

**Tyranny, Complaint and Redress:
The Evidence of the Petitions Presented to the Crown C. 1320 to 1335**

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of Philosophy**

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For my Father, Stanley Wood, 1927-1984.

Love you Dad.

Abstract

This thesis offers a new approach to the understanding of the recurrent crises of the period c.1320 to 1335, covering the final years of Edward II's turbulent reign, the deposition, and its repercussions into the period of the Regency and the first years of the majority rule of Edward III. This has been achieved through an archive led study of the accounts of the 'complaint and redress' encompassed in the records of the Ancient Petitions presented to the Crown, held by The National Archives and designated as the SC 8 series. These records contain some of the most vivid contemporary and individual records of the lives and concerns of the king's subjects during this turbulent period. This thesis illustrates that these records contain the genuine 'voice' of the petitioners, and can be used to reveal the impact on those seeking the king's justice during the recurring crises of this defining moment in late medieval English history.

Although there has been much interest in the events leading to the deposition and death of Edward II, research to date has focused mainly on its effect on the noble members of society, their place in administrative and governmental history, and the workings of the judicial system. In contrast, this study considers the nature of these complaints and requests in order to illustrate specific events. It places them in historical, social and political context to further illustrate Michael Prestwich's assertion that 'personalities mattered more [in the fourteenth century] than abstract principles of reform'.¹ This fresh approach to the study of the petitions examines how the changing fortunes of Thomas 2nd earl of Lancaster, Hugh Despenser the younger, his father Hugh Despenser the elder, Edward II's queen, Isabella and her partner Sir Roger Mortimer of Wigmore affected the lives of those seemingly unimportant people that made up the majority of the king's subjects.

¹ M. Prestwich, *The Three Edwards: War and State in England, 1272-1377*, 2nd ed. (London, 2003), p. 100.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Primary Sources

Annales Paulini: Stubbs, W. (ed.), 'Annales Paulini' in *Chronicles of the Reign of Edward I and II* (London, 1882-3).

Anonimalle: Child, W. and Taylor, J. (eds), *The Anonimalle Chronicle, 1307-1334, from the Brotherton Collection Ms. 29* (Leeds, 1991).

Bridlingtoniensi: Stubbs, W. (ed.), 'Gesta Edwardi de Carnarvan Auctore Canonico Bridlingtoniensi' in *Chronicles of the Reign of Edward I and II* (London, 1882-3).

Brut: Brie, F. W. D. (ed.), *The Brut or, the Chronicles of England, 2 vols* (London, 1906).

CCh.R: *Calendar of Charter Rolls Preserved in the Public Record Office* (London, 1903-1927)

CCh.W: *Calendar of Chancery Warrants Preserved in the Public Record Office, 1244-1326* (London, 1927).

CCR: *Calendar of the Close Rolls Preserved in the Public Record Office* (London, 1896-1913).

CFR: *Calendar of Fine Rolls, Preserved in the Public Record Office* (London, 1912).

CIM: *Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellaneous, Chancery, Preserved in the Public Record Office Prepared Under the Superintendence of the Deputy Keeper of the Records Edward II – Edward III, 1307-1349, vol. 2* (London, 1916-1968).

CIPM: *Calendar of Inquisitions Post-Mortem and Other Analogous Documents, Preserved in the Public Record Office* (London, 1908).

CPR: *Calendar of the Patent Rolls Preserved in the Public Record Office* (London, 1891-1986).

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Froissart: Brereton, G. (ed.), *Froissart Chronicles* (Middlesex, 1968).

Galfridi: Thompson, E. M. (ed.), *Chronicon Galfridi le Baker de Swynbroke* (Oxford, 1889).

Lanercost: Maxwell, H. (ed.), *The Chronicle of Lanercost, 1272-1346* (Glasgow, 1913).

Malmesberiensis Stubbs, W. (ed.), *Monachi cujusdam Malmesberiensis vita Edwardi II* in *Chronicles of the Reign of Edward I and II* (London, 1882-3).

Modus Tenendi Parliamentum: Hardy, T. D. (ed.), *Modus Tenendi Parliamentum: An Ancient Treatise on the Mode of Holding the Parliament in England* (London, 1846).

Murimuth: Thompson, E. M. (ed.), *Adae Murimuth Continuatio Chronicarum. Robertus de Avesbury de Gestis Mirabilibus Regis Edwardi Tertii* (London, 1889).

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Rot. Parl.: Strachey, J. (ed.), *Rotuli Parliamentorum; ut et Petitiones, et Placita in Parlamento, (1278-1325)* (London, 1767-1777).

Rymer's Foedera: Rymer, T., *Foedera, conventiones, literæ, et cujuscunque generis acta publica, inter reges Angliæ, et alios quosvis imperatores, reges, pontifices, principes, vel communitates, ab Ineunte Saeculo Duodecimo, viz. ab anno 1101, ad nostra ...*, 20 vols (London, 1726).

Statutes of the Realm: *The Statutes of the Realm: Printed by Command of His Majesty King George the Third, in Pursuance of an Address of the House of Commons of Great Britain: From Original Records and Authentic Manuscripts*, 11 vols (London, 1810-28).

Statutes at Large: Ruffhead, O. and Runnington, C., *The Statutes at Large, from Magna Charta to the Twenty-Fifth Year of the Reign of King George the Third*, vols 1-14 (London, 1786).

Thomas de Burton: Bond, E. A. (ed.), *Thomas de Burton, Chronica monasterii de Melsa, a fundatione usque ad annum 1396, auctore Thomas de Burton, abbate. Accedit continuation ad annum 1406 a monacho quodam ipsius domus, II*, 3 vols (London, 1866-1868).

TNA: *The National Archives, Kew, London.*

Vita Edwardi Secundi: Denholm-Young, N. (ed.), *The Life of Edward the Second by the So-Called Monk of Malmesbury* (London, 1957).

Walsingham: Riley, H.T. (ed.), *Thomae Walsingham quondam Monachi Sancto Albani, Historia Anglicana, I, 1272-1381* (London, 1863).

Internet Sources

ODNB: Matthew H.C.G. and Harrison, B. H. (eds) *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (online edition, 2004) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com>].

PROME: Given-Wilson, C., Brand, P., Phillips, S., Ormrod, M., Martin, G., Curry, A. and Horrox, R. (eds), *The Parliament Rolls of Medieval England* (Leicester, 2005): [<http://www.sd-editions.com/PROME/home.html>].

RTDP: *Report from the Lords Committees Appointed to Search the Journals of the House, Rolls of Parliament and Other Records and Documents, for all Matters Touching the Dignity of a Peer of the Realm* (London, 1826):
Hathi Trust Digital Library [<http://babel.hathitrust.org>]

TNA: *The National Archives* [<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk>].

VCH: 'The Victoria Histories of the Counties of England'
[<http://www.victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk>].

Journal Titles

BIHR: *The Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research.*

EHR: *The English Historical Review.*

JMH: *The Journal of Medieval History.*

P&P: *Past and Present*

TRHS: *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society.*

Collection References

C: *Chancery Document:
The Parliament Rolls of Medieval England*
[<http://www.sd-editions.com/PROME/home.html>]

CP: *Records of the Court of Common Pleas and Other Courts from the beginning of the reign of Edward I onwards, digitised version held by
The Anglo-American Legal Tradition – The University of Houston*
[<http://aalt.law.uh.edu/>]

E: *Records of the Exchequer:
Unless otherwise stated Medieval English Genealogy*
[<http://www.medievalgenealogy.org.uk/>]

KB: *Records of the Court of King's Bench and Other Courts:
The Anglo-American Legal Tradition – The University of Houston*
[<http://aalt.law.uh.edu/>]

SC: *Special collection: Records held at The National Archives, Kew London:*
[<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk>].

INTRODUCTION

The turbulent period of 1320 to 1335, which made up the final years of Edward II's, and the early years of Edward III's, reigns, has led to an impressive field of research. The seminal works of nineteenth century historians, whose interest lay in the evolution of parliament, portrayed Edward II as neither a warrior king nor a lawmaker and, more disastrously, not 'a man of business'.¹ They described Edward III with equal disapproval, stating that he had been in danger of either 'ris[ing] to the dignity of a tyrant or [sinking] to the level of a voluptuary'.² These censorious opinions were followed by a welter of research dedicated to further understand the reigns and the impact of arguably two of the most enigmatic kings of the later Middle Ages. The more recent biography of Edward II by Seymour Phillips asserted that he intended 'to rehabilitate [Edward II] to some degree'. Phillips went on to describe him as being 'too able to be ignored', but nevertheless tempered this with the rider that he had 'too many weaknesses...to be a success'.³ Ian Mortimer, in his almost hagiographical biography of 2006, described Edward III as having been responsible for the establishment of the English national identity, making 'the English nation what it is'.⁴ He added to this image of a 'perfect [medieval] king' by declaring that in addition to his many statesmanlike qualities he was to warfare 'what Mozart was to music'.⁵ Ormrod's equally fulsome account of Edward III published in 2011, written in a perhaps less emotive style, described a powerful and able king. He emphasised the prosperity, stability and military success achieved by Edward III, which had helped restore the legitimacy of the Crown that had been so badly damaged during his father's reign. The volume of interest in the period of the deposition and the regency was summed up by

¹ J. C. Davies, *The Baronial Opposition to Edward II: Its Character and Policy: A Study in Administrative History* (Cambridge, 1918), p. 76.

² W. Stubbs, *The Constitutional History of England: In its Origin and Development*, 2nd edition (Oxford, 1877-1883), pp. 313, 375; Stubbs quoted in J. R. Maddicott, 'Review: [untitled] The Reign of Edward II: New Perspectives', *EHR*, 113 (2008), 176-178, p. 176

³ S. Phillips, *Edward II* (London, 2010), pp. 4, 612.

⁴ I. Mortimer, *The Perfect King: The Life of Edward III, Father of the English Nation* (London, 2006), p. 396.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 402.

Haines who, speaking of the reign of Edward II in the introduction to his own comprehensive work, stated that the period had been given a ‘disproportionate [amount] of attention’.⁶ However, historians’ interest in the period has focused mainly, if not exclusively, on the limited perspective of the experiences of the king, the nobility, and its impact on the evolution of government. This thesis aims to add to our knowledge of this period through a consideration of the hitherto under-explored experiences of a broader cross-section of political society. This will include the merchant class, social, geographic and religious communities as well as the individuals who made up the vast numbers of the king’s subjects. This thesis will conduct a detailed analysis of the content of the numerous private petitions presented to the Crown. This collection contains approximately seventeen thousand six-hundred records made up of writs, correspondence and petitions from diverse groups and individuals from the thirteenth to late fifteenth centuries and is a source that has, according to Gwilym Dodd and Mark Ormrod, been much undervalued.⁷

However, note must also be made of the difficulties of accessing the full potential of the petitions encountered in the past. The petitionary bundles compiled by the Chancery clerks at each parliament had, in the nineteenth century, undergone what has been described as a ‘disastrous’ reorganisation. This created an artificial class of documents with the petitions removed from the context of the writs and rolls of parliament to which they had originally been attached.⁸ In the early 1920s this disparate collection of petitions, correspondence and writs underwent a further reorganisation by R. L Atkinson. His remit was to re-establish the archives chronological provenance which had

⁶ R. M. Haines, *King Edward II: Edward of Caernarfon: His Life, His Reign and its Aftermath* (London, 2003), pp. x, ix.

⁷ G. Dodd, *Justice and Grace: Private Petitioning and the English Parliament in the Late Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2007), p. 7; W. M. Ormrod, ‘The Road to Boroughbridge: The Civil War of 1321-22 in the Ancient Petitions’, in P. Brand and S. Cunningham (eds), *Foundations of Medieval Scholarship: Records Edited in Honour of David Crook* (York, 2008), p. 77. The petitions can be accessed at: TNA [<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk>].

