gloriana in her coronation robes now in the National Portrait Gallery.<sup>220</sup> The comparisons made in Hayward's *Henrie VIII* and in recent stage productions of *King Richard II* had clearly stung.

Elizabeth's death did not bring the age of the English favourite to a close, since James I's affections gave rise to two men whose influence and position were arguably greater: Robert Carr, earl of Somerset and George Villiers, duke of Buckingham.<sup>221</sup> The parallel with Edward II's reign is uncanny. Somerset was James's first favourite before his imprisonment in 1616 on a charge of murder, almost exactly three hundred years after Gaveston was similarly removed from the scene. Buckingham then took his place in the king's affections, where he remained until he was murdered in 1628. In the same way that Despenser learnt lessons from Gaveston's fall and resolved to block the advance of any who did not enjoy his confidence, so too Buckingham sought to control access to James I following Somerset's death.<sup>222</sup>

Contemporaries were quick to pick up on the historical echoes. In 1621 Sir Henry Yelverton, who was defending himself in parliament against charges of corruption, laid the blame firmly at the feet of the duke of Buckingham:

I dare say if my Lord of Buckingham had but read the articles exhibited in this place against Hugh Spencer, and had known the danger of placing and displacing officers about a King, he would not have pursued me with such bitterness.<sup>223</sup>

The charges against Yelverton need not concern us, but the reaction to his reference to the Despensers caused uproar in the House. Prince Charles interrupted him, 'unable to endure his father's government to be so paralleled and scandalised', and James himself had Yelverton thrown into prison. 'If he Spencer, I Edward II', he protested. 'To reckon me with such a prince is to esteem me a weak man, and I had rather be no king than such a one as Edward II.'<sup>224</sup> Such public criticism, fuelled by historical accounts of

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<sup>220</sup> Alexander and Binski (eds.), *Age of Chivalry*, no. 713.

<sup>221</sup> N. Cuddy, 'The revival of the entourage: the Bedchamber of James I, 1603-1625', in D. Starkey (ed.), *The English Court: from the Wars of the Roses to the Civil War* (London 1987), 173-225, shows that under James's rule the bedchamber became politically meaningful again, as male-male friendship replaced the androgynous male-female courtship which existed under Elizabeth.

<sup>222</sup> For the younger Hugh's control of access to Edward II, see above, chapter 3(a).

<sup>223</sup> Lockyer, *Buckingham*, 101-3.

<sup>224</sup> G.L. Harriss, 'Medieval Doctrines in the Debates on Supply, 1610-1629', in K. Sharpe (ed.), *Factions and Parliament: Essays on early Stuart History* (Oxford 1978), 85-86, demonstrates that in failing to 'draw the line

the reign published in recent years,<sup>225</sup> brought the Despensers to the fore once again. From the perspective of king and favourite, this was reflected not only in the heavy fine and imprisonment meted out upon Yelverton, but also in the lengthy debate in the House of Lords when Buckingham's critics did all they could to mitigate the accusations. It was probably this incident that reinstalled the younger Hugh as a perfect foil for critics who were appalled at Buckingham's position at court. A comment by Sir Henry Wotton, Buckingham's first biographer – 'He did not much strengthen his own substance at Court, but stood there on his own feet; for the truth is most of his allies rather leaned upon him than shored him up' – could equally have been written of Despenser.<sup>226</sup>

This incident shows the continuing fascination with Edward II's reign and was probably the catalyst for the reissue in 1622 of Marlowe's *Edward II*.<sup>227</sup> In addition, Sir Francis Hubert and Elizabeth Cary, Lady Falkland, wrote histories of 'court parasites' in the 1620s, the latter describing how the younger Despenser drained the treasury 'to water the drought of himself, his herd of hungry Kindred, and the swarm of Flesh-flies that became his creatures'.<sup>228</sup> All of them wrote of James's dalliance with Buckingham, as well as other relationships they saw in the European courts.<sup>229</sup> Cary, a recent English convert to Catholicism, saw Queen Isabella a tragic heroine suffering oppression in much the same way as her friend and religious confidante, Henrietta Maria.<sup>230</sup> Consequently her

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between politic liberality and culpable prodigality', James opened himself to further comparisons with Henry III, Richard II, Henry IV and Henry VI, the last of whom he thought to be 'a sillie weake King'.

<sup>225</sup> J. Speed, *History of England* (London 1611); J. Stow, *The Annales, or Generall Chronicle of England* (London 1615); S. Daniel, *Collection of the Historie of England* (London 1618).

<sup>226</sup> H. Wotton, *A Short View of The Life and Death of George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham* (London 1642), 27; quoted by K. Sharpe, 'Crown, parliament and locality: government and communication in early Stuart England', repr. *Politics and Ideas in Early Stuart England* (London 1989), 82. For the suggestion that the younger Despenser's retinue consisted of hangers-on who fed off his success, see above, chapter 4.

<sup>227</sup> See Figure 7.

<sup>228</sup> F. Hubert, *The Deplorable Life and Death of Edward the Second, King of England, together with the Downfall of the two Unfortunate Favorits, Gavestone and Spencer, Storied in an Excellent Poem* (London 1628); E. Cary, *The History of the Life, Reign and Death of Edward II, King of England and Lord of Ireland, with The Rise and Fall of his Great Favourites, Gaveston and the Spencers, Written by E.F. in the year 1627* (London 1680), 80.

<sup>229</sup> Perry, 'Politics of Access', 1063, shows how Hubert and Marlowe were influenced by Jean Boucher's work on Gaveston. Both men saw comparisons between Edward II's England and Henri III's France.

<sup>230</sup> B.K. Lewalski, *Writing Women in Jacobean England* (Cambridge, MA 1994), 201-11, Appendix A; K. Nelson, 'Elizabeth Cary's *Edward II*: advice to women at the court of Charles I', in M.E. Burke, J. Donawerth, L.L. Dove and K. Nelson (eds.), *Women, writing and the reproduction of culture in Tudor and Stuart Britain* (New York 2000), 157-73. D.R. Woolf, 'The True Date and Authorship of Henry, Viscount Falkland's *History of the Life, Reign and Death of King Edward II*', *Bodleian Library Record* 12 (1988), 444, identifies Cary's sources as the *Vita et Mors Edwardi Secundi*, but differs by attributing authorship to Cary's husband.

work is 'sunk to the hilt in her frustrations under Buckingham's regime'.<sup>231</sup> Cary portrays Isabella as a woman on a crusade against the court favourites Gaveston and Despenser, who are given new life by James I's favourites Somerset and Buckingham. Edward II's England is seen as a power struggle between Despenser and Isabella, although Mortimer's involvement and the possibility of regicide is necessarily minimised in light of the Gunpowder Plot (1604), the overthrow of Henri IV in France (1610) and the plots of Arbella Stuart.

Marlowe, Hubert and Cary also repeated the charges of sodomy made in the 1320s.<sup>232</sup> The latter two play this down: although sodomy is implicit in their histories, there is no actual condemnation of the act. For Cary in particular, the general feeling is that homosexuality must be kept private and inconsequential to avoid the ruin of the kingdom.<sup>233</sup> Marlowe's language is much less subtle, but, as Jonathan Goldberg has shown, he recognised the difference between Gaveston ('a sexual culprit') and Despenser ('a political malefactor').<sup>234</sup> Sir Robert Naunton did not. Writing in 1633 that Buckingham held a position that no favourite of Elizabeth had ever held, his choice of language is extremely telling: 'We find no Gaveston, Vere, or Spencer to have swayed alone during forty-four years'.<sup>235</sup> That Naunton chose to look to the fourteenth century (and to both Edward II and Richard II) speaks volumes about the significance of those earlier favourites. Both William Rufus and Henry III appear to have been eclipsed by this point, as Naunton highlighted the three men from that period who were variously accused of sodomy, extortion, misappropriation of patronage and witchcraft.<sup>236</sup> But in conflating them, he failed to recognise the significant differences that originally existed between them (and which are emphasised by almost all early modern literature); that it

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<sup>231</sup> L. Schleiner, 'Lady Falkland's re-entry into writing: Anglo-Catholic consensual discourse and her *Edward II* as historical fiction', in K.Z. Keller and G.J. Schiffhorst (eds.), *The Witness of Times: Manifestations of Ideology in Seventeenth Century England* (Pittsburgh 1993), 205.

<sup>232</sup> D. Clarke, "'The sovereign's vice begets the subject's error': the Duke of Buckingham, "sodomy" and narratives of Edward II, 1622-28', in T. Betteridge (ed.), *Sodomy in early modern Europe* (Manchester 2002), 46-64; and, more generally on court intimacy, L.L. Peck, 'Monopolizing Favour: Structures of Power in the Early Seventeenth-Century English Court', in Elliott and Brockliss (eds.), *The World of the Favourite*, 62-65.

<sup>233</sup> Schleiner, 'Lady Falkland', 211.

<sup>234</sup> J. Goldberg, *Sodometries: Renaissance Texts, Modern Sexualities* (Stanford 1992), 105-43.

<sup>235</sup> J.S. Cerovski (ed.), *Fragmenta Regalia, or Observations on Queen Elizabeth, Her Times and Favourites* (Washington, DC 1985), 40.

<sup>236</sup> The only work I have found that deals in any part with William Rufus is C. Caesar, *Numerus Infaustus: A short view of the unfortunate reigns of William the Second, Henry the Second, Edward the Second, Richard the Second, Charles the Second, James the Second* (London 1689). It merely contends that 'the kings of England as were the second of any name proved very unfortunate persons'. Further sodomy references have been noted in John Ford's *The Chronicle Historie of Perkin Warbeck* (London 1634): L. Hopkins, 'Touching Touchets: Perkin Warbeck and the Buggery Statute', *Renaissance Quarterly* 52 (1999), 395.

was Gaveston and de Vere who were accused of homosexuality, but Despenser who took over the government.

The revolutionary ferment of the early 1640s saw additional commentary on the reigns of Edward II and Richard II, but the focus was less their favourites and more their depositions.<sup>237</sup> A distinct lack of Despenser material then appeared after the Restoration, chiming with the different ways in which we saw Charles II to have been perceived. In fact, the only tract dealing with Edward II in the 1660s was a single sheet poem describing Jane Shore, who was accused of being Edward's mistress.<sup>238</sup> Probably a Puritan attack on Charles II's mistresses, it was 'set forth for the example of all lewd women', but is worthy of mention because it emphasises Edward II's *heterosexuality*. Such tracts were rare indeed. When the Despenser publications next reappeared, they were in response to Monmouth's rebellion and the unrest over William III's claim to the throne, Sir Robert Howard in particular concocting a vehement defence of the Glorious Revolution under the guise of a medieval history.<sup>239</sup> In 1695, Nathaniel Crouch focused on the Despensers' counsel, again within a heterosexual framework:

By their leud [*sic*] and profligate Counsels, they prevailed upon the King to commit all manner of Enormities, by forsaking the Company and Bed of his lawful Wife, and living in all manner of debauchery with common Strumpets.<sup>240</sup>

Once more we see allegations that the Despensers' ambition and profligacy had led to the collapsing of the boundaries between the king's public and private identities. Perhaps because Crouch was writing in the reign of William and Mary, the sodomitical allegations

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<sup>237</sup> T. Fannant, *A historicall Narration of the manner and forme of that memorable Parliament, which wrought wonders: begun at Westminster 1386, in the tenth year of the reigne of king Richard the Second* (London 1641); Anon., *A pious and learned speech delivered in the High Court of Parliament, 1 H. 4, by T. Mercks, the Bishop of Carlisle, wherein he gravely and judiciously declares his opinion concerning the questions what should be done with the deposed King, Richard the Second* (London [1642]); Anon., *The Life and Death of King Richard the Second, who was deposed, etc.* (London 1642); Anon., *The People Informed of Their Oppressors and Oppressions, With a remedy against both, Unto which is added the sentence of deposition against King Richard the Second and Edward the Second; With the happiness that ensued to this Nation thereupon* (London 1648). The antiquary Sir Robert Cotton also published a fourteen-page pamphlet on *The Troublesome Life and Raigne of King Henry the Third, Wherein five Distempers and Maladies are set forth* (London 1642), which he wrote was 'sutable to these unhappie times of ours'. The latter half of Cotton's work (pp. 9-13) outlines the Barons' Wars and the justiciarship of Hugh Despenser (d. 1265).

<sup>238</sup> Anon., *The Wofull lamentation of Mistris Jane Shore, a goldsmiths wife in London, sometimes Edward the Second's concubine, who for her wanton life came to a miserable end* (London 1658x1664).

<sup>239</sup> R. Howard, *The Life and Reign of King Richard the Second, By a Person of Quality* (London 1681); id., *Historical observations upon the reigns of Edward I. II. III. and Richard II., With remarks upon their faithful counsellors and false favourites* (London 1689); id., *The History of the Reigns of Edward and Richard II, with Reflections, and Characters of their Chief Ministers and Favourites, As Also A Comparison between those Princes Edward and Richard the Second, with Edward the First, and Edward the Third* (London 1690). For the latter, see Figure 8.