⁸ G. Dodd, ‘Parliamentary Petitions? The Origins and Provenance of the ‘Ancient Petitions’ (SC8) in the National Archives’ in W. M. Ormrod, G. Dodd and A. Musson (eds), *Medieval Petitions: Grace and Grievance* (York, 2009), p. 16. A useful summary of the history of the private petitions is provided in: Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, *passim*; R. L. Atkinson and H. C. Maxwell-Lyte in their ‘Report (1924) on Ancient Petitions’, in *Index of Ancient Petitions, Lists and Indexes*, I (London, 1966), pp. 2-9.

been lost in the nineteenth century.⁹ It is Atkinson's version of the archive is the foundation of the current SC 8 series of Ancient Petitions. This archive was digitally reproduced between 2003 and 2007 and made available via The National Archives (TNA) website through a grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), together with the University of York.¹⁰

This study concentrates on those petitions presented in what Dodd considered to be the 'high noon' of petitioning, notably from c.1320 to 1335.¹¹ Focussing on the complaints of the King's English, Irish and Welsh subjects, the SC 8 series was explored using a number of different search parameters to facilitate an accurate measure of petitions relating to the five main characters under consideration. (An example based on the search parameters used in Chapter One: [Thomas, earl of Lancaster OR Thomas of Lancaster OR earl of Lancaster] was further restricted to the period 1320-1335).¹² However, the searches also retrieved other associated documents such as letters of direction from the king and his officials, the results of enquiries and writs, along with duplicate petitions, which were all excluded from this study. The resultant list of some six hundred and forty petitions is illustrated in Appendix A, which is split by chapters and notes the level of redress each petitioner received. These petitions were considered individually, with research being undertaken to ascertain the political and social context of each complaint.

This also revealed the social and gender origins of these petitioners illustrating that they were presented predominantly by *men* of 'middling' or gentry rank, with members of the urban elites and the Church making up the bulk of the rest. There are relatively few petitions from women and the poor or lower ranking peasants. The lower social groups were often represented through group petitions or by persons of higher rank acting on their behalf.¹³ For example, 'bond' or un-free peasants' rights were represented legally through their lords, with only 'free' peasants having the ability or need to

⁹ Dodd, 'Parliamentary Petitions?', p. 16.

¹⁰ For a more complete description of the scope of the SC 8 series see: *Ibid.*, pp. 12-46.

¹¹ Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, pp. 49-78.

¹² The use of search links such as 'OR', 'AND' and 'NOT' were capitalised to omit them from the search: for this and other search tips see the help section of 'The Catalogue' of TNA.

¹³ Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, p. 209.

access royal justice.¹⁴ All women were allowed access to the petitioning process.¹⁵ Nevertheless petitions involving women were predominantly sponsored by husbands on their behalf, with the married couple being considered as one person (*baron et feme erunt animae duae et carne una*).¹⁶ Of those women who did claim legal independence, the majority were widows or leaders of religious houses who petitioned on behalf of their communities.¹⁷ The widow petitioner usually fell into two categories. For example, independently powerful women, such as the dowager duchess of Thomas 2nd earl of Lancaster and those widows who were, according to Dodd, petitioning as ‘victims’, often to regain lands and monies from their husband’s estate.¹⁸

Those women who did petition in their own right must be considered as atypical, none more so than those petitions from leaders of religious communities. Petitioning by any individual in the Church in effect bypassed the parliamentary *Gravamina*, the clerical equivalent of the common petition, used during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries by the Church to retain its separation from the secular world.¹⁹ The significance of the private petition presented by the individual cleric or religious house was that it actively involved the Crown and the secular power of the king in Church business.²⁰

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 208-209.

¹⁵ Women were denied the right to initiate legal proceedings in the common law courts: Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, p. 208.

¹⁶ Quoted in E. Hawkes, ‘[S]he will...Protect and Defend her Rights Boldly by Law and Reason...’ *Women’s Knowledge of Common Law and Equity Courts in Late Medieval England*, in N. Menuge (ed.), *Medieval Women and the Law* (Woodbridge, 2000), p. 46; For a discussion of queens as women see: L. Benz St John, *Three Medieval Queens: Queenship and the Crown in Fourteenth-Century England* (New York, 2012), pp. 6-9.

¹⁷ Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, pp. 211-215.

¹⁸ Examples are discussed throughout the thesis.

¹⁹ W. R. Jones, ‘Bishops, Politics and the Two Laws: The *Gravamina* of the English Clergy, 1237-1399’, *Speculum* (1966), 41, 209-245; G. Dodd and A. K. McHardy (eds), ‘Introduction’, *Petitions to the Crown from English Religious Houses c.1272-c.1485* (Woodbridge, 2010), pp. xi-xiii.

²⁰ Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, pp. 243-254. The implications of the relationship between the Church, the individual cleric and the Crown, although not in the scope of this study, is discussed in various works, particularly in Dodd and McHardy, *Petitions to the Crown from English Religious Houses*, *passim*; J. H. Tillotson, *Clerical Petitions 1350-1450: A Study of Some Aspects of the Relations Between the Crown and the Church in the Late Middle Ages*, D.Phil thesis, Australian National University, 1969, quoted in Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, n. 5, p. 243.

As well as religious communities, the petitioning process was the ideal platform for county and town grievances, with groups of like-minded individuals assuming a group identity. These petitions, although not numerically significant, offer an insight into local identity, collective action and their relationship with the king.²¹ As can be seen in this brief discussion of the variety of those individuals and groups who used the petitioning process, there is great potential for further development of an understanding of social, political and religious mores through their contents and context.

The discrete period between 1320 and c.1335 was chosen for the study because of the recurring political and social crises that led up to the deposition of Edward II and the accession of Edward III. These crises affected all levels of society; from the nobility on whom these momentous changes would have impacted at a fundamental level, to those members of lower social groups who, through the deaths of their lords and changes in land ownership, would have seen their lives disrupted or changed completely. These crises included the rebellion against Edward II in 1322 and the period known as the ‘tyranny’ which ended with the deposition and alleged murder of the legitimate king in 1326-1327, followed by the regency and its abrupt end in 1330.

Although one must acknowledge the undoubted worth of other sources of evidence for these crises such as the copious records of the Church, along with provincial and governmental records, they are, according to Ormrod, necessarily ‘at some remove’ from the characters and events of the day.²² He described the provenance of these documents, generated as part of the bureaucratic workings of parliament, as being written with a necessarily ‘self-conscious artificiality’ which, coupled with the lack of any ‘tradition of official history or polemic’, largely precludes any understanding of the motivations and agendas of the majority of the king’s ordinary subjects.²³ However, the records

²¹ Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, pp. 254-266.

²² W. M. Ormrod, *Edward III* (New Haven and London, 2011), pp. 1-2.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2. It is ironic to note that in this period, when the English monarchy was in crisis, that the reason behind this lack of official history can be explained through the reasonable territorial stability of the English state. Other European histories such as that produced at the abbey of Saint-Denis in France or those sponsored by Alfonso the Wise of Castile or by Pedro the Ceremonious of Aragon were products of a need to ‘focus on the king and its commitment to the fate of the monarchy’: G. Spiegel, *The Chronicle Tradition of Saint-Denis: A Survey* (Brookline, 1978), pp. 7, 11-12, quoted

of the private petitions offer a unique ‘snapshot’ of the effects of these crises on the lives of the individual, as they attempted to find redress through the personal intervention of the king. This is an important point. As *personal* requests, petitions were modified to the requirements of the petitioner. As a source they therefore have the potential to offer a unique view of the motivations and aspirations of a broad spectrum of the population.²⁴ The petitions can consequently provide a deeper understanding of, and a different perspective on, the careers of the main figures of the reign, but also of the petitioners themselves. This will add an essentially new perspective to our understanding of the period, allowing an opportunity not only to ascertain the level of political awareness at various levels of society, but also to analyse the relationship between the king and his subjects. Therefore, this study will concentrate on the events and actions of five of the most influential characters, and the impact of the main crises, of the period that are encapsulated in the contents of the hundreds of private petitions presented to the king.²⁵ This will include the rebellion and subsequent execution of Thomas, 2nd earl of Lancaster, the career of that archetypal royal favourite, Hugh Despenser the younger and his father Hugh Despenser the elder and, in the aftermath of the deposition of Edward II, the careers of Queen Isabella of France and her partner Sir Roger Mortimer of Wigmore as regents.

As well as illustrating the perception and availability of direct justice from the king, through the concept of ‘complaint and redress’, the petitions further reveal the experience and incidence of tyranny perpetrated by these main figures during this period. This study reveals the intellectual and emotive responses to political and social crises of the early fourteenth century on the

in C. Given-Wilson, *Chronicles: The Writing of History in Medieval England* (London, 2004), p. 154. It is also interesting that the obvious choice for an English national history, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, was written in a period when English territorial stability could not be taken for granted (the late ninth until the mid-thirteenth centuries): *Ibid.*, p. 154.

²⁴ Notable work regarding the language of the petitions has been done by Dodd, Ormrod and Sneddon: Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, pp. 279-316; W. M. Ormrod, ‘Murmur, Clamour and Noise: Voicing Complaint and Remedy in Petitions to the English Crown, c. 300- c.1460’, in Ormrod, Dodd and Musson, *Medieval Petitions: Grace and Grievance*, pp. 135-155; A. S. Sneddon, ‘Words and Realities: The Language and Dating of Petitions, 1326-7’, in Ormrod, Dodd and Musson, *Medieval Petitions, Grace and Grievance*, pp. 193-205.

²⁵ See Appendix A for details of those petitions used within each chapter.

‘ordinary’ man, notably the consequences of actions of perceived tyranny. The study considers not only those actions that conform to the modern definition of the tyrant but also to that of fourteenth century philosophers and political thinkers. The modern definition of the term ‘tyranny’ or ‘tyrant’ can be applied to *anyone* who exercises power unjustly or oppressively’.²⁶ This implies that the modern tyrant is exceeding set parameters and that there is a limit to their power. However, to fourteenth century political thinkers and philosophers, tyranny, defined simply, was a perversion of a God given (and therefore limitless) kingship.²⁷ According to medieval philosophy, the main purpose of this God given royal authority was to secure social stability and justice. This study will examine how the final years of Edward II’s, and the first years of Edward III’s, reign exposed the king’s subjects to the consequences of tyranny and how these people used their perceived right to royal justice through the petitioning process to achieve redress.

Writing about Thomas of Lancaster in 1970, John Maddicott concluded that history had been unanimous in its verdicts on the characters of both Lancaster and his cousin, Edward II, with the actions and inadequacies of the king being generally excused, but with Lancaster having received no such mercy.²⁸ But Maddicott nevertheless agreed with the consensus view that Lancaster was someone who was ‘unscrupulous, violent and avaricious’. He added that Lancaster had an ‘almost repulsive nature’ in which ‘others could see few attractive personal qualities’, summing up his description by stating, rather blandly, that Lancaster had ‘little to recommend him’.²⁹ This modern opinion was influenced by the works of earlier historians, who had considered the turbulent relationship of Thomas of Lancaster and Edward II from the viewpoint of its impact on a weak and failing kingship and on the progress made in the evolution of parliament. The eminent nineteenth century

²⁶ Oxford English Dictionary: [<http://dictionary.oed.com>].

²⁷ The God given right to rule was exemplified in the act of coronation, when the anointed ruler became a *mixta persona*, a dual person, descending from both nature and God’s Grace: J. T. Rosenthal, ‘The King’s “Wicked Advisers” and Medieval Baronial Rebellion’, *Political Science Quarterly* (1967), 82, 4, 595-618, pp. 601-602.

²⁸ J. R. Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster 1307-1322: A Study in the Reign of Edward II* (Oxford, 1970), p. 318.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 319.

historians William Stubbs and Thomas F. Tout concluded that Lancaster had ‘no ideals, no principles’ and no ‘sense of responsibility’.³⁰

The chronicles and histories which, along with the official records of government, make up the usual source of contemporaneous evidence for the actions of Thomas of Lancaster, must be considered to have been written with, at best, ‘perfect’ hindsight, but also with the agendas of their temporal and spiritual sponsors. This produces a contemporaneous impression of Lancaster's actions and personality through a veil of supposition and suggestion. This is illustrated by the chroniclers having described him, at once, as being ‘avaricious’, ‘noble’, ‘loyal’, ‘treacherous’, ‘piteous’ and ‘pious’ as well as the terror of the whole country ‘*terror totius patrie*’.³¹ The long term struggle between Edward II and Lancaster culminated at the battle of Boroughbridge in March 1322, during which the king finally defeated his intransigent cousin. Lancaster was executed at Pontefract after a ‘show’ trial which was enough of an echo of that of Piers Gaveston that the author of the *Vita Edwardi Secundi* remarked that Lancaster having ‘once cut off Piers Gaveston's head... ha[d] lost [his]’.³²

During the final years of his reign Edward II has been portrayed as once again being dominated by an unwise choice of personal companion, Hugh Despenser the younger. Edward II's growing dependence on the joint counsel of this favourite and his father, Hugh Despenser the elder, along with the exclusion of his erstwhile most trusted councillors, began the period that has become known as the ‘tyranny’ of Edward II. The identity of the instigator of this tyranny has been contentious. Both Phillips and May McKisack agreed that the two Despensers were not the dominating force behind the ‘tyranny’ whilst, conversely, both Nigel Saul and Jeffrey Hamilton

³⁰ Stubbs, *The Constitutional History of England*, pp. 339-350, *passim*; Davies, *The Baronial Opposition to Edward II*; T. F. Tout, *The Place of the Reign of Edward II in English History: Based Upon the Ford Lectures Delivered in the University of Oxford in 1911*, 2nd ed. (Connecticut, 1976); T. F. Tout, *The History of England From the Ascension of Henry III to the Death of Edward III (1216-1377)* (London, 1905), pp. 265-266.

³¹ *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, pp. 97-99, 126; *Lanercost*, pp. 234-235; *Brut*, pp. 219, 222; *Murimuth*, pp. 271-274.

³² *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, pp. 214-215.

declared their belief that the Despensers *had* dominated the period.³³ In 1979 Natalie Fryde added to the debate by stating that Edward II had orchestrated the events after the execution of Thomas of Lancaster in order to avenge the death of his former favourite, Piers Gaveston.³⁴ But these historians reached a consensus in their belief that the king and the two Despensers were equally ruthless in their exploitation of the lands of Lancaster and the rebels, with Fryde contending that they were motivated primarily by monetary greed and that historians had ‘grotesquely underestimated and misunderstood the motives...of these men at the height of their power’.³⁵

Were the Despensers guilty of masterminding this ‘tyranny’? Accepting that the years 1322-1326 were a period of tyranny, Nigel Saul argued that the Despensers were, in effect, running the country.³⁶ Chris Given-Wilson added to the debate by placing the blame equally on a collaboration between Edward II and the two Despensers, describing the king more as an accessory, guilty of supporting the actions of the Despensers.³⁷ Ormrod seemingly agreed when he stated his belief that ‘the king and the Despensers had operated one of the most oppressive regimes...in medieval England’; but he eventually came to temper his belief in Edward II's part in the ‘tyranny’, reassigning the blame through the strategic use of the term ‘the Despenser regime’.³⁸

But it was not this ‘tyranny’ alone that was to bring Edward II's reign to an end through deposition. In September 1324, with the worsening Anglo-French relations and at the urging of the Despensers, Edward II had confiscated not only Queen Isabella's English lands and property, but had also removed their children from her care.³⁹ Davies commented, apparently without irony,

³³ J. R. S. Phillips, *Aymer de Valence, Earl of Pembroke, 1307-1324* (Oxford, 1972), pp. 269-290, *passim*; M. McKisack, ‘Edward III and the Historians’, *History* (1960), 45 1-15, p. 8; N. Saul, ‘The Despensers and the Downfall of Edward II’, *EHR* (1984), 99, 1-33; J. S. Hamilton, *Piers Gaveston, Earl of Cornwall, 1307-1312: Politics and Patronage in the Reign of Edward II* (Michigan, 1988).

³⁴ N. Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II, 1321-1326* (Cambridge, 1979), p. 42.

³⁵ Saul, ‘The Despensers and the Downfall of Edward II’, p. 3.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 1-33.

³⁷ C. Given-Wilson, *The English Nobility in the Late Middle Ages: The Fourteenth Century Political Community* (London, 1987), pp. 32-33.

³⁸ W. M. Ormrod, ‘Agenda for Legislation, 1322-c.1340’, *EHR* (1990), 105, 1-33, p. 1.

³⁹ In forfeiting her lands, Isabella was compensated by 2920 marks a year for her expenses, therefore it was more of a political and personal attack than a financial one:

that ‘this action did not tend to improve the relations between husband and wife’.⁴⁰ However, Isabella’s value as international ‘peace weaver’ remained significant.⁴¹ Even as Edward II reduced her household and took away her children, Isabella was sent to France to act as intercessor between the king and her brother Philip V of France.⁴² Hamilton saw Edward II as having been seemingly ‘oblivious to the growing discontent ...[and] complete alienation of his wife’.⁴³ On September 24, 1325 Queen Isabella, accompanied by the future Edward III, Sir Roger Mortimer of Wigmore and a ‘comparatively small band’ of followers, made their way back to England as an invading force.⁴⁴ But it had never been considered a foregone conclusion that Edward II would be deposed as a result of Isabella and Mortimer’s invasion.⁴⁵ Indeed she had declared at the outset of the campaign that it was her intention to preserve the estate of ‘the dear king’ by ‘destroy[ing] the Despensers and all evil councillors’.⁴⁶ Ultimately, however, deposition must have appeared as the only safe outcome for the uprising. As Claire Valente stated, ‘when death was the penalty for failure, *permanent* success was imperative and compromise less likely’; therefore the final removal of the king became a natural progression from the elimination of his favourites.⁴⁷

S. Menache, ‘Isabelle of France, Queen of England – A Reconsideration’, *JMH* (1984), 10, 107-24, p. 110; Davis, *The Baronial Opposition to Edward II*, p. 107; *Rymer’s Foedera*, vol. 4, p. 85; *CFR, 1319-1327*, pp. 300-301; *CCR, 1323-1327*, p. 223; S. Raban, *England Under Edward I and Edward II, 1259-1327* (Oxford, 2000), p. 150.

⁴⁰ Davis, *The Baronial Opposition to Edward II*, p. 107.

⁴¹ Benz St. John, *Three Medieval Queens*, p. 3.

⁴² S. L. Waugh, *England in the Reign of Edward III* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 12. Letters from Isabella to various nobles, including one to ‘our beloved king’ (*roi a nos chers*) during her mission to France can be read in P. Chaplais (ed.), *The War of Saint-Sardos (1323-1325), Gascon Correspondence and Diplomatic Documents* (London, 1954), pp. 198-200.

⁴³ Hamilton, *Piers Gaveston, Earl of Cornwall*, p. 12.

⁴⁴ Haines, *King Edward II: Edward of Caernarfon*, p. 177; Phillips, *Edward II*, p. 502.

⁴⁵ I. Mortimer, *The Greatest Traitor: The Life of Sir Roger Mortimer, Ruler of England, 1327-1330* (London, 2003), p. 150; J. H. Round, ‘The Landing of Queen Isabella’, *EHR* (1899), 14, 104-105; J. C. Parsons ‘Isabella, Queen of England (1295–1358)’ *ODNB*; T. F. Tout, ‘Isabella of France (1292–1358)’ *ODNB* (archive); *Annales Paulini*, pp. 313-1314.

⁴⁶ *Murimuth*, pp. 45-51; *Anonimalle*, pp. 32-33, 124-130; C. Valente, *The Theory and Practice of Revolt in Medieval England* (Aldershot, 2003), pp. 154-155.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 155 (my italics); *Anonimalle*, p. 33.

Isabella has been variously described as a pawn of Roger Mortimer's ambition or as a scheming, politically savvy woman, keen to establish her own power through her role as the mother of the heir to the throne.⁴⁸ Although Tout described her as a 'spite[full]...adulterous queen', in more recent histories she has also been sympathetically depicted as a wronged wife.⁴⁹ A victim of the younger Despenser's malice, she has been noted for her political foresight which saw her, even before she left England and her association with Mortimer, 'earmarking her future allies' and becoming a magnet for a group of disaffected Englishmen, who also had reason to hate the Despensers.⁵⁰ Paul Doherty described Isabella's development from an 'honourable queen [and] ... dutiful wife' to a 'she-wolf, the new Jezebel'.⁵¹ What is clear is that history has not been able to fit Isabella into the role of the typical medieval queen; Henrietta Leyser summed this up when she stated that Isabella had 'marked out [a] ... quite different path ... [when], together with her lover, [Roger Mortimer, she] overthrew her king and husband.'⁵²

If Isabella has been depicted recently as more sinned against than sinning, Roger Mortimer has not been given any such leeway. Ian Mortimer's description of him as England's 'greatest traitor' has been generally accepted, with him being depicted as being little better than the 'corrupt ... and despised' Hugh Despenser the younger.⁵³ Although a mere baron, for almost exactly four years Roger Mortimer was, with Queen Isabella, the dominant political

⁴⁸ Benz St. John, *Three Medieval Queens*, p. 140. There has been much debate over the portrayal and agenda of Isabella, a small example can be read in Ormrod, *Edward III* (2005), notably pp. 1-120; J. S. Bothwell, 'The More Things Change: Isabella and Mortimer, Edward III, and the Painful Delay of a Royal Majority', in C. Beem (ed.), *Royal Minorities of Medieval and Early Modern England* (London, 2008), pp. 33-77; Mortimer, *The Greatest Traitor*, *passim*; P. Doherty, *Isabella and the Strange Death of Edward II* (London, 2003); A. Weir, *Isabella, She-Wolf of France, Queen of England* (London, 2006); H. Castor, *She-Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England Before Elizabeth* (London, 2011), pp. 207-320.

⁴⁹ Tout, *The History of England*, p. 302; Benz St. John, *Three Medieval Queens*, *passim*.

⁵⁰ Weir, *Isabella, She-Wolf of France*, pp. 165-169, 179-180; M. McKisack, *The Fourteenth-Century, 1307-1399* (Oxford, 1959), p. 45.

⁵¹ Doherty, *Isabella and the Strange Death of Edward II*, pp. 22, 49.

⁵² H. Leyser, *Medieval Women: A Social History of Women in England, 450-1500* (London, 1995), p. 84.

⁵³ Mortimer, *The Greatest Traitor*, *passim*; Given-Wilson, *The English Nobility in the Late Middle Ages*, p. 33; Valente, *The Theory and Practice of Revolt*, p. 846.

figure in England, being considered ‘king in all but name’.⁵⁴ Ian Mortimer, after listing the wrongs his namesake has been accused of, which included the forced deposition of the rightful king, regicide (although he ardently supported the theory that Edward II in fact survived long after his ‘death’), the murder of leading members of the royal family and the seduction of the king’s wife, excused Roger Mortimer by stating that he committed these acts of treason for the good of the country.⁵⁵ This declaration by Ian Mortimer was presumably based on his namesake having been instrumental in removing a king who has been equally vilified.

As this brief description of the many different approaches and opinions of the main characters and events of this period has shown, there has been no real consensus achieved about the period or their reputations. This thesis intends to bring some clarity through the myriad contents of the private petitions. Until recently the ancient petitions had only been considered as a parliamentary source, and any detail as further evidence for the political workings and evolution of the medieval parliament. The 1970s saw Maddicott make the first of the more recent forays into the petitions as a source of evidence beyond this parliamentary focus.⁵⁶ However, his consideration of the petitions did not stray far from their conventional application, as he used the petitioning process as further evidence for his discussion of the bureaucratic development of local government and its exploitation by the upper echelons of county society. However, Maddicott’s work also brought attention to the possible role of the local lawyer in both producing and presenting petitions from the localities. He noted the lawyers’ influence both socially and politically, describing them as having moved from ‘capital to county’, their

⁵⁴ *Lanercost*, p. 265; R. R. Davies, ‘Roger Mortimer (V), First Earl of March (1287–1330)’ *ODNB*; W. M. Ormrod, *Edward III*, 3rd ed. (London, 2005), p. 16.

⁵⁵ It is accepted that Mortimer’s relationship with Queen Isabella was sexual but, contemporaneously, none of the chronicles either confirmed or denied it. Only Murimuth, writing in the years following the downfall of Isabella and Mortimer, spoke of their sharing an intimate friendship, ‘*familiaritatem contractam inter dictam reginam et Rogerum de Mortuo*’, chroniclers often merely named Mortimer as one of Isabella’s entourage: Murimuth, pp. 45-46; *Lanercost*, p. 251; *Brut*, pp. 246-247; H. T. Riley (ed.), ‘The French Chronicle of London: Edward III’, in *Chronicles of the Mayors and Sheriffs of London: 1188-1274* (London, 1863), pp. 248-267; Mortimer, *The Greatest Traitor*, pp. 265-266.