<sup>240</sup> N. Crouch, *The Unfortunate Court-Favourites of England* (London 1695), 29, 36.

are missing, but the view that the younger Hugh was ‘wholly possessed by all the most intolerable vices’ remains.<sup>241</sup> It is unsurprising to see such themes re-emerge when political crisis repeated itself.<sup>242</sup> This was also true in France during sudden upsurges in popular complaint in the 1590s, the mid-1610s, and the years of the Fronde. In England, however, because the critical discourse of the court overflowed into the streets and onto the stages, recognition and hatred of the sovereign’s favourites was more widespread. F.J. Levy wrote that ‘a typical Englishman must have found it more and more difficult to avoid having any knowledge of the past. Regardless of his purse, his background or his tastes, sooner or later he was bound to be exposed to history.’<sup>243</sup> Nevertheless, certain trends in the favourite literature can be detected. Most early modern Richard II histories are concerned with Richard’s deposition rather than his alleged homosexual relationships. By contrast, the Edward II narratives cover usurpation, misappropriation of power and sexual misconduct. Only occasionally, when dealing with allegations of sodomy, are Gaveston and Despenser pushed together; otherwise, they are kept distinct. As Henry Yelverton’s accusation in 1621 demonstrated, the Despensers’ role was interpreted as being on a different level.

Not only does this ring true for early modern constructions, it also holds true for how the 1320s must be viewed overall. To borrow terminology from Laurence Brockliss, Gaveston was a traditional favourite, a ‘toadie’, who ‘did not so much supplant royal authority as encourage it into unpopular channels’.<sup>244</sup> Removing Gaveston or de Vere changed little; such men ‘were only singing the royal tune’. The sixteenth- and seventeenth-century minister-favourites were different. They acted as ‘surrogate sovereigns’, determining patronage decisions and formulating domestic and foreign policy. Fascinatingly, this was exactly the role of the younger Despenser for much of his public career. To have played a part usually only attributed to Richelieu, Mazarin and Olivares is astonishing. Taking into account – as we must – the difference in models of government, the argument that the ‘golden age’ of the minister-favourite did not officially begin for another two centuries is too limiting. As Francis Bacon wrote, ‘it is

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<sup>241</sup> Crouch, *Court-Favourites*, 15.

<sup>242</sup> Bishop Merks’ speech from 1399, which originally appeared in 1642, was republished in 1679 with a note on the title page: ‘The Bishop of Carlisle’s speech in Parliament, concerning deposing of Princes. Thought seasonable to be published to this murmuring age.’

<sup>243</sup> F.J. Levy, *Tudor Historical Thoughts* (San Marino, CA 1967), 234.

<sup>244</sup> L.W.B. Brockliss, ‘Concluding Remarks: The Anatomy of the Minister-Favourite’, in Elliott and Brockliss (eds.), *The World of the Favourite*, 283. Hamilton, *Piers Gaveston*, 45, takes the same stance.



no new thing for Kings and Princes to have their *privadoes*, their favourites, their friends'.<sup>245</sup> Whilst Hugh Despenser the younger could never have been a minister-favourite in the later sense of the word, he came closer than anyone in the late medieval period to total appropriation of sovereignty with the king's co-operation. His 'rule' was not on the same scale nor accepted in the same way, but it was much less embryonic as usually thought.

A final footnote to the 'Despenser legend' comes in *The Song of Queen Isabell*, a tract printed during the Napoleonic wars.<sup>246</sup> The majority of the text is a poem describing Isabella's trip to France in 1325 and the subsequent triumph of the 'queen and faithful wife' over Edward II and the Despensers. Appended is a song entitled *What can the Reason be? Johnny is gone to the Wars*, written from the perspective of a woman whose sweetheart has gone away to fight. She intends to 'tie up my hair like a bonny young soldier' and 'follow my love to the wars'. The actual intention of the tract is difficult to fathom. It may have been a radical print supporting the proposed French invasion of England or a patriotic comparison between Isabella's defeat of the Despensers and the Allied defeat of Napoleon. However, since the recurrent theme is an attempt to masculinise both the queen and the nameless woman, it seems most likely that we are asked to see a further blurring of the boundaries between male and female involvement in the war. Whatever the case, the tract provides a final illustration of the longevity of the 'Despenser legend' and the extent to which the family still pervaded popular English culture, nearly half a millennium after 1326.<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> Quoted by L.L. Peck, *Court Patronage and Corruption in Early Stuart England* (London 1990), 49, who sees this in reference to the duke of Lerma, Francisco de Sandoval y Rojas, the declining favourite of Philip III of Spain. I prefer to read Bacon's words more generally; that he had in mind favourites of another age altogether. Indeed, the concept can be traced back to classical Greece and Rome: Nero, for example, projected images of himself as a 'Magnificent Monarch' showering largesse on a benevolent populace and promoting whom he pleased (M.T. Griffen, *Nero: the end of a dynasty* (London 1987), 115-18, 146-50, 152-54). The adaptability of the imagery is shown by the stage performances in 1605 of Samuel Daniel's *The Tragedy of Philotus* (describing the downfall of Alexander the Great's favourite) and Ben Jonson's *Sejanus His Fall* (an account of Tiberius's minion) (Worden, 'Favourites on the English Stage', 169). In the parliament of 1626 Buckingham was accused by Sir John Eliot of being Sejanus. Charles I was outraged: 'Implicitly, he must intend me for Tiberius' (J.H. Elliott, 'Introduction', in id. and Brockliss (eds.), *The World of the Favourite*, 2; Lockyer, *Buckingham*, 323).

<sup>246</sup> Anon., *The Song of Queen Isabell, Wife of King Edward the Second, With the Downfall of the Spencers* (Warrington [1792x1815]). Neither of the publication dates suggested by the English Short-Title Catalogue (1790) or the Royal Historical Society bibliography (1825) are convincing: the tract almost certainly emerged during the war years. I would like to thank Professor Alan Forrest for discussing this piece of work with me.

<sup>247</sup> P. Horne, 'The besotted king and his Adonis: representations of Edward II and Gaveston in late nineteenth-century England', *History Workshop Journal* 47 (1999), 31-48, contains discussion of Edward's other favourite in a later period. For the growing Victorian distaste with the 'religious superstition, bloodthirstiness and chivalric exclusivity' of the Middle Ages: P. Mandler, "'In the olden time": Romantic history and English national identity, 1820-1850', in L.W.B. Brockliss and D. Eastwood (eds.), *A union of*

### Conclusion

The different ways in which the Despencers represented themselves had immensely far-reaching consequences. Unfortunately for them, the ancient pedigree and high ambition that was so powerfully manifest when the family was at its peak was all but forgotten in later centuries as the memories of the 1320s took centre stage. Instead of pretensions of grandeur, the name 'Despenser' became synonymous with immorality, corruption and tyranny. But against this must be set the glories held within the walls of Tewkesbury Abbey. The towering pinnacles and imposing chantry tombs stand as testimony to a family at the very heart of late medieval life. Silent and unchanging, not subject to the need for a male heir or the whims of political fortitude, perhaps this is their real legacy.

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*multiple identities: the British Isles, 1750-1850* (Manchester 1997), esp. 82-87; J.T. Lynch, *The Age of Elizabeth in the Age of Johnson* (Cambridge 2003), 18-37, 57-77. R. Mitchell, *Picturing the past: English history in text and image, 1830-1870* (Oxford 2000), 56-83, argues that there remained an interest in 'anecdotal' medieval histories. The classic work on the English obsession with chivalry is M. Girouard, *The return to Camelot: chivalry and the English gentleman* (London 1981).

## 7

## Conclusion

**H**ISTORY has not treated the Despensers kindly. Medieval chroniclers saw them as evil, early modern pamphleteers used them as political cannon fodder, and modern historians castigated them for their rapacity and greed. Whilst this thesis has in no way attempted to paint them as heroes, it has been emphasised that the tyranny of the 1320s was merely part of the family history. By taking a wider perspective it has been shown that loyalty, not rebellion, was the Despensers' *raison d'être*. They were variously courtiers, administrators, warriors, diplomats and earls who made a substantial contribution to fourteenth-century political life as servants of the crown. Indeed, their very survival, not to mention their brief rebirth in 1397, shows the value of adherence to the culture of royal service.

The involvement of Hugh III and Edward Despenser in warfare and government of the 1340s, 1350s and 1360s underlines the importance of Edward III's reconciliation with errant members of his nobility, and provides the strongest possible indication of the crown's willingness to fully engage with the rebels of previous reigns. The same can be said for Hugh senior's recovery in the 1290s and the swift return of the family patrimony to Constance Despenser after 1400. That a family was still valued despite an individual's contumacy is extremely important. In general it indicates just how much the king needed his nobility for support, counsel, leadership in war and governance in the localities. More specifically it underlines the abilities and aptitude of the Despensers for the tasks they were given. In the late middle ages, crown and nobility needed one another. Theirs was

not a relationship whereby both parties looked to prosper at the expense of a foe, but an organic, ever-developing process founded on the guarantee of mutual support.

Such an approach is surely the only way to explain the remarkable resilience of the Despensers. When the deaths of the first three Hughs in 1265 and 1326 are taken into account, later family members would have been forgiven for merely contenting themselves with survival. Yet there is hardly any indication of a 'quiet' period, save for the unavoidable minorities. Without a doubt the Despensers were intensely ambitious. How else could they number war captains, Garter Knights, a justiciar, a household chamberlain, a prince's steward, a pope's ally and a king's companion, all in the midst of a century wracked by famine, plague and economic adversity? But for the most part this ambition was pursued with the tacit assumption that service to the crown came first. Instead of seeing them as destructive, we must not underestimate the Despensers' contribution to the smooth running of the English polity.

This is not to say that the Despensers were successful at everything to which they set their hands. The circumstances of the decades in which they lived, whilst providing opportunities for reconciliation, also acted against them. First, as we saw in chapter 6(b), neither Hugh III or Edward received the earldom that they hoped for because of the crown's changing political expectations. Second, income from their vast estates in Glamorgan plummeted after the Black Death, and it required a serious effort to weather the storm. Third, the point made in chapter 4 concerning the inability of Hugh junior and Thomas to maintain strong regional affinities suggests a serious failure to appreciate the need for local support. Indeed, their almost lackadaisical approach, exemplified in 1326 and 1399 when the crown called in vain for their support, suggests a genuine difficulty facing those members of the baronage who tried to survive at court as well as keep peace on their estates. Territorial interests outside the March and prominence at court drove a wedge between the Despensers and their neighbours. For all their achievements, it is this third objection that still remains their ultimate legacy, because the terror of the 1320s poisoned English politics for decades to follow. When Richard II's men, including Thomas Despenser, rose in rebellion against Henry IV, contemporaries were right to draw comparisons with 1326. The *duketti* acted precisely as the earlier Despensers had done, and thus confirmed their infamy.

It is hoped that this study has raised questions that go beyond the scope of just one medieval family. We have considered the durability and ambitions of the fourteenth-century nobility, and the lengths to which the barons would go to preserve their legacy, even in death. We have also examined the relationships between a king and his favourites, and a noble and his affinity. The former in particular I hope to research further in the future. We have seen the impact of war and diplomacy on English government, and the role of noblewomen – specifically widows – in family survival during both long absence and minorities. Above all, we have seen the continuing presence of the Despensers at the heart of English politics. This contrasts with almost all research carried out on the nobility in the past few decades, which has shown how one or two generations of a family were usually compelled, by force of circumstance, to retreat from the spotlight for a time. It has been argued here that the Despensers never did this. They left an enduring legacy as one of the most instantly recognisable families of the middle ages.

### **Epilogue: the last Despenser?**

In a recent family history, Lord Spencer of Althorp argued that his family had direct claim to descent from the baronial Despensers. Theoretically, this would link him and his late sister Princess Diana to the events discussed in this thesis.<sup>1</sup> Lord Spencer's assertions aroused much interest and a flurry of letters in *Spectator* and a variety of genealogical publications.<sup>2</sup> Not many months later, the College of Arms awarded Prince William his individual heraldic coat of arms to mark his eighteenth birthday. The prince chose to commemorate his mother by including a scallop shell from her heraldry, a decision that fascinated the British tabloids and also appealed to BBC Radio 4, which in 2002 serialised a new publication by Christopher Lee entitled *This Sceptred Isle: The Dynasties*.<sup>3</sup> 'It is tempting', wrote the author in response to Lord Spencer's claims, 'to think the sense of family tragedy is undiminished'.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> C. Spencer, *The Spencers: A Personal History of an English Family* (London 2000), ch. 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Spectator*, November 1999; *Baronage*, January 2000.

<sup>3</sup> The accompanying book claims to tell the saga of British history from the perspectives of twenty families who left an 'indelible mark' on the past.

<sup>4</sup> C. Lee, *This Sceptred Isle: The Dynasties* (London 2002), 52.

In fact, the *escallops argent* that appeared on the rectangular banner used by Prince Charles and Princess Diana during their marriage, and was replicated by Prince William, were the only features of the Spencer arms that were truly theirs. The remainder were appropriated from the medieval Despenser arms.<sup>5</sup> The Spencers have borne these arms perfectly legally for four centuries, since they have been authorised by the College of Arms, but their actual blood descent from the Despensers is far from convincing.<sup>6</sup> In 1504, one John Spencer, a prosperous sheep farmer in Northamptonshire, successfully petitioned for a grant of arms. He was awarded *azure a fess ermine between six sea-mews' heads erased argent*, and was later knighted by Henry VIII. Although the fourteenth-century Despensers did hold estates in Northamptonshire, neither the heralds nor John Spencer himself saw any further connection. Had they done so, the original Despenser arms would surely have been awarded. Instead, no pretension was made to any descent, and the Spencer family proudly bore their new coat of arms until 1595, when Clarencieux King of Arms Richard Lee visited Althorp and 'discovered' a connection to an old cadet branch of the Despensers. Upon this discovery the medieval arms, *quarterly argent and gules, in the second and third quarters a fret or, over all a bend sable*, were assumed, with the addition of three *escallops argent on a bend*.

Lord Spencer does not actually claim descent from the main Despenser family line, but from John Despenser, cousin of Hugh the justiciar in the thirteenth century, and thence to a steward of William the Conqueror who came over after Hastings. Such a claim is utterly impossible to substantiate. It is one thing to say 'it is beyond doubt that one Robert Despenser was [the Conqueror's] steward'; quite another to prove a legitimate connection to one's own line.<sup>7</sup> The position of *dispensario* was not limited to any one family in Anglo-Norman England, and there were at least three families using the surname Despenser by the fourteenth century. These may have been distantly related, but it can not be proven. The book also makes regular appeal to antiquarian family trees. In The National Archives, for example, there exists a bundle of solicitors' papers once belonging to Sir Francis Spencer (1779-1845).<sup>8</sup> A detailed genealogy in the

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<sup>5</sup> See Figure 2.

<sup>6</sup> J.H. Round, *Studies in Peerage and Family History* (London 1901), 279-329, from which the following is taken. See also M.E. Finch, *The Wealth of Five Northamptonshire Families 1540-1640*, Northamptonshire Record Society 19 (1956), 38-39; C.G. Y[oung], 'Additions to Dugdale's Baronage; from the MS collections of Francis Townsend, esq., Windsor Herald', *Collectanea Topographica et Genealogica* 5 (1838), 5-7.

<sup>7</sup> Spencer, *The Spencers*, 1.

<sup>8</sup> TS 33/200. Other genealogies may be found in College of Arms MS L.14, f. 98v; MS Vincent 11, insertion; MS Vincent 114, 162-69.

bundle shows that the Althorp Spencers do indeed descend from a cadet branch of the Despensers. But there are problems with such 'evidence'. First, it is difficult to trace the validity of family trees written after 1595 because they are suspect to the same alterations made by the College of Arms. Second, even if these trees can be trusted, they actually prove that the modern Spencers are not progeny of the line traceable from Hugh the justiciar, but from his cousin. They are therefore not legitimate bearers of the arms last borne in anger by Thomas Despenser in January 1400.

Genealogists commonly look upon these changes as a classic example of the Tudor heralds' duplicity. Elizabeth I, well aware of these 'bogus pretensions to ancient gentility', once said of Clarencieux King of Arms Richard Lee that 'if he prove no better than his predecessor, it made no matter if he were hanged'.<sup>9</sup> The nobility in the 1621 parliament were equally convinced by the falsity of the claim. During the clamour that arose when Sir Henry Yelverton accused the duke of Buckingham of acting like Hugh Despenser the younger,<sup>10</sup> the origins of Sir Robert Spencer came under fire from the earl of Arundel. But it was not because Spencer spoke up for his alleged forebear. Indeed, if he had done so, Charles Spencer's argument would carry more weight. It was, Arundel declared, because whilst *his* ancestors were suffering for king and country, '[Lord Spencer's] ancestors kept sheep'.<sup>11</sup> If men in the thick of the action saw no connection to the main Despenser line, there seems little reason why anyone else should.

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<sup>9</sup> McFarlane, 'Extinction and Recruitment', repr. *Nobility*, 166.

<sup>10</sup> See above, chapter 6(c).

<sup>11</sup> R. Cust, 'Spencer, Robert, first Baron Spencer (1570-1627)', in *Oxford DNB*, li, 881-82.

# Appendix 1

## The Despensers in Parliament, 1281-1399

Parliament (with month of assembly) <sup>1</sup>	Dispenser presence
1281 May	-
1281 September	-
1282 [Easter]	-
1282 [Michaelmas]	-
1283 September	Hugh E <sup>2</sup>
1284 [Easter]	-
1284 [Michaelmas]	-
1285 May	-
1285 October	-
1286 April	-
1289 April	-
1290 January	-
1290 April/July	-
1290 October	-
1291 January	-
1291 June	-
1292 January	-
1292 June	-
1293 March	-
1293 October	-
1294 June	-
1294 November	-
1295 August	Hugh E <sup>3</sup>
1295 November	Hugh E <sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Due to the difficulty with terminology at this point in the development of parliament, I have also included Great Councils if those appear in the sources. My dating for parliaments is dependent on the following: *HBC*; H.G. Richardson and G.O. Sayles, 'The English Parliaments of Edward I', 'The English Parliaments of Edward II' and 'The English Parliaments of Edward III', repr. *English Parliament in the Middle Ages*, chs. V (151-54), XVI (85-88) and XXI (78-82); Ormrod, *Edward III*, Table 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Parl. Writs*, I, 15.

<sup>3</sup> *Parl. Writs*, I, 29.

<sup>4</sup> *Parl. Writs*, I, 31, 33.



1296 November	Hugh E <sup>5</sup>
1297 February	Hugh E <sup>6</sup>
1297 July	-
1297 Sept/October	-
1298 March	-
1299 March	Hugh E <sup>7</sup>
1299 May	Hugh E <sup>8</sup>
1299 October	Hugh E <sup>9</sup>
1300 March	Hugh E <sup>10</sup>
1301 January	Hugh E <sup>11</sup>
1302 July	Hugh E <sup>12</sup>
1302 October	Hugh E <sup>13</sup>
1305 February	Hugh E <sup>14</sup>
1305 September	Hugh E <sup>15</sup>
1306 April	Hugh E <sup>16</sup>
1307 January	Hugh E <sup>17</sup>
1307 October	Hugh E <sup>18</sup>
1308 March	Hugh E <sup>19</sup>
1308 April	Hugh E <sup>20</sup>
1308 October	Hugh E <sup>21</sup>
1309 February	Hugh E <sup>22</sup>
1309 April	Hugh E <sup>23</sup>
1309 July	-
1310 February	Hugh E <sup>24</sup>
1311 August	Hugh E <sup>25</sup>
1311 November	Hugh E <sup>26</sup>
1312 February	Hugh E <sup>27</sup>
1312 August	Hugh E <sup>28</sup>
1313 March	Hugh E <sup>29</sup>
1313 July	Hugh E <sup>30</sup>
1313 September	Hugh E <sup>31</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *Parl. Writs*, I, 48.

<sup>6</sup> *Parl. Writs*, I, 52.

<sup>7</sup> *Parl. Writs*, I, 79.

<sup>8</sup> *Parl. Writs*, I, 80.

<sup>9</sup> *Parl. Writs*, I, 81.

<sup>10</sup> *Parl. Writs*, I, 82.

<sup>11</sup> W. Dugdale, *A Perfect Copy of all the Summons of the Nobility* (London 1685), 38.

<sup>12</sup> *Parl. Writs*, I, 112.

<sup>13</sup> *Parl. Writs*, I, 114, 116.

<sup>14</sup> *Parl. Writs*, I, 136, 138.

<sup>15</sup> *Parl. Writs*, I, 158-60.

<sup>16</sup> *Parl. Writs*, I, 164.

<sup>17</sup> *Parl. Writs*, I, 181; *Rot. Parl.*, i, 188.

<sup>18</sup> *Parl. Writs*, II(i), 2.

<sup>19</sup> *Parl. Writs*, II(i), 18.

<sup>20</sup> *Parl. Writs*, II(i), 20.

<sup>21</sup> *Parl. Writs*, II(i), 22.

<sup>22</sup> *Parl. Writs*, II(i), 24.

<sup>23</sup> *Parl. Writs*, II(i), 25.

<sup>24</sup> *Parl. Writs*, II(i), 40, 42.

<sup>25</sup> *Parl. Writs*, II(ii), 38.

<sup>26</sup> *Parl. Writs*, II(i), 57.

<sup>27</sup> *Parl. Writs*, II(i), 69.

<sup>28</sup> *Parl. Writs*, II(i), 75.

<sup>29</sup> *Parl. Writs*, II(i), 81.

<sup>30</sup> *Parl. Writs*, II(i), 95.

<sup>31</sup> *Parl. Writs*, II(i), 101.

1314 April	Hugh E <sup>32</sup>
1314 September	Hugh E and Hugh Y <sup>33</sup>
1315 January	Hugh E and Hugh Y <sup>34</sup>
1316 January	Hugh E and Hugh Y <sup>35</sup>
1317 April [Council]	Hugh E and Hugh Y <sup>36</sup>
1317 July [Council]	Hugh E and Hugh Y <sup>37</sup>
1318 October	Hugh E and Hugh Y <sup>38</sup>
1319 May	Hugh E and Hugh Y <sup>39</sup>
1320 January	Hugh E and Hugh Y <sup>40</sup>
1320 October	Hugh E and Hugh Y <sup>41</sup>
1321 January	Hugh E and Hugh Y <sup>42</sup>
1322 May	Hugh E and Hugh Y <sup>43</sup>
1322 November	Hugh E and Hugh Y <sup>44</sup>
1324 February	Hugh E and Hugh Y <sup>45</sup>
1324 May [Great Council]	Hugh E and Hugh Y <sup>46</sup>
1324 October	Hugh E and Hugh Y <sup>47</sup>
1325 April [Great Council of Magnates]	Hugh E and Hugh Y <sup>48</sup>
1325 June	Hugh E and Hugh Y <sup>49</sup>
1325 November	Hugh E and Hugh Y <sup>50</sup>
1327 January	-
1327 September [Council]	-
1328 February	-
1328 April	-
1328 July [Council]	-
1328 October [Council]	-
1329 February	-
1330 March	-
1330 November	-
1331 September	-
1332 March	-
1332 September	-
1332 December	-
1333 January	-
1334 February	-
1334 September	-
1335 May	-
1336 March	-
1336 September [Council]	-
1337 March	-

<sup>32</sup> *Parl. Writs*, II(i), 120, 122.

<sup>33</sup> *Parl. Writs*, II(i), 127.

<sup>34</sup> *Parl. Writs*, II(i), 137.

<sup>35</sup> *Parl. Writs*, II(i), 153.

<sup>36</sup> *Parl. Writs*, II(i), 170.

<sup>37</sup> *Parl. Writs*, II(i), 171.

<sup>38</sup> *Parl. Writs*, II(i), 173-83.

<sup>39</sup> *Parl. Writs*, II(i), 198.

<sup>40</sup> *Parl. Writs*, II(i), 216.

<sup>41</sup> *Parl. Writs*, II(i), 219.

<sup>42</sup> *Parl. Writs*, II(i), 235.

<sup>43</sup> *Parl. Writs*, II(i), 245.

<sup>44</sup> *Parl. Writs*, II(i), 262.

<sup>45</sup> *Parl. Writs*, II(i), 287, 289.

<sup>46</sup> *Parl. Writs*, II(i), 647-57.

<sup>47</sup> *Parl. Writs*, II(i), 317-18.

<sup>48</sup> *Parl. Writs*, II(i), 325-28.

<sup>49</sup> *Parl. Writs*, II(i), 328.

<sup>50</sup> *Parl. Writs*, II(i), 334.

1337 September [Council]	-
1338 February	-
1338 July [Council]	Hugh III <sup>51</sup>
1339 February	Hugh III <sup>52</sup>
1339 October	[Hugh III] <sup>53</sup>
1340 January	
1340 March	Hugh III <sup>54</sup>
1340 July	Hugh III <sup>55</sup>
1341 January [Great Council of Magnates]	Hugh III <sup>56</sup>
1341 April	[Hugh III] <sup>57</sup>
1341 [Summer] [Great Council of Magnates]	Hugh III <sup>58</sup>
1342 Easter [Great Council of Magnates]	Hugh III <sup>59</sup>
1342 October [Council]	Hugh III <sup>60</sup>
1343 April	[Hugh III] <sup>61</sup>
1344 June	[Hugh III] <sup>62</sup>
1346 September	-
1347 March [Council]	Hugh III <sup>63</sup>
1348 January	-
1348 March	-
1351 February	-
1352 January	-
1352 August [Council]	-
1353 September [Council]	-
1354 April	-
1355 November	-
1357 April	-
1358 February	Edward <sup>64</sup>
1360 May	-
1361 January	Edward <sup>65</sup>
1361 Easter [Council]	Edward <sup>66</sup>
1362 October	-
1363 October	Edward <sup>67</sup>
1365 January	Edward <sup>68</sup>
1366 May	Edward <sup>69</sup>
1368 May	-
1369 June	-
1371 February	-

<sup>51</sup> GEC, iv, 273; Dugdale, *Summons*, 201.

<sup>52</sup> GEC, iv, 273; Dugdale, *Summons*, 206.

<sup>53</sup> *Rot. Parl.*, ii, 103.

<sup>54</sup> Dugdale, *Summons*, 210.