⁵⁶ J. R. Maddicott, ‘The County Community and the Making of Public Opinion in Fourteenth-Century England’, *TRHS* (1978), 5th series, 28, 27-43.

social and political networking creating the ‘legal and political self-consciousness of the shires’.⁵⁷ However, Dodd, in his history of the petitioning process, disputed Maddicott’s theory of the involvement of these local lawyers. Dodd argued that a person whose wealth allowed them to afford not only to travel to parliament, but to reside there for some time for the presentation of their petition, was unlikely to have trusted the important task of compiling their complaint or request to a perhaps less experienced local scribe or lawyer.⁵⁸ However, highlighting the point that there is very little evidence of where or by whom the petitions were created, Dodd went on to add the provision that it was almost certain that only a tiny minority of petitions were prepared by the petitioners themselves, arguing that it would have been more likely that these petitioners would have preferred to have had their petitions prepared more centrally, by individuals more familiar with governmental procedure, rather than relying on a less experienced local scribe or lawyer.⁵⁹

Maddicott’s study of the evolution of the county community can be used to illustrate the piecemeal approach that historians have made regarding the evidence of the petitions. A typical example is illustrated in Phillips’ biography of Edward II.⁶⁰ Discussing the level of petitioning business in the earlier part of Edward II’s reign he stated that although there must have been many ‘pent-up grievances’ from the ‘individuals and local communities’, most petitions nevertheless ‘had no obvious connection with the grand politics’ of Edward II’s reign, but that ‘a few d[id]’.⁶¹ He went on to discuss those petitions that related to the collection of scutage and purveyance, but only in order to highlight the king’s deteriorating relationship with his noble ‘opponents’, ignoring Edward II’s many disgruntled subjects. By subjecting the petitions to a systematic consideration of these ‘grievances’, this thesis establishes their value as a source of evidence for the state of both political and social opinion in the period.

⁵⁷ Maddicott, ‘The County Community and the Making of Public Opinion’, pp. 35-38.

⁵⁸ Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, p. 309.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 309.

⁶⁰ Phillips, *Edward II*, pp. 332-336.

⁶¹ Discussing the parliament of October 1318, Phillips noted that ‘large numbers’ of petitions were dealt with, but goes on to mention only two, from Walter Langton and Hugh Audley, both influential members of at Court: *Ibid.*, p. 244.

To date, the work of Dodd in 2007 is the only comprehensive study to consider the history and mechanics of both the ‘private’ and the ‘common’ petition, from the point when Edward I installed the apparatus for, and encouraged, the mass hearing of petitions.⁶² The difference between the two types of petition may be summed up simply. A ‘private’ petition was presented with the object of dealing with the discrete interests of individuals or groups of individuals. The ‘common’ petition, which was introduced at the end of the reign of Edward II, was presented by the parliamentary commons, and had (ostensibly) the ‘public good’ as their motivating focus, and formed the basis of additions to, or changes of, statutory legislation.⁶³ Recognising the true scope of the petitions as a source, Dodd gave a valuable insight into their significance for future researchers of both political and social history. This political historian’s research was undertaken with the intention of refocusing interest on the everyday functions of the medieval government, in effect to establish what ‘medieval parliament was for, and what it did’.⁶⁴ Dodd’s comprehensive discussion of the writing and presentation of petitions made use of many individual petitions to highlight the main thrust of his work. But the study of the individual petition or petitioner and their motives and agendas, was considered only as supporting evidence for his detailed exploration of petitioning as part of the parliamentary process. However, Dodd, along with other historians such as Ormrod and Anthony Musson, has been at the forefront of research into the private petitions as evidence for a ‘worm’s eye view’ of history.⁶⁵ In their joint collaboration as editors in 2009, they gathered together the works of several like-minded historians, as they explored the methodology of accessing the newly digitalised ancient petitions.⁶⁶ These included Simon Harris’s study of petitions presented during the period immediately before the deposition, and Shelagh Sneddon’s work on the language and dating of

⁶² Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, pp. 1-2.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁶⁵ W. M. Ormrod, ‘Introduction, Medieval Petitions in Context’, in Ormrod, Dodd and Musson, *Medieval Petitions: Grace and Grievance*, p. 3.

⁶⁶ Ormrod, Dodd and Musson, *Medieval Petitions: Grace and Grievance*.

petitions.⁶⁷ Both articles illustrate the value of the content of the petitions as a source to enhance our knowledge of the impact of political and social crises for the king's subjects. They were, nevertheless, once again predominantly focussed on an assessment of their place in the development of the parliamentary process.⁶⁸ The aim of this study is to extend the already extensive research done on the history and evolution of the petitioning process by accessing the otherwise unheard voice of the majority of the king's subjects, essentially refocusing on the experiences and viewpoints of the petitioners rather than that of the petitioned.

The petitioning process was primarily used when recourse through normal channels of justice had been exhausted.⁶⁹ It could be argued that virtually all petitions fell into two categories: either they were requests for the king's justice, such as for the return of lands, goods or payment of debts, or they were matters requiring the king's grace, such as grants of office, living, ancestral privileges or of pardon.⁷⁰ The hearing of petitions was deemed so central to the successful function of royal justice that their consideration was included in the New Ordinances imposed on Edward II in 1311.⁷¹ As an intrinsic part of the role of the king, a failure to hear petitions was considered one of the shortcomings of royal government and of the king himself. The evidence of the petitions therefore open up a fresh avenue to assess the diverse concerns of the many of the king's subjects, as well as illustrating those moments of political crisis or change, which make up the 'grist' of many academic works about this period.

Chapter One will consider the fallout of the rebellion of Thomas of Lancaster through a consideration of the private petitions presented in the years surrounding Lancaster's execution in 1322. The chapter will discuss changes in the nature, language and frequency of those complaints which made use of Lancaster's name either directly or indirectly to illustrate the

⁶⁷ S. J. Harris, 'Taking Your Chances: Petitioning in the Last Years of Edward II and the First Years of Edward III', in Ormrod, Dodd, and Musson, *Medieval Petitions: Grace and Grievance*, pp. 173-192; Sneddon, 'Words and Realities', pp. 193-205.

⁶⁸ Ormrod, 'Murmur, Clamour and Noise', pp. 135-155.

⁶⁹ Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, p. 2.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2. See Appendix A for a breakdown of these different types of petition.

⁷¹ M. Prestwich, *Plantagenet England, 1225-1360* (Oxford, 2005), p. 181.

political and social reverberations of the rebellion. The influence of Lancaster as the most significant landowner of the period after the king will also be considered, as the evidence of the petitions reveals the consequences of his downfall on his many tenants. This will be done in order to establish if this source supports the idea that, in addition to the Lancastrian rebels, the king's subjects also felt the repercussions of Edward II's so-called retribution. The chapter will also include a discussion of the apparent metamorphosis of Thomas of Lancaster from his having been found guilty and executed as a traitor to his being the focus of significant and enduring spiritual veneration.⁷²

The period following Thomas of Lancaster's rebellion and execution has become synonymous with the increasing power of Hugh Despenser the younger and his father, Hugh Despenser the elder, and their influence over Edward II. Therefore, the second chapter will consider the careers of these two men, again through the perception of the petitioners. The English monarchy was based on theocratic principles, which stated that the king's power was God-given, but which was limited through the law and the rights of his subjects.⁷³ Therefore if the monarch, as a representative of God, was above criticism but there were problems with his government, then the fault could not be the king's. The usual scapegoat for this role was his advisors and counsellors.⁷⁴ The importance of the concept was underlined by its inclusion in the terms of the Ordinances, which made the closest royal advisors responsible to their fellow councillors, parliament and ultimately to the law.⁷⁵ This concept was exemplified in the terms of the Despensers' brief exile in 1321. They were accused of extortion, breaking the laws of the land and ultimately, and perhaps most tellingly for their eventual fate, they were accused of usurping the barons'

⁷² For a discussion of the nature of political sainthood see: S. Walker, 'Political Saints in Later Medieval England', in M. J. Braddick (ed.), *Political Culture in Later Medieval England, Essays by Simon Walker* (Manchester, 2006), pp. 198-222.

⁷³ Rosenthal, 'The King's "Wicked Advisers"', p. 600.

⁷⁴ Rosenthal explained that this idea was in itself the basis of a paradox; a wicked king could only chose advisors who were wicked, but kings who listened to wicked advisors were destined to become wicked kings: *Ibid.*, pp. 600, 614.

⁷⁵ The Ordinances stated: 'Whereas the king...has been badly advised and guided by evil councillors, we ordain that all the evil councillors shall be put out and utterly removed, so that neither they nor other such persons shall be near him or shall be retained in any office under the king; and that other persons who are fit shall be put in their places': *Rot. Parl.*, vol. 1, pp. 281-296; Rosenthal, 'The King's "Wicked Advisers"', p. 616.

role, that of most trusted counsellors to the king.⁷⁶ The two Despensers remain the archetypal wicked advisors. But the use of the term ‘the Despensers’ is problematic. Its use due to the similarity of their names, suggests joint motives and actions that are difficult to assess. Therefore any evidence of complicity between the two men which would support this concept will be sought. The chapter will also consider the contents of the petitions directly relating to the actions of the two Despensers individually; concluding with a general deliberation of the actions and reactions of the ordinary petitioner to the so-called ‘Despenser ascendancy’, both before and after their downfall.

Edward II was to end his reign ignominiously, a victim of alleged cuckoldry, deposition and probable murder through the collaboration of his queen and his nobles. He has been depicted as having deviated so thoroughly from the accepted norms and standards of fourteenth century perceptions of kingship that it had left no alternative but his physical removal. This was neatly outlined by Phillips, who explained that medieval kings were expected to adhere to a prescribed set of rules, and that Edward II had thoroughly ‘flouted these elementary rules...and suffered the consequences’.⁷⁷ Therefore the third chapter will consider the petitions presented in the transition period of the deposition in order to illustrate the reaction of the general public to the removal of Edward II. It will also consider the careers of Edward II’s queen, Isabella, and her associate Roger Mortimer of Wigmore, both before, during and after their regency. The chapter is split into two sections. The first considers the career of Roger Mortimer including the period before his alliance with Queen Isabella, his rebellion against Edward II in 1322, his subsequent surrender, imprisonment and escape, along with his eventual re-emergence as ‘king in all but name’.⁷⁸ The second section will consider the career of Queen Isabella from the period of her being regarded as a faithful wife and queen to the successful removal of Edward II through deposition and

⁷⁶ M. J. Lawrence, ‘Rise of a Royal Favourite: the Early Career of Hugh Despenser the Elder’ in G. Dodd and A. Musson (eds) *The Reign of Edward II: New Perspectives* (Woodbridge, 2006), p. 218. This is also discussed in B. Wilkinson, ‘The Sherburn Indenture and the Attack on the Despensers, 1321’, *EHR* (1948), 63, 1-28; M. C. Prestwich, ‘The Charges Against the Despensers, 1321’, *BIHR* (1985), 58, 95-100.

⁷⁷ Phillips, *Aymer de Valence, Earl of Pembroke*, p. 290.

⁷⁸ *Lanercost*, p. 265; Davies, ‘Roger Mortimer’, *ODNB*; Ormrod, *Edward III* (2005), p. 16.

probable murder. Her alleged adulterous relationship with Roger Mortimer and the period of the regency will be discussed to establish if, through the content of the petitions, it can be shown that she had earned the modern sobriquets of ‘the new Jezebel’ or the ‘she-wolf’.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Doherty, *Isabella and the Strange Death of Edward II*, pp. 22, 49.