<sup>55</sup> Dugdale, *Summons*, 212.

<sup>56</sup> Dugdale, *Summons*, 214.

<sup>57</sup> *Rot. Parl.*, ii, 126.

<sup>58</sup> Dugdale, *Summons*, 215.

<sup>59</sup> Dugdale, *Summons*, 216.

<sup>60</sup> Dugdale, *Summons*, 217.

<sup>61</sup> *Rot. Parl.*, ii, 135.

<sup>62</sup> *Rot. Parl.*, ii, 147.

<sup>63</sup> Dugdale, *Summons*, 229.

<sup>64</sup> GEC, iv, 276; Dugdale, *Summons*, 259.

<sup>65</sup> Dugdale, *Summons*, 262.

<sup>66</sup> Dugdale, *Summons*, 264.

<sup>67</sup> *Rot. Parl.*, ii, 275. Made a trier of petitions for Aquitaine and overseas (12<sup>th</sup> of 18, first after the earls).

<sup>68</sup> *Rot. Parl.*, ii, 283; Dugdale, *Summons*, 270. Made a trier of petitions for Aquitaine and overseas (13<sup>th</sup> of 18, first after the earls).

<sup>69</sup> *Rot. Parl.*, ii, 289. Made a trier of petitions for Aquitaine and overseas (13<sup>th</sup> of 18, first after the earls).

1371 June [Council]	-
1372 November	Edward <sup>70</sup>
1373 November	-
1376 April	-
1377 January	-
1377 October	-
1378 October	-
1379 April	-
1380 January	-
1380 November	-
1381 November	-
1382 May	-
1382 October	-
1383 February	-
1383 October	-
1384 April	-
1384 November	-
1385 October	-
1386 October	-
1388 February	-
1388 September	-
1390 January	-
1390 November	-
1391 November	-
1393 January	-
1394 January	-
1395 January	-
1395 January [Great Council]	
1397 January	Thomas <sup>71</sup>
1397 September	Thomas <sup>72</sup>
1399 September	Thomas <sup>73</sup>
1399 October	Thomas <sup>74</sup>

<sup>70</sup> *Rot. Parl.*, ii, 309; Dugdale, *Summons*, 284. Made a trier of petitions for England (17<sup>th</sup> of 23, first after the earls).

<sup>71</sup> *Rot. Parl.*, iii, 338; Dugdale, *Summons*, 348. Made a trier of petitions for Gascony and overseas (9<sup>th</sup> of 13, first after the earls).

<sup>72</sup> *Rot. Parl.*, iii, 348. Made a trier of petitions for Gascony and overseas (11<sup>th</sup> of 15, first after the earls).

<sup>73</sup> Dugdale, *Summons*, 354.

<sup>74</sup> Dugdale, *Summons*, 358. These writs of summons were replicated from September 1399 parliament, which was dissolved on the abdication of Richard II. Thomas was examined in parliament as one of counter-appellants.

## Appendix 2

### Life Indentures and Annuities

Dispenser	Name	Date of first/last contact <sup>1</sup>	Date of indenture (I) or annuity (A) & income
Hugh Y	Sir Peter Ovedale <sup>2</sup>	1316	1316 (I) none
Hugh Y	Sir Thomas Grey <sup>3</sup>	1325/1326	1325 (A) £200
Hugh III	John Ellerker <sup>4</sup>	1336/1341	1339 (A) 20m/year
Hugh III	Richard Blundel, yeoman <sup>5</sup>	1337/1345	1340 (I)
Hugh III	Walter Bachelor, his chamberlain <sup>6</sup>	1347/1349	1347 (A) £10/year
Edward	Sir Thomas Arthur, of Somerset <sup>7</sup>	1372/1375	1372 (I) £20/year
Edward	Nicholas Bernak, esquire <sup>8</sup>	1372/1375	1372 (I) 20m/year
Edward	Sir John Paleys, of Cologne <sup>9</sup>	1372	1372 (A) £20/year
Edward and Thomas	William Daventry, esquire, of Northants <sup>10</sup>	1373/1399	1373 (I) £20/year and 1396 (I) 20m/year

<sup>1</sup> It is probable that the association began shortly before the date of first contact, although this is obviously difficult to prove. Such a caveat applies to all tables.

<sup>2</sup> M. Jones & S.K. Walker (eds.), 'Private Indentures for Life Service in Peace and War', in *Camden Miscellany XXXII*, Camden 5<sup>th</sup> series, 3 (London 1994), no. 22.

<sup>3</sup> SAL MS 122, ff. 29r-v, 33r.

<sup>4</sup> SC 1/39/124; CPR 1307-13, 181; CPR 1338-40, 328; S.L. Waugh, 'For King, Country and Patron: the Dispensers and Local Administration, 1321-22', *JBS* 22 (1983), 51.

<sup>5</sup> C 61/54, m. 30; C 71/17, m. 5; C 76/15, m. 20; C 76/20, m. 1; C 81/1724/90; CPR 1340-43, 194.

<sup>6</sup> CPR 1348-50, 550.

<sup>7</sup> Jones & Walker (eds.), 'Private Indentures', no. 57; E 101/32/26; E 101/35/3; E 101/35/5.

<sup>8</sup> Jones & Walker (eds.), 'Private Indentures', no. 58.

<sup>9</sup> CPR 1377-81, 564.

<sup>10</sup> Bristol RO, MS 5139/49; E 101/511/12/14-15; Jones & Walker (eds.), 'Private Indentures', no. 87; CPR 1388-92, 397.

Edward	John Tremyr, Edward's chaplain <sup>11</sup>	1374/1391	1374 (A) 20s/year
Edward	John Carter, esquire <sup>12</sup>	1375	1375 (A) £20/year
Edward	Sir Edward Dalyngrigge, of Sussex <sup>13</sup>	1368/1375	[1368x1372] (A) £40/year
Edward	John atte Wode <sup>14</sup>	<i>bef.</i> 1375	<i>bef.</i> 1375 (A) £40/year
Edward	Leisandum Avene <sup>15</sup>	<i>bef.</i> 1375/1391	<i>bef.</i> 1375 (A) 20m/year
Thomas	John Wilcotes, esquire, of Oxon <sup>16</sup>	1395	1395 (T) £10/year
Thomas	William Hamme, esquire, of Herefordshire <sup>17</sup>	1399	1399 (T) 10m/year
Thomas and Elizabeth	Hugh Mortimer of Northants <sup>18</sup>	1375/1399	<i>bef.</i> 1400 (A) £40/year
Thomas	William Karewe <sup>19</sup>	1399	<i>bef.</i> 1400 (A) £20/year [?]
Thomas	Robert Rous, esquire <sup>20</sup>	1399	<i>bef.</i> 1400 (A) £10/year [?]
Thomas	Richard Whittington of London <sup>21</sup>	1399	<i>bef.</i> 1400 (A) [?]
Constance	William Cheyne <sup>22</sup>	1400	1400 (A) £40/year

<sup>11</sup> E 101/511/12/11-12; SC 6/1292/3/3, no. 9; *CCIR 1374-77*, 484-85; *CPR 1374-77*, 366; *CPR 1381-85*, 15.

<sup>12</sup> E 101/511/12/7; E 101/511/12/9; SC 6/1292/3/3, nos. 10-11; SC 6/1292/3/4, no. 9; *CPR 1381-85*, 565.

<sup>13</sup> C 81/1724/98; E 101/32/26; E 101/35/3; E 101/35/5; SC 8/105/5215; Jones & Walker (eds.), 'Private Indentures', nos. 57-58; *CAP Wales*, 356; *CCIR 1374-77*, 488; *CPR 1374-77*, 289; *CPR 1391-96*, 312.

<sup>14</sup> E 101/511/12/1-2; SC 6/1292/3/3, nos. 1-2; SC 6/1292/3/4, nos. 1-2; *CPR 1374-77*, 256; *CPR 1377-81*, 98.

<sup>15</sup> E 101/511/12/4; E 101/511/12/8; SC 6/1292/3/3, no. 8; SC 6/1292/3/4, no. 14.

<sup>16</sup> Jones & Walker (eds.), 'Private Indentures', no. 84.

<sup>17</sup> Jones & Walker (eds.), 'Private Indentures', no. 93.

<sup>18</sup> Lambeth Palace, Reg. Arundel, ii, f. 109r; C 76/83, m. 12; *CIM*, vii, 262; *CPR 1391-96*, 510; *CPR 1396-99*, 430-31, 520.

<sup>19</sup> E 101/511/29/2.

<sup>20</sup> E 101/511/29/4.

<sup>21</sup> E 101/511/28/8; E 101/511/28/15-16; E 101/511/28/27-28.

<sup>22</sup> *CPR 1399-1402*, 285.

## Appendix 3

### The Inner Circle'

Dispenser	Name	Dates of first/last contact	Area of expertise
Hugh E	Sir Ingelram Berenger <sup>1</sup>	1299/1326	Military, witness, creditor, attorney
Hugh E	Sir Henry Bodrugan <sup>2</sup>	1303/1307	Military, witness
Hugh E	Sir Ralph Camoys <sup>3</sup>	1299/1326	Military, witness, attorney
Hugh E	Sir Richard Chastilon <sup>4</sup>	1305/ <i>d.</i> 1322	Military, council
Hugh E	Ralph Chenny <sup>5</sup>	1302/1309	Attorney
Hugh E and Hugh Y	John Chyverton <sup>6</sup>	1307/1326	Military, other
Hugh E	Roger Cobham <sup>7</sup>	1299/1307	Military
Hugh E	Sir John Dene <sup>8</sup>	1305/1307	Military
Hugh E and Hugh Y	Sir William Dene <sup>9</sup>	1308/ <i>d.</i> 1319	Steward in Gloucestershire
Hugh E	Sir Robert Etchingam <sup>10</sup>	1294/1307	Military, witness

<sup>1</sup> C 67/14, m. 10; C 81/1724/81; E 40/215, E 40/441, E 40/463, E 40/523, E 40/943, E 40/3186-91, E 40/6814, E 40/10419; JUST 1/1020/1; SC 1/49/142; CPR 1301-7, 382; CPR 1307-13, 191, 582; CPR 1317-21, 262, 271; CPR 1321-24, 189; CPR 1327-30, 14; A.W. Goodman (ed.), *Registrum Henrici Woodstocke, Dioc. Wyntoniensi, A.D. 1305-1316*, CYS 44 (Oxford 1941), ii, 926.

<sup>2</sup> C 67/15, m. 9; C 67/16, m. 10; C 81/1724/81; E 40/4837; E 40/4855; E 40/7526.

<sup>3</sup> C 67/14, mm. 2, 10; C 67/15, m. 14; C 67/16, m. 11; C 81/1724/81; E 40/215; E 40/523; CPR 1301-7, 382; CPR 1307-13, 582; CPR 1317-21, 449; CPR 1321-24, 187; CPR 1327-30, 20.

<sup>4</sup> C 67/16, m. 8; C 81/1724/81; CPR 1301-7, 382; CPR 1317-21, 271; CPR 1321-24, 187; *Parl. Writs*, II(i), 610-11.

<sup>5</sup> CPR 1307-13, 191; C.T. Flower and M.T.B. Dawes (eds.), *Registrum Simonis de Gandavo, Dioc. Saresbiriensis, A.D. 1297-1315*, CYS 40 (Oxford 1934), I(ii), 620.

<sup>6</sup> C 67/16, m. 5; *Calendar of Memoranda Rolls (Exchequer) Preserved in the Public Record Office Michaelmas 1326 – Michaelmas 1327* (London 1968), no. 2030.

<sup>7</sup> C 67/16, m. 11; C 81/1724/81; CPR 1317-21, 575.

<sup>8</sup> C 67/16, m. 5; C 81/1724/81; CPR 1301-7, 382.

<sup>9</sup> E 40/67; E 40/215; SC 8/241/12004; CIPM, vi, no. 167; CPR 1307-13, 52; CPR 1307-13, 191; N.E. Saul, *Knights and Esquires: The Gloucestershire Gentry in the Fourteenth Century* (Oxford 1981), 65, 79, Appendix 3.

<sup>10</sup> C 67/10, m. 10; C 67/15, m. 9; C 67/16, m. 10; C 81/1724/81; E 40/523.

Hugh E	Sir Martin Fishacre <sup>11</sup>	1307/1322	Military, council
Hugh E	Sir Ralph Gorges, banneret <sup>12</sup>	1304/d.1322	Military, witness
Hugh E	Sir Walter Hakehuyt <sup>13</sup>	1296/1300	Witness, military diplomatic
Hugh E	Robert Harwedon <sup>14</sup>	1295/1315	Chaplain, attorney, military. dep. justice of forests
Hugh E	Sir John Hastings senior <sup>15</sup>	1296/1309	Military, council
Hugh E and Hugh III	Sir John Haudlo <sup>16</sup>	1299/1337	Military, witness, attorney, lands
Hugh E	Sir John Holt <sup>17</sup>	1296/1304	Witness
Hugh E	John Jukyn <sup>18</sup>	1299/1303	Witness
Hugh E	Sir Robert Kaynes <sup>19</sup>	1299/1304	Witness, financial bonds
Hugh E	Richard Lughteburgh <sup>20</sup>	1287/d.1316	Attorney, witness, military, envoy
Hugh E	Sir Peter Malory <sup>21</sup>	1299/c.1310	Witness
Hugh E	Robert Mandeville <sup>22</sup>	1305/1307	Military
Hugh E	Sir William Mansel <sup>23</sup>	c.1302/1310	Witness
Hugh E	Roger Papillon <sup>24</sup>	1299/1313	Military
Hugh E	Sir Walter Pavely <sup>25</sup>	1299/c.1310	Witness
Hugh E	William Rasen <sup>26</sup>	1299/1313	Military, envoy, petition
Hugh E	Sir John Ratynden <sup>27</sup>	1294/1325	Military
Hugh E	Sir John St Amand <sup>28</sup>	1313/1322	Attorney, military, petition
Hugh E	Sir John St John of Lagham <sup>29</sup>	1309/1313	Military, witness, pardon

<sup>11</sup> C 67/16, m. 9; C 81/1724/81; CPR 1307-13, 582; CPR 1317-21, 271, 426; CPR 1321-24, 187; F. Devon (ed.), *Issues of the Exchequer, Henry III to Henry VI* (London 1847), 131.

<sup>12</sup> BL Stowe MS 553, f. 61r; C 81/1724/81; E 40/3202-4; CPR 1301-7, 382; CPR 1321-24, 188.

<sup>13</sup> C 67/14, m. 10; E 40/927-28; CPR 1292-1301, 535.

<sup>14</sup> C 67/14, mm. 3, 17; C 81/1724/73; E 40/249-55; E 40/2649; E 40/6847; E 40/7238; CPL 1305-42, 10; CPR 1292-1301, 170, 224, 306, 561; CPR 1307-13, 72, 131, 191, 582; CPR 1313-17, 105; Goodman (ed.), *Reg. Woodstock*, ii, 909, 912, 914, 925; Flower and Dawes (eds.), *Reg. Gandavo*, I(i), 81; R. Deedes (ed.), *Registrum Johannis de Pontissara, Episcopi Wyntoniensis, A.D. 1282-1304*, CYS 30 (London 1924), ii, 837-38.

<sup>15</sup> C 67/10, m. 6; C 67/14, m. 10; E 40/927-28; CPR 1307-13, 108.

<sup>16</sup> C 67/14, m. 10; C 67/16, m. 8; C 81/1724/81; E 40/215; E 40/441; E 40/463; E 40/3202-4; E 40/6814; E 40/7428; E 40/10910; E 159/87, m. 31d; SC 1/36/66; CPR 1301-7, 382; CPR 1307-13, 152, 191, 582; CPR 1317-21, 262, 271, 426; CPR 1321-24, 187; CPR 1340-43, 194; CCR 1337-39, 271-72, 273.

<sup>17</sup> E 40/249-55; E 40/927-28; E 40/934; E 40/3979; E 40/4796, E 40/4799; E 40/4803; E 40/4837; E 40/4852; E 40/4855; E 40/7488; E 40/9280; E 40/9357; E 40/12047; WARD 2/28/94E/75; CPR 1307-13, 131; CPR 1348-50, 491.

<sup>18</sup> E 40/9357; E 40/12047; WARD 2/28/94E/75.

<sup>19</sup> E 40/4822; E 40/4837; E 40/4845; E 40/4855; E 40/4859; E 40/5848; E 40/7488; E 40/9280; CPR 1348-50, 491.

<sup>20</sup> BL Cotton MS Nero C.VIII, f. 105r; C 67/13, m. 8; C 67/14, mm. 3, 17; C 67/16, m. 12; E 40/6814; E 40/6847; CPR 1281-92, 267; CPR 1292-1301, 73, 170, 224, 306, 561.

<sup>21</sup> E 40/927-28; E 40/9357; WARD 2/28/94E/75.

<sup>22</sup> C 67/16, m. 11; C 81/1724/81; CPR 1301-7, 388.

<sup>23</sup> E 40/929; E 40/931-32; E 40/948-55; E 40/5904; E 40/7526.

<sup>24</sup> C 67/14, m. 10; C 67/16, m. 9; C 81/1724/81; CPR 1307-13, 582.

<sup>25</sup> E 40/249-55; E 40/943; E 40/3186-91; E 40/4837; E 40/4852; E 40/4855; E 40/7488; E 40/9280; E 40/9357; E 40/12047; WARD 2/28/94E/75; CPR 1348-50, 491.

<sup>26</sup> C 67/14, m. 10; C 67/16, m. 11; C 81/1724/81; CPL 1305-42, 4; CPR 1292-1301, 535; CPR 1301-7, 382; CPR 1307-13, 180, 582.

<sup>27</sup> C 67/10, m. 6; C 67/14, m. 10; C 67/16, m. 6; C 81/1724/81; CPR 1301-7, 382; CPR 1307-13, 582; CPR 1317-21, 262, 426; CPR 1321-24, 187; *Parl. Writs*, II(i), 721.

<sup>28</sup> E 40/10237; CPR 1313-17, 265; CPR 1317-21, 271; CPR 1321-24, 189.

<sup>29</sup> E 40/215; CPR 1307-13, 181.



Hugh E	William Sidemanton <sup>30</sup>	1305/1307	Military
Hugh E	Sir John Tany <sup>31</sup>	1308/1309	Deputy at Strigoil Castle
Hugh E	Ralph Trehampton <sup>32</sup>	1299/1301	Military
Hugh E	Sir John Vaux <sup>33</sup>	?/1326	Official, military
Hugh Y	Sir Walter Beauchamp <sup>34</sup>	1313/1323	Military, witness
Hugh Y	Richard Bliton <sup>35</sup>	1326	Confessor
Hugh Y	John Botiller of Llantwit <sup>36</sup>	1322/1326	Steward in Staffs., Worcs. and Glos.
Hugh Y	Sir Thomas Bradestone <sup>37</sup>	1325/1326	Esquire
Hugh Y	William Cliff <sup>38</sup>	1320/1322	Witness, attorney, military
Hugh Y	William Cusance <sup>39</sup>	1319/1321	Keeper of Despenser's wardrobe
Hugh Y	Thomas Dene <sup>40</sup>	1322x26	Constable of Carmarthen, receiver in Cantrefmawr
Hugh Y and Hugh III	Sir William Erkalewe <sup>41</sup>	c.1326/ after 1340	Military, attorney, council, steward, witness, financial
Hugh Y	Sir John Felton <sup>42</sup>	1321/1326	Retinue
Hugh Y	Thomas of Goodrich Castle <sup>43</sup>	1326	Despenser's clerk
Hugh Y	Sir Rhys ap Gruffydd <sup>44</sup>	1322/1326	Retinue
Hugh Y	John Hampton <sup>45</sup>	?/1326	Council
Hugh Y	Clement Holditch <sup>46</sup>	1325/1326	Despenser's chamberlain
Hugh Y	Sir John Inge <sup>47</sup>	1319/1326	Sheriff of Glamorgan; chief warden of lordship of Kerinkenyn
Hugh Y	John Iweyn <sup>48</sup>	1318/d.1321	Constable of Newport
Hugh Y	Sir Philip Joce <sup>49</sup>	1321	Retinue
Hugh Y	Sir William Lovell <sup>50</sup>	1322/1325	Bachelor
Hugh Y	Sir Thomas Marlborough <sup>51</sup>	?	Retinue

<sup>30</sup> C 67/16, m. 9; C 81/1724/81; CPR 1301-7, 382.

<sup>31</sup> E 40/929; E 40/931; E 40/3186-91; CPR 1307-13, 68.

<sup>32</sup> C 67/14, mm. 3, 10; C 81/1724/73.

<sup>33</sup> C 81/1724/70; Waugh, 'For King, Country and Patron', 48.

<sup>34</sup> C 81/1724/67; C 81/1724/76; C 81/1724/83; E 40/10907; CPR 1317-21, 452, 596; CPR 1321-24, 188.

<sup>35</sup> SAL MS 122, ff. 24v, 45v; E 101/379/17, f. 3r.

<sup>36</sup> Saul, *Knights and Esquires*, 44, 80, Appendix 3.

<sup>37</sup> SAL MS 122, ff. 21r, 27r; C 81/1724/83.

<sup>38</sup> C 81/1724/77; E 40/10907; CPR 1317-21, 449; CPR 1321-24, 189; CPR 1327-30, 25; *Gesta Edwardi de Carnarvan, auctore canonico Bridlingtoniensi*, in Stubbs, *Chronicles*, ii, 67.

<sup>39</sup> SC 1/49/143; SC 1/58/10; E.B. Fryde, 'The Deposits of Hugh Despenser the Younger with Italian Bankers', *EcHR* 4 (1951), 348-49.

<sup>40</sup> *CAP Wales*, 271.

<sup>41</sup> C 71/17, m. 5; C 81/1724/68; *CCR* 1337-39, 521; CPR 1338-40, 183; CPR 1340-43, 194; Clarke, *Cartae*, iv, 180, 182.

<sup>42</sup> SAL MS 122, f. 40r; CPR 1317-21, 575; CPR 1327-30, 37.

<sup>43</sup> SAL MS 122, f. 26v.

<sup>44</sup> E 40/4878; CPR 1327-30, 256; *Parl. Writs*, II(i), 762.

<sup>45</sup> SC 8/66/3288; Waugh, 'For King, Country and Patron', 52.

<sup>46</sup> SAL MS 122, ff. 16v, 29r-v, 33r.

<sup>47</sup> E 40/4887; SC 1/37/6; SC 1/49/143-44; SC 1/63/185; CPR 1307-13, 582; CPR 1327-30, 32; CPR 1330-34, 404; CPR 1338-40, 183; Clarke, *Cartae*, iii, nos. 892, 894-95, 908; *CAC Wales*, 180, 219-20, 220-21, 259-60.

<sup>48</sup> E 163/4/9; *CAP Wales*, 173, 269, 273; Waugh, 'For King, Country and Patron', 52.

<sup>49</sup> *CCR* 1318-23, 541.

<sup>50</sup> CPR 1321-24, 141; Fryde, 'Deposits', 361.

<sup>51</sup> CPR 1327-30, 160.

Hugh Y	Sir John Morteyn <sup>52</sup>	?/1326	Retinue
Hugh Y	Sir Constantine Mortimer <sup>53</sup>	?/1326	Retinue
Hugh Y	Janekyn de Sufford <sup>54</sup>	1326	Esquire
Hugh Y	Thomas Stayngrene <sup>55</sup>	1320	Treasurer at Cardiff castle
Hugh Y	Sir Richard Talbot <sup>56</sup>	?/1325	Military, witness
Hugh Y	Alan Tesdale <sup>57</sup>	1325	Esquire
Hugh Y	Sir Hugh Turplington <sup>58</sup>	1325	Bachelor
Hugh Y	Raulyn Tyssington <sup>59</sup>	1325	Esquire
Hugh Y	Sir Giles Wachesham <sup>60</sup>	1322/?	Lands
Hugh Y	Sir Robert Waterville of Orton (Hunts.) <sup>61</sup>	1325/1326	Bachelor
Hugh Y	Sir Robert Welles <sup>62</sup>	1319/1325	Retinue
Hugh Y	Nicholas <sup>63</sup>	?/1325	Valet
Hugh III	John Alveton <sup>64</sup>	1342/1345	Attorney
Hugh III	Sir Robert Apperle <sup>65</sup>	1340/1345	Military, witness
Hugh III	Walter Beggeworth <sup>66</sup>	1343	Clerk
Hugh III	Sir William Careswell <sup>67</sup>	1338/1340	Military, witness, joint-debt
Hugh III	Thomas Chamberlain <sup>68</sup>	1339/1342	Military
Hugh III	John Coventre <sup>69</sup>	1343	Constable in Wales
Hugh III	Sir Thomas Fallesle <sup>70</sup>	1340/1345	Military
Hugh III	Sir Thomas Gournay <sup>71</sup>	1340/1345	Military
Hugh III	Edmund Grimsby <sup>72</sup>	1342/1348	Attorney, petition, lands
Hugh III	John Hamslap <sup>73</sup>	1340/1343	Secretary, witness, military
Hugh III	Sir Edward Kendale <sup>74</sup>	1340/1346x48	Military
Hugh III	William Osberston <sup>75</sup>	1340/1347	Military, witness, petition, lands

<sup>52</sup> CPR 1327-30, 144.

<sup>53</sup> Fryde, 'Deposits', 351, 360-62.

<sup>54</sup> SAL MS 122, ff. 28v, 31v.

<sup>55</sup> E 163/4/9.

<sup>56</sup> C 81/1724/83; E 40/938.

<sup>57</sup> SAL MS 122, f. 21r.

<sup>58</sup> Fryde, 'Deposits', 362.

<sup>59</sup> SAL MS 122, f. 21r.

<sup>60</sup> E 40/10907.

<sup>61</sup> SAL MS 122, f. 25v; N.E. Saul, 'The Despensers and the downfall of Edward II', *EHR* 99 (1984), 13-15.

<sup>62</sup> BL Add MS 17362, f. 34r; Fryde, 'Deposits', 361.

<sup>63</sup> Bodl. MS Bodley 751, f. iv.