CHAPTER 1: THOMAS, 2ND EARL OF LANCASTER

1.1 A Loyal Cousin and Traitor?

At the beginning of the reign of Edward II, Thomas, 2nd earl of Lancaster did not conform to the archetypal model of an opponent to the Crown. He was born c.1278, the grandson of Henry III, nephew of Edward I, and cousin to Edward II. On his maternal side he was the grandson of Louis VIII of France and grand-nephew of Louis IX.¹ To further complicate the familial relationship, he was also the uncle of Isabella, Edward II's queen, being the half-brother of her mother, Jeanne, queen of Navarre.² His royal lineage was therefore impeccable. He had served Edward I loyally and was considered an affectionate nephew, he was also a close friend of his cousin, the future Edward II. He was in receipt of many royal favours during the reign of Edward I, including an advantageous marriage to Alice, the daughter and heir of Henry de Lacy, earl of Lincoln, in 1294.³ It was this marriage, rather than any political event, that finally transformed Lancaster into the most powerful earl and landowner in the realm. On the death of his father-in-law in February 1311, he went on to inherit a further two earldoms, placing him in an overwhelmingly dominant position amongst the landed gentry which, according to John Maddicott, 'perhaps ... reinforce[ed] ... his emerging leadership'.⁴ During the first years of Edward II's reign Lancaster remained close to his cousin gaining many awards from the new king, including, 'the most important and most portentous' role of the Stewardship of England.⁵ The restoration of this defunct position may be considered to have been the final impetus for Lancaster becoming the main figurehead for baronial reform in Edward II's reign. This image is supported by the pro-Edwardian author of the

¹ J. R. Maddicott, 'Thomas of Lancaster, Second Earl of Lancaster, Second Earl of Leicester, and Earl of Lincoln, Magnate (c.1278–1322)' *ODNB*.

² Parsons, 'Isabella, Queen of England', *ODNB*.

³ R. Somerville, *History of the Duchy of Lancaster*, vol. 1, 1265-1603 (London, 1953-1970), pp. 18-19.

⁴ Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster*, pp. 8-10.

⁵ Maddicott, 'Thomas of Lancaster, Second Earl of Lancaster', *ODNB*. The role of Steward had traditionally been appurtenant to the title of earl of Leicester. Lancaster's father had not used the title and it had gone into abeyance with the first earl's death: L. W. V. Harcourt, *His Grace the Steward and Trial of Peers* (London, 1907), pp. 138-153; Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster, 1307-1322*, pp. 76-77.

Vita Edwardi Secundi who, writing about Lancaster in 1317, stated that ‘by reason of his office of Steward of England’ he saw it as his role to ‘look after the interests of the realm’.⁶

By 1309 there is evidence of a ‘falling out’ between the cousins, resulting in a dramatic breakdown in their relationship that was never fully resolved.⁷ Lancaster was to be beheaded some fifteen years later, in 1322, the first member of the English royal family to be executed, having been convicted of treason, murder, robbery, negotiating with that recurrent enemy, the Scots, and numerous other transgressions; only his royal lineage saving him from a traitor’s death, ‘for cause and love of [his] lineage’.⁸ However, after his execution, Lancaster underwent something of a rehabilitation, with the posthumous reversal of his conviction and the recovery of his lands and titles by Henry, his brother and heir.⁹ He was also to become the focus for popular veneration and several appeals for canonisation, notably from Edward III himself.¹⁰

This chapter will consider how Lancaster was depicted in the petitions and if, through these complaints and claims, it can be shown if the petitioners exploited Lancaster’s dramatic transformation from his being named as a traitor to his being proposed for sainthood. It will illustrate how the petitions reflected the political and social reverberations of Lancaster’s rebellion, and his changing reputation in the ensuing years. This will be done through a discussion of the petitions, both directly and indirectly related to Lancaster,

⁶ *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, p. 244.

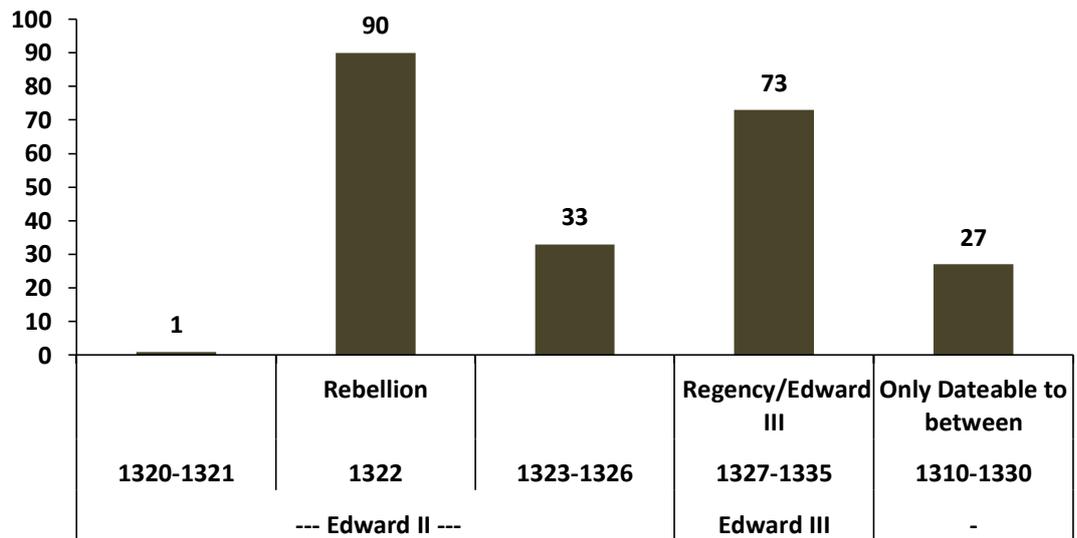
⁷ This ‘breakdown’ can be demonstrated through Lancaster having ceased witnessing royal charters (up until this point he had acted as a witness more than any other earl). He did not act as a witness again until March 1310. His disfavour was further underlined by his self imposed exile to his northern estates, this withdrawal making the ‘quarrel’ self-perpetuating as Lancaster ‘while he was sulking on his own estates’ was unable to make any rapprochement to the king: Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster, 1307-1322*, pp. 76, 92–93; A. King, ‘Thomas of Lancaster’s First Quarrel with Edward II’ in W. M. Ormrod (ed.), *Fourteenth-Century England III* (Woodbridge, 2004), pp. 33, 39.

⁸ For a record of the indictment against Lancaster see: H. T. Riley (ed.) ‘Johannis de Trokelowe’, in *Chronica et Annales*, pp. 112-124; *Rymer's Foedera*, pp. 215-216; *Brut*, p. 222; *Lanercost*, pp. 234-235.

⁹ S. L. Waugh, ‘Henry of Lancaster, Third Earl of Lancaster and Third Earl of Leicester (c.1280–1345)’, *ODNB*; *Rot. Parl.*, vol. 2, pp. 3-5.

¹⁰ Braddick, *Political Culture*, pp. 198-222; J. M. Theilman, ‘Political Canonization and Political Symbolism in Medieval England’ *The Journal of British Studies* (1990), 29, 241-266, p. 251; Bothwell, ‘The More Things Change’, pp. 73-74.

presented from c.1320 to the period of the deposition. This will be followed by a consideration of those petitions presented during the reign of Edward III, both during the period of the regency of Queen Isabella and Roger Mortimer and the first years of the new king's majority rule up until c.1335.



Graph 1.1: The Distribution of petitions relating to Thomas, 2nd earl of Lancaster.

Graph 1.1 illustrates the distribution of the petitions related to Thomas of Lancaster in the period c.1320 to 1335.¹¹ One is immediately able to see from this graph that the majority of the petitions were presented in the period 1320-1326. One can further pin-point the majority of these petitions to 1322, with ninety petitions overall being dateable to the period of Lancaster's rebellion and subsequent execution.¹² That there were so many petitions brought in the immediate aftermath of the downfall of such an extensive landowner may perhaps appear unsurprising, especially when both parliaments

¹¹ For the purpose of all statistical illustrations in this thesis only those petitions which name the main characters (Thomas of Lancaster, the two Despensers, Queen Isabella and Roger Mortimer) were used.

¹² See Appendix A1 for a full breakdown of these petitions. Dodd estimated that during 1322 there were only 110 petitions presented to the Crown, therefore 82% of these petitions directly or indirectly concerned Lancaster, see Graph 2 in: Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, p. 65.

of 1322, held in May and November, were after Lancaster's capture, 'show trial' and execution, which had taken place in March of the same year.¹³

Death of a Royal Cousin and a Council of War

After years spent struggling to maintain control over his barons, Edward II had been forced to take military action against them. On March 11, 1322, having taken counsel with his earls, the king declared his cousin, Thomas, earl of Lancaster, to be a traitor along with his allies, the so-called Contrarians.¹⁴ This culminated at the battle of Boroughbridge in the same month, when the Contrarian forces, led by Lancaster were thoroughly routed. After his capture, Lancaster was put on trial, but accorded no chance to defend himself. He was subsequently found guilty of treason and sentenced to be hanged, drawn and beheaded.¹⁵ The earl, according to the *Flores Historiarum*, made no protest at his sentence (*non contendit neque clamavit*).¹⁶ The sentence was commuted to merely beheading, perhaps as the result of a plea from his niece, Queen Isabella.¹⁷ He was taken to an ignoble execution, 'sitting on a despicable ass, clothed only in a shabby tunic'.¹⁸ With the final defeat of his cousin, Edward II is reported to have followed this victory with a series of bloody, and vengeful executions, alongside a programme of imprisonments, crushing fines and major land confiscations against the surviving rebel forces.¹⁹

¹³ Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, *passim*; Maddicott, 'Thomas of Lancaster, Second Earl of Lancaster', *ODNB*.

¹⁴ Notably, the earls of Arundel, Kent, Pembroke, Richmond, Surrey and the Scottish earl of Atholl.

¹⁵ For a discussion of this final confrontation between Edward II and Lancaster see Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster 1307-1322*, pp. 303-312; Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II*, pp. 58-64.

¹⁶ *Flores Historiarum*, pp. xviii, 206-207.

¹⁷ Phillips, *Edward II*, p. 409.

¹⁸ G. E. Cokayne *et al*, *The Complete Peerage of England, Scotland, Ireland, Great Britain and the United Kingdom: Extant, Extinct or Dormant*, 12 vols (London, 1910-1959), vol. 7, p. 295, n. h, quoted in J. S. Bothwell, *Falling From Grace: Reversal of Fortune and the English Nobility, 1075-1455* (Manchester, 2008), p. 64.

¹⁹ For a consideration of the fallout of the period following the rebellion on Edward II's landholdings and finances see: Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II*, pp. 69-105; Phillips, *Edward II*, pp. 328-454.

This watershed moment was to be confirmed and duly celebrated at the next parliament, held at York, in May of 1322.²⁰ Edward II, like many other kings, had always bemoaned the necessity of holding parliaments, cancelling and postponing them whenever possible.²¹ This did not change, even at the long awaited moment of the defeat of Thomas of Lancaster, when there is record of Edward II demanding that the council arrange for as much of the business of the May parliament to be conducted beforehand, so that the ‘people who come to the parliament [can] depart the sooner’ (*pur plus tost deliuerer le poeple qui viegnent au parlement*).²² Those ‘people who come to the parliament’, presumably, included himself.

The writs of summons to the 1322 parliament had been drafted and issued at Derby on March 14, 1322, even before Lancaster’s defeat and death.²³ The writ announced that the business of parliament would be to deal with ‘various arduous affairs...touching the king and the state of the kingdom’.²⁴ But, with Lancaster’s defeat, the agenda of this parliament was first and foremost to revoke the Ordinances, so beloved of Lancaster and so hated by the king. This was done through the Statute of York, which stated that ‘all the things ordained...by the said Ordainers...shall henceforth and forever cease’; this revocation was to be announced by sheriffs throughout England in ‘full county court’.²⁵ The revocation was not unexpected, as the king had only ever agreed to the Ordinances’ complete implementation for short periods of time and only under compulsion.²⁶ But the rejection of the Ordinances was also a

²⁰ Although there is no surviving ‘roll’ for this important parliament, the main points are known from other sources: *Statutes of the Realm, 1235-1377*, pp. 189-190; *CCR, 1318-1323*, pp. 544-6; *CPR, 1321-1324*, p. 115; *RTDP*, p. 282; Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II*, p. 67; *PROME*, ‘Introduction’ to the parliament of 1322.

²¹ For example in 1311 he postponed the parliament that was to confirm the Ordinances by going on pilgrimage to Canterbury: Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II*, p. 66.

²² For the agenda of the May 1322 parliament see ‘Appendix of Documents’ in J. C. Davies, *The Baronial Opposition to Edward II, its Character and Policy* (Cambridge, 1918), pp. 582-583; Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II*, p. 67.

²³ *PROME* ‘Introduction’ to the parliament of 1322; ‘Appendix 1’.

²⁴ *PROME* ‘Introduction’ to the parliament of 1322; similar wordings were used in the writs summoning various parliaments: Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, p. 69, n. 55.

²⁵ *Statutes of the Realm, 1235-1377* p. 190; Davies, *The Baronial Opposition to Edward II*, p. 491; R. A. Butt, *A History of Parliament – The Middle Ages* (London, 1989), p. 215.

²⁶ Davies, *The Baronial Opposition to Edward II*, p. 491.

politically astute move by Edward II, and may be interpreted as part of an overall strategy to discredit the newly executed Lancaster through his long insistence on their strict observance. There is no surviving parliament roll for the parliament of May 1322, but there is evidence of numerous petitions being presented ‘on private rights’, the dispatch of which can be shown to have gone on until after July 7.²⁷ Gwilym Dodd’s work on the use of the warranty note (*per petitionum de Consilio*) as evidence of the rate of petitioning is an invaluable approach to determining the level of petitionary business.²⁸ These warranty notes were essentially added to chancery records to note that ‘an action of government had been authorised by a petition expedited by the council’.²⁹ Dodd declared that the proof of this lay in the fact that these warranty notes appeared to ‘cluster’ at moments when parliament was in session or had recently ended.³⁰

That there were so many petitions heard in the aftermath of Lancaster’s execution, when parliamentary business must have been overshadowed by Lancaster’s rebellion and military concerns created by the continuing war with the Scots, can perhaps be said to confirm Dodd’s concept of the ‘political order and administrative normality’ that was brought to government in the post-1322 era.³¹ However, it could also be argued that the application of the Ordinances had *hindered* the application of royal justice, virtually replacing the king as the accepted centre of the political system; and that, with Lancaster’s death and the Ordinances’ repeal, control of parliament had been returned to the king, allowing him to channel his energies into the dispensation of justice rather than the continued political wrangling that had up to that point defined his reign.³² This is supported by the evidence of a petition, presented in 1324, which noted

²⁷ *PROME*, ‘Introduction’ to the parliament of 1322. The beginning of Edward II’s sixteenth regnal year: C. R. Cheney (ed.), revised by M. Jones, *A Handbook of Dates for Students of British History* (Cambridge, 2004), p. 34.

²⁸ For a full discussion of Dodd’s findings see: Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, pp. 60-78.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 61-2.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

³² H. G. Richardson and G. O. Sayles, *The English Parliament in the Middle Ages* (London, 1981), xvi, p. 75.

that the king insisted that he hear all petitions, when ‘in times past’ a petitioner could appeal direct to chancery.³³

The parliament of 1322 also confirmed the legal process against Lancaster. Despite the nature of his familial position, his execution may have been seen as a suitable end for one who had risen against his king and had, allegedly, been in treasonous correspondence with the Scottish king, Robert Bruce.³⁴ The executions and the confiscations of the lands and goods of the Lancastrian rebels are confirmed in the petitions of this period. These range from the complaints of the family of such important political figures as Roger D’Amory, a king’s man and former royal favourite, who described how he had been forced into collusion with Lancaster through the expansionist ambitions of the two Despensers; to the petition of Thomas Toky and William de Tyderyngton, gaoled for allegedly pasturing eight oxen (*oyt beofs*) belonging to an alleged Contrariant.³⁵

One unusual petition, illustrating how the Contrariants were pursued after the battle of Boroughbridge, and made from the viewpoint of those ordered to pursue them, was brought by ‘John Flemyng and the others who had been indicted with him at Wigan’ in 1322.³⁶ This petition described how Flemyng had been charged with the theft of armour, horses and other ‘chattels’ taken from the rebels which they had pursued and captured after Boroughbridge. The petitions’ endorsement, ending *coram rege*, shows that these men were heard before the king himself, although no other record exists of their fate. From the nature of the complaint it is clear that the punishment of the Contrariants was not to be a ‘free-for-all’ but rather part of an official tracking down of the rebels, led by the king. However, this does not challenge or negate the theory of Edward II being guilty of acts of vengeance against the Contrariants.

Another, and perhaps more telling, petition regarding the fate of the Contrariants in the aftermath of the rebellion records the fortunes of one of

³³ SC 8/108/5398; Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, p. 76.

³⁴ Given-Wilson, *Chronicles*, p. 10; *Bridlingtonensi*, p. 78; W. E. Rhodes, ‘Thomas, Earl of Lancaster (1277?–1322)’ *ODNB* Archive.

³⁵ SC 8/42/2053; *CIM*, 1307-1349, pp. 126, 509; *CCR*, 1318-1323, p. 596; J. R. Maddicott, Sir Roger D’amory [Amory], Baron and Courtier (d. 1322), *ODNB*; SC 8/5/241; *CIM*, 1307-1349, pp. 489, 530.

³⁶ SC 8/111/5546.

those Lancastrian supporters who chose to flee after the battle of Boroughbridge. The complaint of John de St Mark brought in c.1324-1325 recorded accusations against Robert de Veer of Sudborough, who was outlawed after the battle due to his support of the Lancastrian cause.³⁷ It described how, immediately after the battle of Boroughbridge, Veer had ‘lived by robbery in the woods’ and was apparently still at large in 1324-1325, when he was accused of having accroached on royal power, in a period St Mark termed a ‘time of peace’ (*acroschment... roil power en temps de peas*).³⁸ Veer had done this by leading a force of thirty men in Northamptonshire.³⁹ The accusation of accroachment may well have been made to bolster St Mark’s claim as it reflected one of the main charges made against Lancaster and was considered a political crime rather than one being covered by common law.⁴⁰ According to J. G. Bellamy, the accusation that Robert de Veer rode out with thirty men would have made him guilty of at least *lèse-majesté* or even treason and, incidentally (or maybe not incidentally), echoed the Despensers’ accusation against the rebels.⁴¹ The petition was endorsed with two orders; the first recommended that the petitioner should sue at common law with regard to the attacks Veer and his men made against him; the second, going some way to confirm the above theory, is that the accusation made against Veer of having accroached royal power should be investigated by the justices Walter de Frisken and Robert de Malberthorpe. This petition does not confirm the notion

³⁷ SC 8/143/7102; for a record of the order to arrest Veer and to confiscate his lands made in March 1322: *CPR, 1321-1324*, p. 82; *CFR, 1319-1327*, p. 112; Robert de Veer of Sudborough is not to be confused with Robert de Vere, 6th earl of Oxford who was later proven not to be guilty of supporting Lancaster: SC 8/81/4004, SC 8/81/4005, SC 8/81/4006; *CPR, 1321-1324*, p. 82. The earl of Oxford was also granted protection whilst overseas in 1323, proving that at the time of this petition’s accusation he was not in England: *CPR, 1321-1324*, p. 294. For another record showing Robert de Veer of Sudborough as distinct from Robert, earl of Oxford see the Northamptonshire Tax Assessment for the fifteenth of 1301: E179/155/31, *ms.* 38, for a transcript of this record:

[<http://www.medievalgenealogy.org.uk/subsidies/intro.shtml>]; A. Tuck, ‘John de Vere, Seventh Earl of Oxford (1312–1360)’ *ODNB*; Ormrod, ‘The Road to Boroughbridge’, p. 83.

³⁸ For a discussion concerning accusations of the accroachment of royal power see: J. G. Bellamy, *The Law of Treason in England in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1970), pp. 64-74.

³⁹ Although the recorded summary of this petition gives the number of men as three hundred, the original clearly states a more believable thirty.

⁴⁰ Bellamy, *The Law of Treason in England*, p. 64.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 64-65.

of the rebels being mistreated in the aftermath of the rebellion, although the endorsement shows, perhaps not unexpectedly, that there was to be an investigation into the accusation of Veer having accroached royal power. There is no suggestion that Veer was to be maliciously pursued due to his support of Thomas of Lancaster. The petitions of John St Mark and John Flemyng, discussed above, both illustrate complaints made in the aftermath of Lancaster's rebellion, with an 'official' account of events being used to further the agenda of the petitioner.

Because of their nature as formal legal documents there are few petitions that can be shown to reflect the actual personality of Lancaster, with perhaps only one illustrating any personal observation of the earl's private beliefs.⁴² This petition, presented between 1322 and 1327 by Hamond de Hessay of York, relates to the period of Lancaster's final imprisonment, with the petition describing how Lancaster was surrounded by the king's men (*de gentz nostre seigneur le roy*) before his execution. The petitioner included the personal names of several of these 'gentz' (Bernard Pylegrym, Domynic, Johan, Bernard, Bruce ...), which indicates that he was indeed a member of the party holding the disgraced earl. The petition concerns the return of a French Bible (*Bible de Fraunceys*) that the petitioner had loaned to Lancaster. A discussion concerning the significance of this petition by R. L. Atkinson, is illustrative of how the petitions have been under-utilised in the past. Writing in the early twentieth century, Atkinson considered this petition from the context of the existence of vernacular Bibles before the period of the Lollard movement.⁴³ However, there is far more information one may gather from this petition. For example, it could be considered as further evidence of Lancaster's personal piety, which Maddicott described as being more than customary, as well as illustrative of the social *mores* of the period.⁴⁴ Another element of this petition is its inferred information about the manner in which Lancaster was held after his defeat. For example the petition recorded that Lancaster had the services of a confessor. This infers that, as a leading member of the royal

⁴² SC 8/116/5794.

⁴³ R. L. Atkinson, 'A French Bible in England about the Year 1322', *EHR* (1923), 38, pp. 248-249.

⁴⁴ Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster, 1307-1322*, p. 321.

family, he was able to maintain the levels of personal service expected of such an important man. The loan of this vernacular Bible also suggests that Lancaster was allowed to carry on his own personal devotions. It also infers that he was housed in a manner in which he could read the said Bible, again this is indicative of some level of comfort. The petitioner went on to state that Lancaster had reassured him ‘at the time of his death’ that his confessor would return the Bible to him, (*le quel Thomas eynz son moriaunt chargea frer Thomas de Hothom son confessor... la deliveraunce du dit liver*). The petitioner showed no hesitation in stating that he had loaned the Bible to the earl, indicating that this act of kindness would not have been censured by the king. Equally Hessay had no hesitation in admitting his role in the incarceration of Lancaster, indicating that the earl’s execution was still considered just and that his reputation had not, as yet, undergone the transformation that was to take place in the following years.

Immediately after Lancaster’s death Edward II had begun to make ‘practical arrangements’ for a renewed Scottish campaign.⁴⁵ Although there is no evidence of any demand for additional taxation from the laity at the parliament of May 1322, there is evidence of Edward II, according to Fryde, ‘squeezing’ as much military service from his subjects as possible.⁴⁶ The petitions illustrate the impact of this burdensome obligation on a nation already afflicted with the aftermath of famine and civil unrest.⁴⁷ Portraying what must have been a common concern throughout the country, the plea of the ‘community of Lincolnshire’ stated that in addition to their animals being afflicted with a murrain, their crops failing and being harassed by ‘the enemies and rebels’ of the king who had held certain people for ransom (*...de moryn de bestes ... et ble faille, et des gentz pris et mis a raunson par les enemis et rebelles ...*), they were now required to provide four thousand armed foot-soldiers along with ten shillings per soldier for expenses (*demandont du dite conte IIII M. homes, a pe, bien armez, de la comunalte avantdite; et estre ceo cheseum homes x sou pur ses dispenses.*)⁴⁸ This was not the only petition

⁴⁵ Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II* p. 124.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 124; Phillips, *Edward II*, p. 424.

⁴⁷ Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster, 1307-1322*, pp. 163-164.