<sup>64</sup> C 61/54, m. 18; C 76/20, m. 1.

<sup>65</sup> C 61/54, m. 30; C 76/15, m. 20; C 76/19, m. 22; C 81/1724/90; CPR 1340-43, 194.

<sup>66</sup> CPP 1342-1419, 24.

<sup>67</sup> C 76/15, m. 20; C 81/1724/88; CCR 1337-39, 521; CPR 1340-43, 194.

<sup>68</sup> C 61/54, m. 30; C 76/15, m. 20; C 81/1724/90; CCR 1339-41, 122.

<sup>69</sup> CPP 1342-1419, 24.

<sup>70</sup> C 61/54, m. 30; C 76/15, m. 20; C 76/19, m. 22; C 76/20, m. 1; C 81/1724/79; C 81/1724/90.

<sup>71</sup> C 61/54, m. 30; C 76/15, m. 20; C 76/19, m. 22; C 76/20, m. 1; C 81/1724/79; C 81/1724/88; CPR 1338-40, 482.

<sup>72</sup> C 61/54, m. 21; C 76/20, m. 1; CIPM, ix, 329; CPP 1342-1419, 24.

<sup>73</sup> C 81/1724/68; CPP 1342-1419, 24; CPR 1340-43, 194.

<sup>74</sup> C 61/54, m. 30; C 76/15, m. 20; C 76/19, m. 22; C 76/20, m. 1; C 81/1724/79; C 81/1724/90; SC 1/39/195; CPR 1340-43, 194.

<sup>75</sup> C 61/54, m. 18; C 76/15, m. 20; C 81/1724/90; E 43/511; CIPM, ix, 329; CPP 1342-1419, 24.

Hugh III	Sir Andrew Sackville III <sup>76</sup>	1345/1347	Steward, military
Hugh III	Sir Roger Warde <sup>77</sup>	1340/1345	Military
Hugh III	William Whittington <sup>78</sup>	1346/1348	Military
Hugh III	John Wynecote <sup>79</sup>	1340/d.1349	Military, lands
Edward	Thomas Brown <sup>80</sup>	1370/1375	Witness, military, executor, constable of Cardiff castle
Edward	Robert Burton <sup>81</sup>	1375	Executor, confessor
Edward	Sir John Dautesey <sup>82</sup>	1368/1375	Military, witness, lands, executor
Edward	John Dodyngfeld <sup>83</sup>	1373/1375	Military
Edward	Sir John Fallele <sup>84</sup>	1372/1375	Military, lands, executor
Edward	Ralph Ferrers <sup>85</sup>	1373	Council
Edward	John Forester of Romsey <sup>86</sup>	1370	Witness, military
Edward and Thomas	John Frome <sup>87</sup>	1359/1399	Council
Edward	Thomas Lyons <sup>88</sup>	1372/1373	Military, witness
Edward	Nicholas Litlyngton <sup>89</sup>	1373	Attorney
Edward	Thomas Mortimer <sup>90</sup>	1372	Witness
Edward	Robert Palet <sup>91</sup>	1362/1375	Steward in Gloucester
Edward	Robert Perle <sup>92</sup>	1359/1375	Attorney, lands, executor
Edward	John Thorpe <sup>93</sup>	1372/1373	Witness, lands
Edward and Elizabeth	Henry Yakesley <sup>94</sup>	1370/1381	Witness, lands, military, executor
Edward and Elizabeth and Thomas	Thomas Bridges <sup>95</sup>	<i>bef.</i> 1375/1400	Steward, receiver
Thomas	John Browning <sup>96</sup>	1394/1400	Office-holder, parliament
Thomas	Thomas Eade <sup>97</sup>	1399	Seneschal in Worcestershire

<sup>76</sup> C 76/20, m. 1; N.E. Saul, *Scenes from provincial life: knightly families in Sussex 1280-1400* (Oxford 1986), 183.

<sup>77</sup> C 61/54, m. 30; C 76/15, m. 20; C 76/19, m. 22; C 76/20, m. 1; C 81/1724/79; C 81/1724/90.

<sup>78</sup> C 76/22, m. 7; SC 1/39/194.

<sup>79</sup> C 61/54, m. 30; C 76/15, m. 20; C 81/1724/90; *CPR 1348-50*, 317.

<sup>80</sup> E 101/35/5; *CPR 1374-77*, 289; *CPR 1399-1402*, 432; *CAP Wales*, 356.

<sup>81</sup> Lambeth Palace, Reg. Sudbury, ff. 89v-90r; E 101/35/5.

<sup>82</sup> Lambeth Palace, Reg. Sudbury, f. 90r; C 76/51, m. 4; Jones and Walker (eds.), 'Private Indentures', nos. 57-58; *CPR 1374-77*, 289; *CAP Wales*, 356.

<sup>83</sup> Lambeth Palace, Reg. Sudbury, f. 89v; C 81/1724/98; E 101/32/26; E 101/35/3; E 101/35/5.

<sup>84</sup> Lambeth Palace, Reg. Sudbury, f. 90r; E 101/35/3; E 101/35/5; Jones and Walker (eds.), 'Private Indentures', no. 57; *CPR 1374-77*, 289; *CAP Wales*, 356.

<sup>85</sup> *CPR 1370-74*, 329.

<sup>86</sup> *CPR 1399-1402*, 432.

<sup>87</sup> C 81/1724/95; C 81/1724/98; E 101/511/29/2; E 101/511/29/8; *CPR 1396-99*, 520.

<sup>88</sup> C 81/1724/98; Jones and Walker (eds.), 'Private Indentures', nos. 57-58.

<sup>89</sup> London, Westminster Abbey Muniments, 9509; and see above, chapter 2(c).

<sup>90</sup> SC 6/1292/3/14; Jones and Walker (eds.), 'Private Indentures', nos. 57-58.

<sup>91</sup> *CPR 1361-64*, 531; *CPR 1364-67*, 283; Saul, *Knights and Esquires*, 65, 154-56.

<sup>92</sup> Lambeth Palace, Reg. Sudbury, f. 90r; C 76/38, m. 17; C 76/51, m. 4; SC 6/1292/3/14; *CPR 1374-77*, 289; *CAP Wales*, 356.

<sup>93</sup> *CPR 1370-74*, 283; Jones and Walker (eds.), 'Private Indentures', nos. 57-58.

<sup>94</sup> Lambeth Palace, Reg. Sudbury, f. 90r; Jones and Walker (eds.), 'Private Indentures', no. 58; *CPR 1374-77*, 289; *CPR 1377-81*, 395; *CPR 1381-85*, 278; *CPR 1399-1402*, 432; *CAP Wales*, 356.

<sup>95</sup> BL Add. MS 37657, f. 194v; C 115/78, f. 194v; E 101/511/29/1-2; E 101/511/29/7-8; E 101/511/29/10; *CPR 1391-96*, 507; *CPR 1396-99*, 228, 231; Saul, *Knights and Esquires*, 65, 81, 93, 112n, Appendix 3.

<sup>96</sup> *CPR 1391-96*, 510; Saul, *Knights and Esquires*, 80, 113, Appendix 3.

<sup>97</sup> E 101/511/28/30.

Thomas	John Holford <sup>98</sup>	1399	Valet
Thomas and Constance	Robert Pointz <sup>99</sup>	1394/1401	Office-holder
Thomas	Richard Ruyhale <sup>100</sup>	1397/1399	Council, attorney
Thomas	William Synor <sup>101</sup>	1399	Council
Thomas	William Waryn <sup>102</sup>	1399	Valet

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<sup>98</sup> E 101/511/29/6.

<sup>99</sup> Saul, *Knights and Esquires*, 80, 113, 124, Appendix 3.

<sup>100</sup> C 76/83, m. 12; C 115/78, f. 194v; E 101/511/29/8; CPR 1396-99, 228, 520.

<sup>101</sup> E 101/511/29/2.

<sup>102</sup> E 101/511/29/7.

## Appendix 4

### *Sheriffs and Escheators*

Name	Shrievality/ Escheatorship (+)	Date <i>(dates in italics denote a period of office beginning outside lifetime of Despenser served)</i>
Sir John Acton <sup>1</sup>	Herefs. Herefs. Salop/Staffs Herefs. Glamorgan/Morgannwg	December 1294 – October 1299 April – November 1303 February 1304 – November 1305 October 1305 – November 1306 <i>March 1327 – ?</i>
John Alveton	Oxon/Berks Oxon/Berks + Oxon/Berks Oxon/Berks + Oxon/Berks	<i>June 1335 – October 1340</i> November 1342 – November 1347 November 1342 – November 1347 <i>November 1352 – November 1354</i> <i>November 1352 – November 1354</i>
Sir Thomas Arthur	Somerset/Dorset	<i>November 1397 – December 1398</i> <i>November 1399 – November 1400</i>
Sir Ingelram Berenger	Glamorgan/Morgannwg Beds/Bucks	July – December 1314 April 1320 – August 1321
John Besemaunsel <sup>2</sup>	Glos.	December 1323 – June 1324
John Browning	Glos. + Dorset	November 1398 – November 1399 <i>November 1404 – December 1405</i>
Thomas Bridges	+ Worcs. + Worcs. Glos. Glos.	<i>December 1376 – November 1378</i> <i>October 1381 – December 1382</i> <i>December 1385 – November 1386</i> <i>November 1389 – November 1390</i>
Sir William Burcester <sup>3</sup>	Kent	<i>November 1389 – November 1390</i>
Gilbert Chastilon (u-sheriff) <sup>4</sup>	Warks/Leics	<i>October – November 1351</i>
John Chyverton	+ North Wales	<i>February 1328 – May 1329</i>
Sir John Dautesey	Wiltshire	November 1373 – December 1374
Sir John Dene	Warks/Leics	October 1302 – April 1304 April – October 1305

<sup>1</sup> E 40/943; CPR 1317-21, 426.

<sup>2</sup> Saul, *Knights and Esquires*, 112 n.26.

<sup>3</sup> CPR 1391-96, 507.

<sup>4</sup> CCR 1354-60, 429.

		November 1307 – May 1308 June 1310 – April 1311 May 1311 – October 1312
John Ellerker	+ North Wales	October 1338 – June 1340 October 1341 – ?
Sir William Ercalewe	Salop/Staffs Glamorgan/Morgannwg	January 1326 – February 1327 1338 – ?
Sir Robert FitzElys <sup>5</sup>	Oxon/Berks + Oxon/Berks	November 1341 – November 1342 November 1341 – November 1342
Richard Foxcote <sup>6</sup>	Glos.	<i>September 1332 – May 1338</i> <i>October 1351 – March 1352</i>
John Frome	Somerset/Dorset	<i>November 1402 – November 1403</i>
Thomas Gobion <sup>7</sup>	Essex/Herts	January 1323 – November 1324
Ralph Gorges	Devon	April 1306 – December 1307
Sir Rhys ap Gruffydd	Carmarthenshire	October – December 1326
Walter Hakelute, jun.	Herefs.	September 1307 – September 1311
John Hampton	Glos. + Glos.	November 1318 – December 1323 November 1323 – February 1327
Thomas Harpedene <sup>8</sup>	+ Wilts/Hants	June 1326 – February 1327
John Haudlo	Kent	April 1313 – June 1314
John Inge	Devon	November 1321 – May 1322
Oliver Ingham <sup>9</sup>	Flintshire	<i>November 1328 – ?</i>
John Iweyn	Carmarthenshire	March 1319 – [d. 1321]
Thomas Lercedeakne <sup>10</sup>	Cornwall	Mich. 1313 – November 1314
Sir Thomas Marlborough	Somerset/Dorset	? – February 1327
John Maudit <sup>11</sup>	Wiltshire	June – December 1311 <i>December 1329 – December 1330</i> <i>May 1332 – November 1333</i> <i>February – March 1338</i> <i>April 1338 – January 1341</i> <i>December 1341 – November 1344</i>
Walter Pavely	Wiltshire	December 1296 – October 1299
John Paynel <sup>12</sup>	Carmarthenshire	December 1317 – March 1319
Robert Pointz	+ Glos./March Glos. + Glos./March	November 1395 – February 1397 December 1396 – November 1397 November 1399 – November 1400
Richard de la Rivere <sup>13</sup>	Glos.	November 1314 – May 1318
Robert Russell <sup>14</sup>	Wiltshire + Wiltshire + Worcs.	November 1347 – October 1351 November 1347 – October 1350 <i>November 1368 – November 1371</i>
Andrew Sackville III	Surrey/Sussex	<i>November 1366 – November 1368</i>
John Sapy <sup>15</sup>	Herefs. Carnarvonshire	September – October 1311 August 1316 – Mich. 1321
John Thorpe	Glos.	<i>November 1381 – November 1382</i>
Richard Turberville <sup>16</sup>	+ Somerset/Dorset	November 1356 – December 1357
Sir Giles Wachesham	Norfolk/Suffolk	June 1323 – February 1327

<sup>5</sup> Hugh the elder: *CPR 1321-24*, 186; Hugh III: *CCR 1337-39*, 273.

<sup>6</sup> Waugh, 'For King, Country and Patron', 51.

<sup>7</sup> *CPR 1321-24*, 187.

<sup>8</sup> *CPR 1317-21*, 429.