⁴⁸ SC 8/6/259; Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II*, pp. 12, 56.

brought by the people of Lincolnshire complaining about the king's demands for military aid, as the Abbot and convent of Bardney also bemoaned the straits they were under in attempting to fulfil the king's demand for men.⁴⁹ Michael Powicke suggested that this petition and other complaints made at the York parliament may well have been the deciding factor in abandoning efforts to impose unpaid service in Scotland and to accept a parliamentary grant of a national levy for the paid service for forty days of one man from every vill.⁵⁰

However, even though this campaign had been meticulously planned, it was to be as disastrous for the king as his earlier forays into Scotland. The campaign, which began on August 12, 1322, met with massive losses, not only through military defeat but also because of starvation and illness.⁵¹ The petitions again allow one an intimate view of effect of the failure of this campaign on the merchant class. A petition brought by the merchant Manent Fraunceis, responsible for finding supplies for the king's troops, can be shown to refer to the failed campaign of 1322 through its content, which cites the events taking place in the fifteenth year of the king's father.⁵² Fraunceis complained that, although he had supplied wheat for Scotland in the face of difficulties with permissions from the French king and attacks from Flemish-backed piracy, he had never been fully recompensed. Although this petition was presented some years later, it remains important evidence of the crucial nature of the difficulties in supplying Edward II's enormous army in Scotland. This is further supported through a mandate from the king, dated April 20, 1322, warning of the threat of Flemish piracy preventing 'victuals which are intended for the Scotch expedition from coming to England'.⁵³ The petition's endorsement is, unusually, contemporaneously dated, and apparently dictated by Edward II himself, as it stated that he had witnessed it at Westminster on March 8, during the first year of his reign (*Teste me ipso apud Westmonasterium, VIII Martii anno regni nostri primo*).

⁴⁹ SC 8/267/13335.

⁵⁰ M. R. Powicke, *Military Obligation in Medieval England: A Study in Liberty and Duty* (Oxford, 1962), pp. 152-153; Ormrod, 'The Road to Boroughbridge', p. 84.

⁵¹ Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II, 1307-1322*, p. 132.

⁵² SC 8/290/14494.

⁵³ *CPR, 1321-1324*, p. 102; Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II, 1321-1326*, pp. 129-30.

Many chronicles recorded Edward II's defeat in Scotland; the *French Chronicle of London* commented that 'his people died of hunger for want of food' and that 'the king had ... shamefully returned into England'.⁵⁴ Edward II's military reputation, regained in the wake of Lancaster's defeat had, once again, reached a nadir.⁵⁵ This was compounded in October when the king only just evaded capture by the Scots, and his queen was abandoned behind enemy lines at Tynemouth priory.⁵⁶ Edward II responded by calling another parliament, a '*colloquium et tractatum*', initially for November 14, 1322, at Ripon, which was then rescheduled to be held at York.⁵⁷ It is thought that the majority of this meeting was spent on the topics of 'recriminations and money'.⁵⁸ Although it is not clear that this meeting was considered as a parliament, and there is no surviving parliamentary roll, all the persons required to form a parliament were present and its parliamentary status is further supported by the king being granted a tax of a tenth and a sixth on 'moveable goods' to be collected in April and July of the following year, one of the principle remits of parliament.⁵⁹ However, whether there was also time for receiving or answering petitions at this parliament, which was essentially a council of war, and whether those wishing to present petitions knew that their complaints would be heard, remains unclear. There is no evidence that a proclamation declaring that petitionary business would be heard was made at this (or any other) parliament.⁶⁰ This is further supported by evidence that there were also no appointments of 'receivers' or 'triers' made in the November parliaments of 1322.⁶¹

However, it can be assumed that time for the hearing of petitions remained at the forefront of parliamentary business in the last years of Edward II's reign, with evidence of them being 'expedited in large numbers'; but only

⁵⁴ Riley, 'The French Chronicle of London'; Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II, 1321-1326*, p. 132.

⁵⁵ Military incompetence being one of the charges made against the king at his deposition: Phillips, *Edward II*, p. 432, n. 149.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 429-31.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 431-32.

⁵⁸ *PROME* 'Introduction' to the Parliament of November 1322.

⁵⁹ This tax was the final and heaviest of the reign, yielding over £42,000: *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *PROME* 'Calendar of Unedited Petitions, 1307-1337'; Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, pp. 68-72, n. 55.

⁶¹ G. Sayles, *The King's Parliament of England* (London, 1975), pp. 109-10.

at those parliaments which were not dominated by political conspiracies or when the king was forced to give attention to ‘other matters’.⁶²

1.2 Thomas of Lancaster - Saint or Sinner?

Can the fallout of this defining moment of Edward II’s reign and its impact on Lancaster’s reputation be illustrated through the evidence of the petitions? S. J. Harris noted that at all times in any reign there would have been many petitions from ‘the most powerful to the [most] humble’, but added that at such an abnormal period as Thomas of Lancaster’s downfall the number of petitions would have been numerous.⁶³ Graph 1.1 clearly illustrates this theory, with over thirty-eight per cent of the petitions relating to Lancaster covered by this study being presented in the parliaments of 1322.⁶⁴ The significance of this is further highlighted when one considers that, in the period prior to his death, from c.1300 to c.1321, only thirteen petitions can be shown to directly relate to Lancaster. These earlier petitions contain useful evidence to help establish Lancaster’s response to direct confrontations which place into context his later actions. They also reflect the political astuteness of the petitioners, as the petitions contain evidence of how the lower echelons of society sought to exploit the animosity between the king and Thomas of Lancaster in order to gain redress.

This idea is clearly illustrated in those petitions which reflected the long term fallout of an unsuccessful uprising in Lancashire in 1315 led by Sir Adam Banastre. There is a string of petitions which relate to the effect of Banastre’s execution and the confiscations resulting from the uprising. Historians such as Conway Davies and Maddicott used the evidence of this rebellion to support the theory that Lancaster was guilty of exploiting ‘with greedy vindictiveness’ the lands forfeited by his enemies. But only Davies, in an otherwise detailed account of the uprising, mentioned the petitions as

⁶² Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, pp. 75-6.

⁶³ Harris, ‘Taking Your Chances: Petitioning in the Last Years of Edward II’, in Ormrod, Dodd and Musson, *Medieval Petitions: Grace and Grievance*, pp. 173-192.

⁶⁴ See Graph 1.1.

evidence of this, but he summed up the series of petitions relating to Banastre's rebellion in three lines.⁶⁵

Banastre had served in Lancaster's retinue from as early as 1305, and was brother-in-law to Lancaster's chief retainer Robert Holland.⁶⁶ His loyalty had never been in doubt.⁶⁷ However, according to the *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, in 1315 Banastre had been accused of murder (*perpetrasset homicidium*).⁶⁸ It seems likely that this crime, coupled with the considerable animosity that had seemingly developed between Banastre and Holland, had forced him to commit to the act of rebellion against Lancaster.⁶⁹ This may be explained by Banastre believing that an action against the earl would please the king, and therefore ultimately cancel out his original crime. However, the uprising failed and Banastre along with his supporters were executed by Lancaster, the king having granted him a commission of oyer and terminer to try the rebels.⁷⁰

The petitions clearly illustrate that Banastre's revolt brought long term repercussions for his family. For example, in 1318 the petition of Margaret Banastre, sister to the failed rebel, requested the release of Banastre's brother Nicholas from Pontefract castle where he had been held by Lancaster since the rebellion.⁷¹ Because it was presented before Lancaster's execution this petition is particularly significant as it reveals the level of power Lancaster wielded in the period leading up to his downfall. The fact that Banastre's sister chose to appeal directly to Edward II himself suggests that she considered that there was no other recourse for redress above Lancaster except for the king (and indeed the petition was heard *coram rege*, 'by the king himself'). The petition also reveals the level of influence of those included in Lancaster's 'inner circle' of retainers. Margaret Banastre appealed to the king to intercede on her behalf

⁶⁵ Davies, *The Baronial Opposition to Edward II*, pp. 504-505; Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster, 1307-1322*, p. 319.

⁶⁶ J. R. Maddicott, 'Thomas of Lancaster and Sir Robert Holland: A Study in Noble Patronage', *EHR* (1971), 86, 449-472, p. 464.

⁶⁷ Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster, 1307-1322*, p. 175.

⁶⁸ *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, p. 64.

⁶⁹ The *Annalis Paulini* recorded the ill feeling between Banastre and Holland, noting that '*Discordia et maxima pugna inter dominum Robertum de Holonde et Adam Banastre milites*': *Annalis Paulini*, vol. 1, p. 279; *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, p. 64.

⁷⁰ *CPR, 1313-1317*, p. 421; The *Vita Edwardi Secundi* gives a slightly different description of Banastre's death, describing it as having taken place during the final battle to halt the uprising: *Vita Edwardi Secundi* pp. 65-66.

⁷¹ SC 8/319/E367.

with Lancaster through the auspices of Robert Holland, even though the animosity between Adam Banastre and his brother-in-law was common knowledge. There is no explanation recorded for this strange circumstance, but this can nevertheless be used to show Holland's power gained through his relationship with Lancaster.

The transference of power to a retainer through their association with Lancaster is demonstrated in another petition relating to the rebellion of Adam Banastre, presented after Lancaster's death in c.1322.⁷² The identity of the petitioner is unknown due to the petition being badly faded and partly illegible, but its contents relate to the imprisonment of the petitioner by Lancaster after Banastre's failed rebellion, along with the confiscation of the petitioner's land in Aughton, Lancashire. The petitioner complained that his lands had been procured by Robert Holland for one of his kinsmen, Richard [Holland].⁷³ The petition illustrates the unusual power held by Holland through his association with Lancaster, supporting the opinion given in the *Brut* chronicle, which stated that '*He [Lancaster] truste more oppon him [Holland] than oppon eny man alive.*'⁷⁴ That Holland was accorded the highest trust and reliance of Lancaster can also be illustrated, according to Maddicott, through his suggested supervision of Lancaster's acquisition of 'dubiously acquired' lands such as those lost by this anonymous petitioner.⁷⁵ Given this implied 'partnership' between Lancaster and Holland, the petitioner's use of the expression 'earl of Lancaster *and* Robert Holland' appears to underline the unusually close relationship between the two men.⁷⁶

Another petition brought by Adam Banastre's heir, John, dated c.1321 to c.1323, was an appeal for the delayed restitution of the 'goods and chattels' of Adam Banastre taken by '*divers gentz de Lancastreshire*'.⁷⁷ John Banastre described the forfeiture as having taken place after the failed revolt. The petition began by stating that Adam Banastre along with his co-conspirator

⁷² SC 8/158/7863.

⁷³ Holland's association with Lancaster had been marked by his steady accumulation of land and wealth, with the anonymous petitioner's lands in Aughton being only one of his many acquisitions: Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster, 1307-1322*, p. 48.

⁷⁴ *Brut*, p. 216.

⁷⁵ J. R. Maddicott, 'Sir Robert Holland (c.1283-1328)' *ODNB*.

⁷⁶ My italics.

⁷⁷ SC 8/7/328.

‘Henry du Lee’ was put to death by Thomas, formerly earl of Lancaster (*mis mort par Thomas, jadis Counte de Lancastre*).⁷⁸ Banastre’s heir spoke of the execution of his father mildly, but allowed no misreading of the event; one is left with no doubt of his belief in Lancaster’s participation and guilt in the pursuit and death of his father. The petition also reveals that John Banastre felt that he could not receive redress until after the death of Lancaster (*en la vie le dit Thomas nul remedi avoir*). This statement echoed other petitioners’ accusations, discussed later, that Lancaster was guilty of suppressing the Crown’s right to administer justice, and perhaps is indicative of the extent of Lancaster’s autonomy on his own estates. However, one must also give consideration to the theory that the statement was an example of the petitioner politicising his petition by emphasising Lancaster’s misuse of power, in order to stress his own vulnerability.⁷⁹ This would, however, been an uncertain strategy unless it was accompanied by the general acceptance of the idea of Lancaster’s suppression and subversion of the Crown’s prerogative to administer justice. The petition ended with a request for redress through a grant of ‘a commission of certain people’ to enquire into his [John de Banastre’s] claim. The petition was endorsed with a recommendation that the petitioner should have a writ of trespass against those, presumably same, ‘*divers gentz*’.

Whatever the political or personal implications of Lancaster’s death were for Edward II and the monarchy, what the evidence of the increase in petitioning after the downfall of Lancaster does illustrate is an unprecedented increase in the demand for justice from Edward’s subjects. A surge in petitions related to Lancaster’s downfall is hardly surprising when one considers the extent of Lancaster’s land holdings. Lancaster, through inheritance and marriage held vast tracts of land throughout the country, but concentrated in the north.⁸⁰ The scale and importance of Lancaster’s resources were described

⁷⁸ Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II*, p. 24.