<sup>9</sup> BL Stowe MS 553, f. 61r; E 43/750.

<sup>10</sup> Pardoned for allegiance to Despensers: *CPR 1327-30*, 14.

<sup>11</sup> E 40/215; *CPR 1307-13*, 582.

<sup>12</sup> Ward of Hugh the elder: *CPR 1301-7*, 526-7.

<sup>13</sup> C 81/1724/74.

<sup>14</sup> C 76/19, m. 22; C 81/1724/79.

<sup>15</sup> E 40/938; *CPR 1324-27*, 106.

<sup>16</sup> C 76/38, m. 17; C 81/1724/95.

Adam Walraund <sup>17</sup>	Wiltshire	December 1311 – May 1313 May – December 1318 May 1322 – February 1327
John Wilcotes	Oxon/Berks + Oxon/Berks Oxon/Berks + Oxon/Berks Oxon/Berks Oxon/Berks Glos.	<i>November 1401 – November 1402</i> <i>November 1403 – October 1404</i> <i>November 1407 – November 1408</i> <i>December 1408 - November 1409</i> <i>December 1415 – November 1416</i> <i>November 1419 – November 1420</i> <i>November 1420 – May 1422</i>
William Wilcotes <sup>18</sup>	+ Salop/Staffs/Marches Oxon/Berks Oxon/Berks + Salop/Marches	<i>December 1386 – November 1387</i> <i>October 1392 – November 1393</i> November 1399 – November 1400 <i>November 1402 – January 1404</i>
John atte Wode	+ Salop/Staffs/Marches Salop	September 1358 – March 1362 <i>October – December 1391</i>

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<sup>17</sup> E 40/12047; CPR 1348-50, 491.

<sup>18</sup> C 76/74, m. 25; CPR 1396-99, 236, 437, 507.

## Appendix 5

### MPs

Name	Constituency <i>(returned for shire unless stated otherwise)</i>	Date <i>(dates in italics denote a period of office beginning outside lifetime of Despenser served)</i>
Sir John Acton	Herefs.	1300, 1301
John Alveton	Oxon.	<i>1332 (Mar.), 1332 (Sept.), 1335 (May), 1336 (Sept.), 1337 (Sept.), 1338 (July), 1352 (Jan.)</i>
Nicholas Aunay <sup>1</sup>	Devon	1316 (Jan.)
Robert Beaupele <sup>2</sup>	Devon	1300
Sir Ingelram Berenger	Wiltshire	1314 (Sept.), 1322 (May), 1324 (Oct.)
Sir Henry Bodrugan	Cornwall	1307 (Jan.)
John Botiller of Llantwit	Glos.	1324 (Feb.), <i>1332 (Mar.), 1339 (Oct.)</i>
Thomas Botiller <sup>3</sup>	Glos.	1305, 1340 (Mar.)
John Browning	Glos.	1397 (Sept.), 1401
William Burcester	Kent	<i>1393 (Jan.)</i>
Edward Burnell <sup>4</sup>	Salop	<i>1352 (Jan.)</i>
Gilbert Chastilon	Worcs.	<i>1352 (Aug.), 1353 (Sept.), 1354</i>
Sir Richard Chastilon	Bucks.	1331
William Cliff	Borough of Bristol, Glos.	1322 (May)
Sir William Cotes <sup>5</sup>	Wiltshire	1301, 1311, 1313 (Mar.)
Sir Roland Coykyn <sup>6</sup>	Cornwall	1307 (Oct.)
Sir Edward Dalyngrigge	Sussex	<i>1379, 1380 (Jan.), etc</i>
John Darcy 'le frere' <sup>7</sup>	Lincs.	1319, 1324 (Feb.)
Sir John Dautesey	Wiltshire	<i>1378, 1379, 1381 (Nov.), 1382 (May), 1382 (Oct.), 1388 (Feb.)</i>
Sir John Dene	Hunts. Salop Warks.	1300, 1301 1307 (Jan.) 1309, 1318, 1319, 1321

<sup>1</sup> CPR 1317-21, 312.

<sup>2</sup> C 67/14, m. 10.

<sup>3</sup> C 76/15, m. 20; C 81/1724/81; C 81/1724/90; E 40/932; E 40/6814.

<sup>4</sup> C 44/3/13.

<sup>5</sup> E 40/3979, 4852.

<sup>6</sup> C 67/16, m. 11; C 81/1724/81.

<sup>7</sup> SC 1/37/179.



	Suffolk	1314 (Sept.)
Roger Engelfeld <sup>8</sup>	Berks.	1312
William Ercalewe	Salop	1324 (Feb.), 1325, 1327 (Jan.), 1330 (Nov.), 1331, 1332 (Mar.), 1332 (Sept.), 1334 (Sept.), 1338 (Feb.), 1339 (Oct.), 1340 (Jan.)
Sir Martin Fishacre	Devon	1318
John Frome	Bucks. Dorset	1385 (Oct.) 1386 (Oct.), 1388 (Feb.), 1390 (Jan.), 1399 (Oct.), 1401
Thomas Gobion	Essex	1322 (May), 1328 (Feb.), 1328 (Apr.), 1336 (Sept.), 1337 (Sept.), 1340 (Jan.)
Sir Ralph Gorges	Dorset	1309, 1313 (Mar.)
Sir Thomas Gournay	Somerset	1336 (Mar.), 1339 (Feb.)
Sir Walter Hakelute, jun.	Herefs.	1313 (Mar.), 1313 (July), 1328 (Feb.)
John Hampton	Borough of Leominster, Herefs.	1322 (May)
Sir Edward Kendale	Herts.	1335 (May), 1358 (Feb.)
Thomas Lercedeakne	Cornwall	1305, 1313 (Mar.), 1313 (Sept.), 1315 (Jan.), 1321, 1322 (May), 1328 (Apr.), 1330 (Nov.)
William Mansel	Glos.	1307 (Jan.), 1311, 1313 (Sept.), 1314 (Sept.)
Sir Thomas Marlborough	Somerset	1331, 1339 (Feb.), 1340 (Jan.), 1340 (Mar.)
William Moigne <sup>9</sup>	Hunts.	1324 (Feb.), 1327 (Jan.), 1330 (Nov.)
Sir John Morteyn	Beds.	1309, 1313 (Mar.), 1321, 1324 (Feb.), 1328 (Feb.), 1328 (Apr.), 1330 (Nov.)
Sir Constantine Mortimer	Norfolk	1321, 1322 (May), 1324 (Feb.), 1324 (Oct.), 1327 (Jan.), 1327 (Sept.), 1328 (Feb.), 1331, etc
Hugh Mortimer	Glos.	1397 (Sept.)
Robert Palet	Glos.	1351 (Feb.), 1371 (Feb.)
Sir Walter Pavely	Wiltshire	1313 (July)
Walter Perle <sup>10</sup>	Dorset	1360, 1371 (June)
Sir John Ratynden	Sussex	1319, 1322 (Nov.), 1328 (Feb.), 1328 (Apr.), 1329
Richard de la Rivere <sup>11</sup>	Glos.	1322 (May), 1327 (Jan.)
Richard Ruyhale	Worcs.	1397 (Jan.), 1397 (Sept.)
Sir Andrew Sackville III	Sussex	1361, 1365 (Jan.), etc
John Sudbury <sup>12</sup>	Cornwall Beds.	1321 1322 (Nov.)
Sir John Tany	Essex	1305, 1307 (Jan.), 1311
John Thorpe	Wiltshire Glos.	1369 1377, 1380 (Jan.), 1381 (Nov.), 1382 (May)
Giles Wachesham	Suffolk	1328 (Feb.), 1331, 1334 (Feb.), 1334 (Sept.)
Adam Walraund	Wiltshire	1307 (Jan.), 1313 (Sept.), 1320, 1324 (Feb.), 1324 (Oct.), 1325
Robert Whittington	Glos.	1384 (Nov.)
William Whittington <sup>13</sup>	Glos.	1348 (Mar.)
John Wilcotes	Oxon.	1399 (Oct.)
William Wilcotes	Oxon.	1390 (Jan.), 1391 (Nov.), 1395 (Jan.), 1397 (Sept.)
John atte Wode	Worcs. Wiltshire	1372 (Nov.), 1373, 1376 1380 (Jan.), 1380 (Nov.)

<sup>8</sup> E 213/208; CPR 1307-13, 147.

<sup>9</sup> CPR 1307-13, 582.

<sup>10</sup> C 76/51, m. 4.

<sup>11</sup> C 81/1724/74.

<sup>12</sup> C 81/1724/70, 75.

<sup>13</sup> C 76/22, m. 7; SC 1/39/194.

# Figures

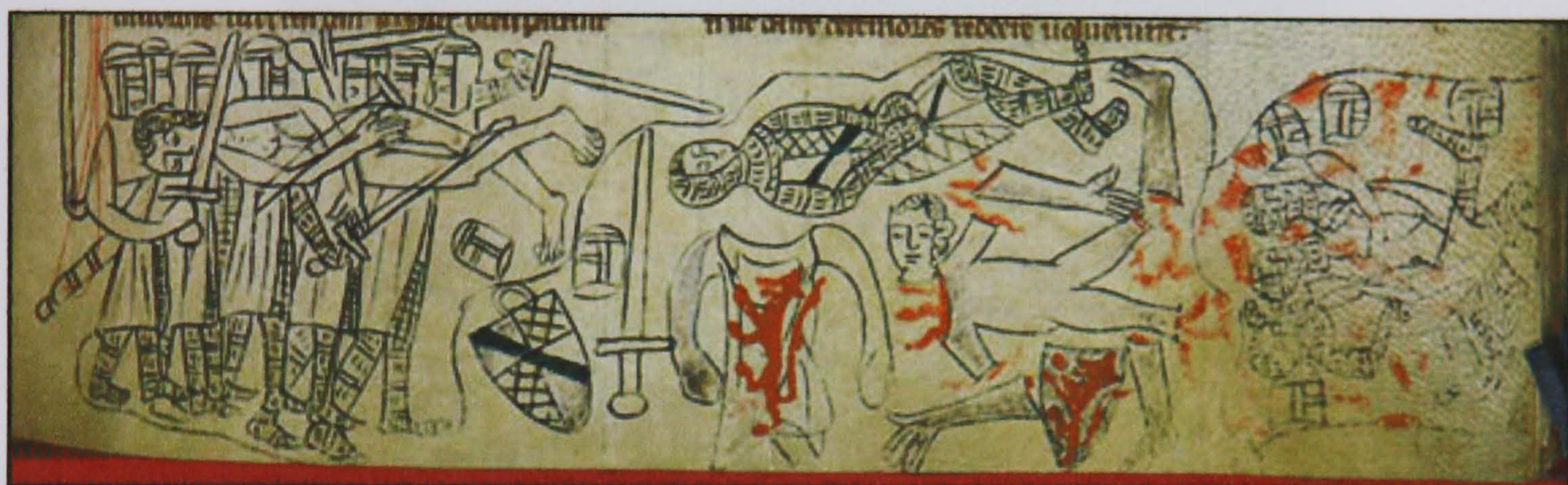


Figure 1. Death at Evesham of Hugh Despenser and Simon de Montfort (BL Cotton MS Nero D.II, f. 177r).

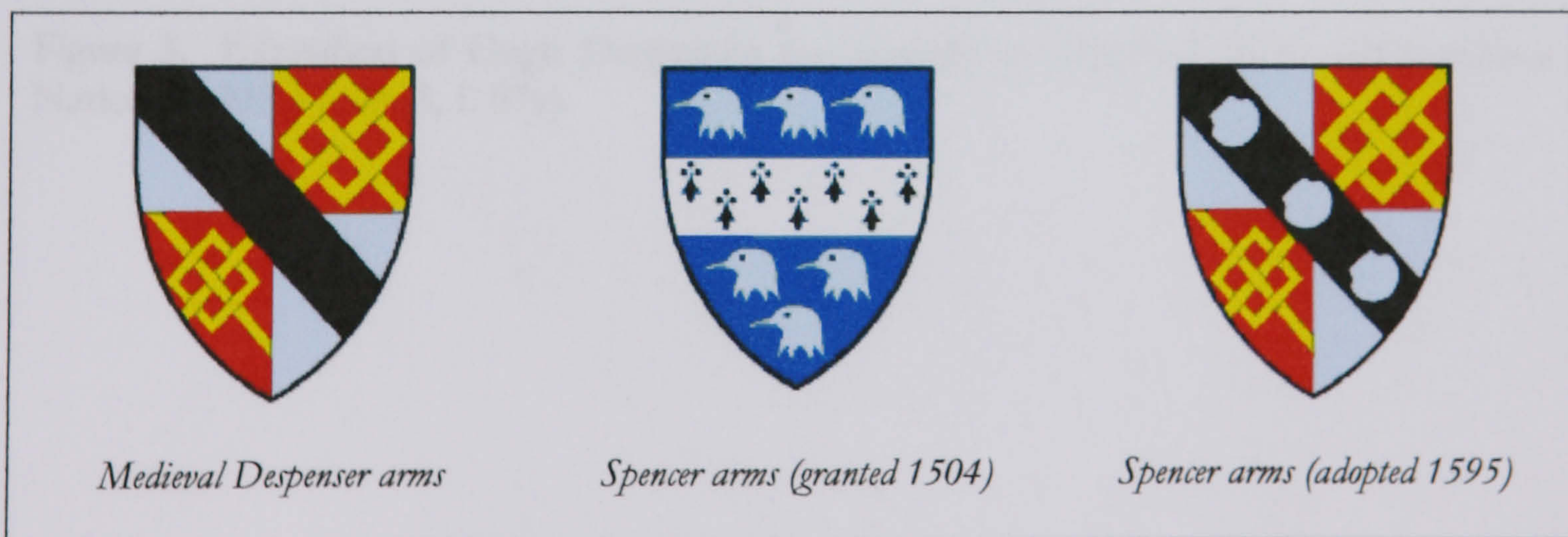


Figure 2. Despenser and Spencer heraldry.



Figure 3. Execution of Hugh Despenser the younger at Hereford (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS Fr. 2643, f. 97v).



Figure 4. Hugh Despenser III, holding the church of Llantrissant, from the *Chronica de Theokesburie* (Bodl. Top. Glouc. d.2, f. 22v).



Figure 5. Edward Despenser, with a Jewish *menorah*, from the *Chronica de Theokesburie* (Bodl. Top. Glouc. d.2, f. 24v).



Figure 6. Wall painting from Santa Maria Novella, Florence, possibly featuring Edward Despenser (centre, with white cape and Garter insignia).

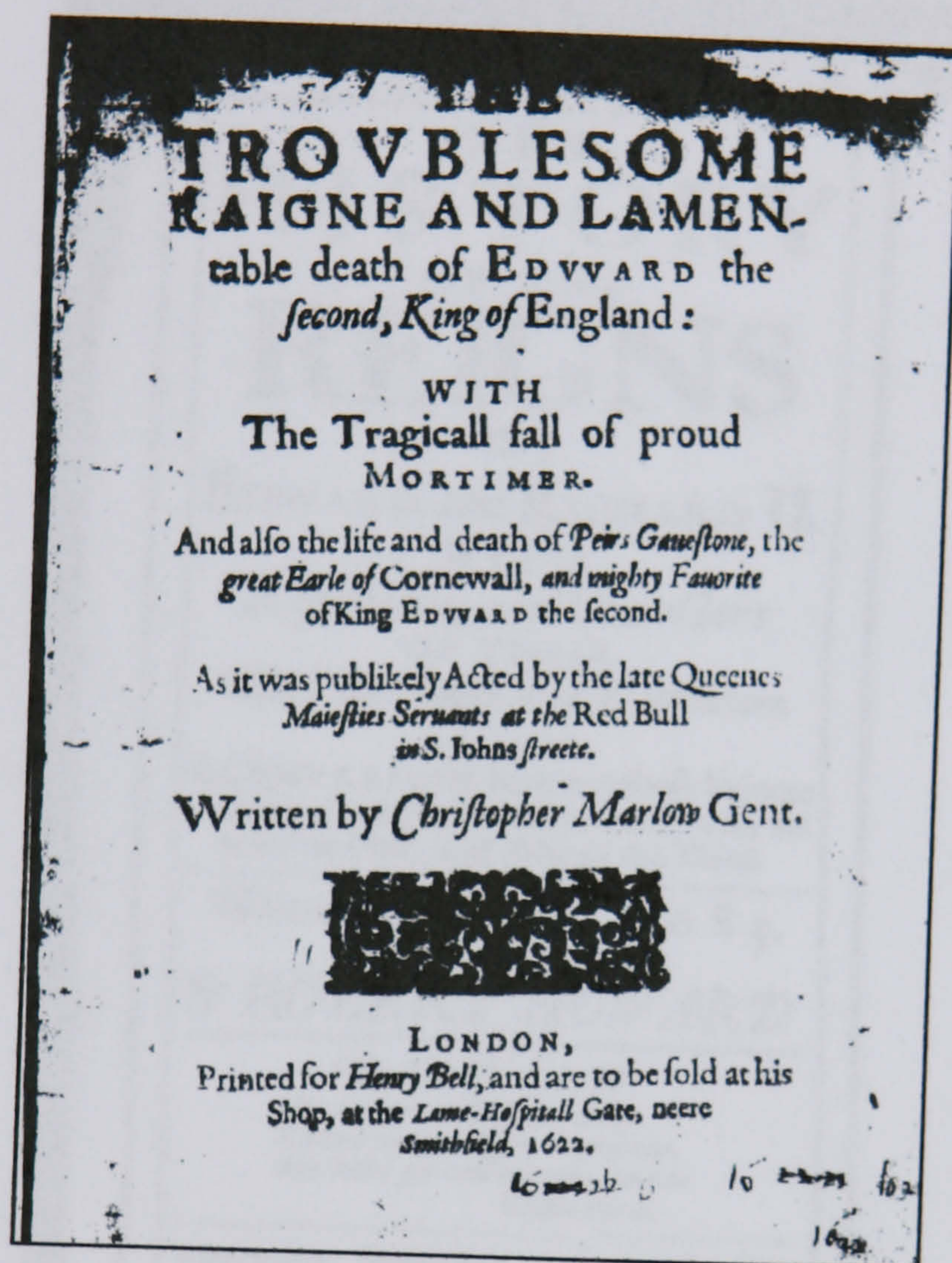


Figure 7. Title-page from the 1622 edition of Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II*.

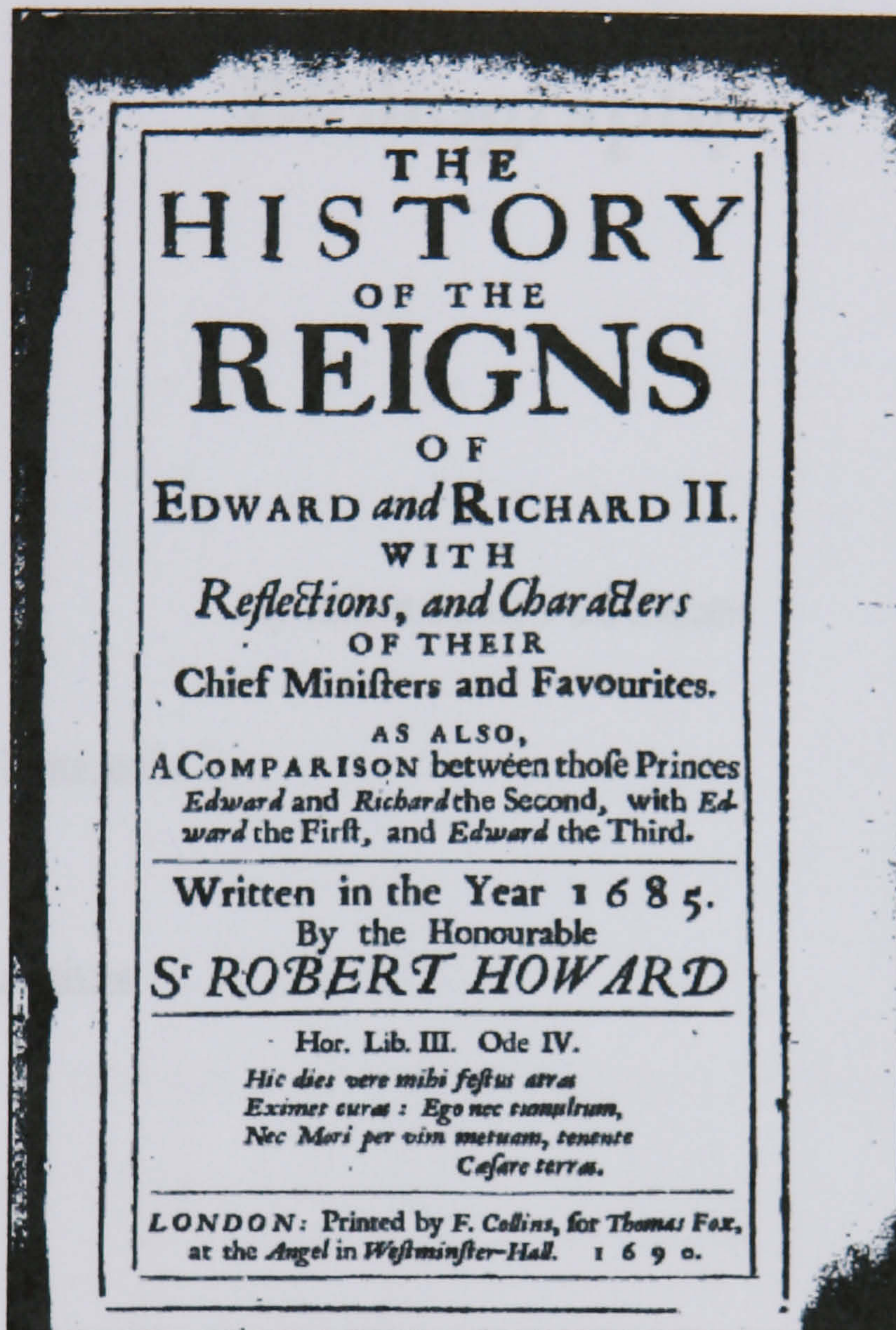


Figure 8. Title-page from Sir Robert Howard's *The History of the Reigns of Edward and Richard II* (London 1685).



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DLL 1/6

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Lincolnshire Archives Office

Register XII  
Register XIII

London, British Library

Additional Charters  
Additional MSS  
Arundel MSS  
Cotton MSS  
Egerton Rolls  
Harley Charters  
Harley MSS  
Sloane MSS  
Stowe MSS

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Petyt MS 553

London, Lambeth Palace Library

Arundel MS 1  
Reg. Arundel  
Reg. Sudbury

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C 42	Chancery: Awards and Agreements
C 44	Chancery: Common Law Pleadings, Tower Series
C 47	Chancery: Miscellanea
C 49	Chancery: Parliament and Council Proceedings
C 53	Chancery: Charter Rolls
C 61	Chancery: Gascon Rolls
C 67	Chancery: Supplementary Patent Rolls
C 71	Chancery: Scotch Rolls
C 76	Chancery: Treaty Rolls
C 81	Chancery: Warrants for the Great Seal
C 115	Chancery: Master Harvey's Exhibits, Duchess of Norfolk's Deeds
C 148	Chancery: Ancient Deeds, Series CS
C 242	Chancery: Certificates of Election of Coroners and Verderers (Tower and Rolls Chapel Series)
CP 40	Court of Common Pleas: Plea Rolls
DL 27	Duchy of Lancaster: Deeds, Series LS
DL 29	Duchy of Lancaster: Accounts of Auditors, Receivers, Feodaries and Ministers
DL 42	Duchy of Lancaster: Cartularies, Enrolments, Surveys and other Miscellaneous Books

- E 28 Exchequer: Treasury of Receipt, Council and Privy Seal Records  
 E 36 Exchequer: Treasury of Receipt, Miscellaneous Books  
 E 40 Exchequer: Ancient Deeds, Series A  
 E 42 Exchequer: Ancient Deeds, Series AS  
 E 43 Exchequer: Ancient Deeds, Series WS  
 E 101 Exchequer: King's Remembrancer, Accounts Various  
 E 142 Exchequer: King's Remembrancer, Extents, Inquisitions and Valors  
 E 143 Exchequer: King's Remembrancer, Extents and Inquisitions  
 E 153 Exchequer: King's Remembrancer, Escheators' Files, Henry III to Richard III  
 E 159 Exchequer: King's Remembrancer, Memoranda Rolls  
 E 160 Exchequer: King's Remembrancer, Memoranda Rolls, Loose Rotuli  
 E 163 Exchequer: King's Remembrancer, Miscellanea  
 E 175 Exchequer: King's Remembrancer, Parliament and Council Proceedings  
 E 210 Exchequer: Ancient Deeds, Series D  
 E 213 Exchequer: Ancient Deeds, Series RS  
 E 326 Exchequer: Augmentation Office, Ancient Deeds, Series B  
 E 364 Exchequer: Lord Treasurer's Remembrancer, Foreign Accounts Rolls  
 E 368 Exchequer: Lord Treasurer's Remembrancer, Memoranda Rolls  
 E 372 Exchequer: Lord Treasurer's Remembrancer, Pipe Rolls  
 E 401 Exchequer of Receipt: Receipt Rolls and Registers  
 E 403 Exchequer of Receipt: Issue Rolls and Registers  
 E 404 Exchequer of Receipt: Warrants for Issues  
 JUST 1 Justices Itinerant: Assize Rolls, etc.  
 KB 27 King's Bench: Coram Rege Rolls  
 SC 1 Special Collections: Ancient Correspondence  
 SC 6 Special Collections: Ministers Accounts  
 SC 8 Special Collections: Ancient Petitions  
 SC 11 Special Collections: Rentals and Surveys, Rolls  
 SC 13 Special Collections: Seals  
 SP 66 State Paper Office: State Papers Ireland, Cases  
 TS 33 HM Procurator General and Treasury Solicitor: Pedigrees  
 WARD 2 Court of Wards and Liveries: Deeds and Evidences

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 MS 121  
 MS 122  
 MS 543

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- MS 37  
 Muniments 9509

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Tanner 197  
Top. Glouc. d.2  
Wiltshire Charters

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CR 26/1/11/K22

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