⁷⁹ Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, p. 298.

⁸⁰ This ‘patrimony’ originally consisted of the earldoms of Lancaster, Leicester and Derby, with extensive estates in Lancashire, Leicestershire, Warwickshire, Staffordshire, Derbyshire and in the Nene valley of Northamptonshire. Lancaster also held lands and a castle at Dunstanburgh, in Northumberland. To these were added, from his wife Alice’s inheritance, the two earldoms of Lincoln and Salisbury, with new lands to add to his portfolio in Yorkshire, Lancashire, Lincolnshire, and north Wales: Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster, 1307-1322*, pp. 9-39; M. Prestwich,

by the author of the *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, who stated that by ‘the size of his [Lancaster’s] patrimony you [could] assess his power’, his landed resources were second only to the king’s.⁸¹ However, the evidence of the petitions shows that there were numerous complaints produced by the many bureaucratic problems created by such a massive change in ownership, and that they were in spite of experience gained of other, though significantly smaller, confiscations during Edward II’s reign.⁸² These previous confiscations had taught the king the importance of establishing a localised administrative system made up of so-called ‘keepers’ for confiscated lands. But unlike these earlier reasonably discreet confiscations, the acquisitions after the Lancaster rebellion were numerous, scattered throughout England, of a diverse nature, and often entangled in both local and national tenurial obligations. Although these ‘keepers’ were only responsible for their own areas and even rendered their accounts locally, the volume of the confiscations created major problems for these overstretched administrators.⁸³ This is illustrated in the petition of Alan de Cobeldyk, keeper of forfeited lands in Lincolnshire whose petition, presented in 1322, complained that he had to ‘hold thirty courts and more’ in the county, and voiced his concerns that there

Plantagenet England, 1225 – 1360 (Oxford, 2005), p. 364; S. Walker, *The Lancastrian Affinity 1361-1399* (Oxford, 1990); the extensive nature of Lancaster’s lands meant that by 1311 he could travel from Pontefract in West Yorkshire to Clitheroe in Lancashire (approximately 53 miles) without having to leave his estates: T. D. Whitaker, *History of Whalley*, vol. 2 (London, 1876), p. 218.

⁸¹ *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, p. 29; for a full discussion of the extent of these landholdings see Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster, 1307-1322*, pp. 8-39.

⁸² Notably the lands of Walter Langton in 1307 and the Templar holdings in 1308: Davies, *The Baronial Opposition to Edward II*, pp. 145-146; T. F. Tout, *Chapters in the Administrative History of Medieval England*, vol. 2 (Manchester, 1920), pp. 316-318; A. M. Leys, ‘The Forfeiture of the Lands of the Templars in England’ in *Oxford Essays in Medieval History Presented to H.E. Salter* (Oxford, 1934), pp. 155-163.

⁸³ A mandate dated May 18, 1322 illustrates the complexity of expectations and duties of those responsible for the forfeited lands. The keepers’ duties included: creating estimates of the value of demesnes, villeinages, homages, services, rents ‘and all other issues’ of the forfeited holdings; assessing which of the forfeited lands already had claims relating to them; to decide whether particular confiscated lands were worth keeping by the king, and to assign a rental value to them and decide which were better ‘let to farm’, and assigning the rates and terms of such ‘lets’, and finally to give an assessment of potential profit and loss that could be taken from woodland. All this was to be certified to the king by the ‘quinzaine of midsummer,’ literally seven weeks from the date of the order; ‘Quinzaine’ - A period of fifteen days, therefore 15 days after midsummer, which from the 13th century was celebrated on St. John's Eve (June 23): *CPR, 1321-1324*, p. 16; Cheney and Jones, *A Handbook of Dates for Students of British History*, p. 76.

would be problems with the collection of due monies if a receiver was not appointed to aid the process.⁸⁴ Unfortunately we do not know how this complaint was received, as there is no recorded endorsement. However, this illustration of an overworked official and the resultant probable administrative backlog may be one explanation why so many complainants chose to take the route of petitioning the Crown to gain redress in this period.

A typical example of recourse to the petitioning process, when an appeal for a solution to their grievance to the ‘keeper’ responsible for the forfeited lands would perhaps have been the more usual route, is the petition of Alan de Claxeby, Ralph West and William atte Kyrke, woodsmen of Lincolnshire.⁸⁵ Presented at the height of the influx of petitions relating to the fall of Lancaster in c.1322, they described how they had bought a quantity of woodland from Lancaster three years before his death, but had been hindered from stripping the woodland by the king’s bailiffs after Lancaster’s downfall. They petitioned for restitution of monies in order that ‘they and their children’ were not made destitute. These petitioners clearly thought they would achieve redress more quickly if they were to by-pass the keeper dealing with forfeited lands in Lincolnshire and appeal to the king directly. The petitioners gained a mixed response to their request. The section of their complaint pertaining to their actions before Lancaster’s fall seemingly needed no further process or endorsement by the king, the woodsmen being granted their request. However, for the second part of the complaint, which referred to the king’s bailiffs having hindered them from cutting the remaining timber, the endorsement suggested that the king wished to retain the wood. The response stated that the king was not obliged to respond to this request (*Rex non tenet respondere*). The use of a third person response may merely illustrate that the petition had been reviewed and a suggestion formulated for the king to action, but it could also be interpreted as a direct answer from the king without need for advisement. However, this second ‘recommendation’ could also be considered illustrative of Fryde’s belief that Edward II was ruthless in

⁸⁴ SC 8/99/4917; *PROME* ‘Appendix of Unedited Petitions, 1307-1337’; *Rot. Parl.*, vol. 1, pp. 387-415; instructions to the keepers of forfeited lands to make a valuation as described in the petition;

⁸⁵ SC 8/5/231; *PROME*, ‘Appendix of Unedited Petitions, 1307-1337’; *Rot. Parl.*, vol. 1, pp. 396b-397a.

capitalising on the confiscation of the Contrarians' lands and that he was motivated primarily by monetary greed.⁸⁶ That the petitioners do not appear to have been willing to make such accusations against the king is hardly surprising, but Lancaster, in the wake of his execution, was due no such distinctions. Being unable to answer any such accusations, he became the focus of many charges of wrongdoing in his role as lord and landowner.

The petition brought by the 'liege people of Leicester' in the aftermath of the Lancastrian rebellion accused Lancaster of having placed 'wicked people' (*mauveis gentz*) in charge of their town and requested that Leicester should be ruled by 'loyal people' and that the town's ancient customs be reinstated.⁸⁷ The petition was endorsed with the comment that it was the king's intention to look into the accusations; this can be shown to have been carried out through an inquisition held in 1322.⁸⁸ In the report of this inquisition we have rare evidence of direct accusations of the misuse of power by Lancaster and his retinue, which included the charge of oppression of the town's merchants through fines made on the sale of cloth and the heavy taxation of butchers, along with accusations of the flouting of the authority of the town bailiff's by Lancaster's servants.⁸⁹ The results of this petition and inquisition support the view that Lancaster was guilty of using his lands to fund both his political ambitions and the extravagant lifestyle his royal position demanded, and that the 'apparent reluctance' of his tenants to complain against him whilst he was alive, was an explanation of the 'long howl of protest' against Lancaster which Maddicott noted after his execution in 1322.⁹⁰

However, care must be taken when making such assumptions, as a closer consideration of the background of the petition illustrates. The record of the inquisition illustrates that the townspeople of Leicester went to some lengths to contrast the practices of Thomas of Lancaster with those of his (apparently) much more moderate (tyrannous?) father Edmund. Each of the

⁸⁶ Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II*, p. 113.

⁸⁷ SC 8/203/10147.

⁸⁸ *CIMC, 1307-1349*, p. 138.

⁸⁹ W. Page (ed.), 'The Victoria History of the County of Leicester', *VCH*, vol. 4 (London 1907-1964), p. 19.

⁹⁰ Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster 1307-1322*, p. 39.

fourteen complaints began with a positive comment about the ‘time of Edmund’ which was then contrasted with a negative comment about the ‘time of Thomas’. Therefore one must, in order to determine the worth of this petition as evidence of Lancaster’s reputation, place it in the historical context of the Duchy of Lancaster’s relationship with Leicester’s townsfolk. The former earl of Leicester, Simon de Montfort, although not keeping a residence in the town, had seemingly acted in concert with the wishes of its officials.⁹¹ Montfort’s tenure had been followed by that of Edmund, first earl of Lancaster. Because his administration was centred in the north, the borough of Leicester had seen very little of its earl.⁹² Therefore for almost sixty years, until the succession of Thomas of Lancaster in 1296, the people of Leicester had met with little opposition from their earl, who had either supported their aims or allowed the status quo to be maintained. Thomas of Lancaster, however, not only kept a residence in Leicester, he also endorsed a seemingly much more ‘hands on’ administration than his predecessors.⁹³

The relationship between the townsfolk and their earl deteriorated even further during the rebellion, when they refused to rally to Lancaster’s aid, declaring that they ‘despised his commands’ and held him in ‘no good will’.⁹⁴ Therefore the long-term relationship between the people of Leicester and Thomas of Lancaster must be considered as having a significant influence on the petitioners’ agenda in petitioning. Although, ultimately, the inquisition found in favour of ‘the liege men of Leicester’, without further evidence it cannot be assumed that the accusations were not exaggerated, or that the inquisition’s findings were impartial. This petition highlights the fact that one must remain conscious of any agenda underlying the petitioner’s complaint, coupled with the recognition that these sometimes contentious texts were written by experienced clerks, whose job was to portray complaints in the best possible light. This, when coupled with Maddicott’s belief that local town officials would have had detailed knowledge of national politics, disseminated

⁹¹ J. R. Maddicott, *Simon De Montfort* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 56.

⁹² S. Lloyd, ‘Edmund [called Edmund Crouchback], First Earl of Lancaster and First Earl of Leicester, Prince (1245–1296)’ *ODNB*.

⁹³ R. A. McKinley (ed.), ‘A History of the County of Leicester’, *VCH* (London, 1958), pp. 1-30.

⁹⁴ ‘Leicester Borough Records, 1103–1327’, 329 quoted in McKinley ‘A History of the County of Leicester’, pp. 1-30.

through the local county courts, makes a consideration of the rhetorical ‘spin’ of these petitions imperative. It grants us not only a deeper appreciation of the political awareness of the sponsors of these petitions, but also illustrates how Lancaster’s portrayal was shaped by the changing political climate.⁹⁵

For example, in the period immediately after his defeat and execution, Lancaster was often depicted as a ruthless landowner who was able to summon, in the words of the petition of the Abbot of Croyland, the ‘wild menaces’ of his servants, to intimidate his tenants into submission.⁹⁶ The petition, presented c.1322 to c.1327, concerned the advowson of the church of Wigtoft near Boston in Lincolnshire which Lancaster had disputed. The Croyland petitioners began their petition with a request for an enquiry into the verisimilitude of Lancaster’s claim to be the chief lord of the fee of Wigtoft.⁹⁷ The petition went on to complain that they had bought the advowson of Wigtoft church by ‘charter and permission of our lord the king’, but that in spite of this Lancaster had brought a writ of *quare impedit* against them. The ownership of the advowson by the Church is supported by the record that the abbey of Croyland on November 21, 1299 was granted the ‘alienation in mortmain’ of ‘three roods of land in Wyketoft and the advowson of the church there.’⁹⁸ After establishing their right of ownership the petitioners speak of the ‘outrajos manaces’ of Lancaster’s bailiffs. This seems to support the opinion of J. H. Ramsey, who wrote that

⁹⁵ J. R. Maddicott, ‘The County Community and the Making of Public Opinion in Fourteenth-Century England’, *TRHS* (1978), 5th series, 28, 27-43, p. 37.

⁹⁶ SC 8/103/5124.

⁹⁷ The ‘Provisions of Westminster’ of 1259, and later the Statute of Mortmain or the ‘Statute de *Viris Religiosis*’ in 1279, stated that no land could be transferred to the Church without licence from the king. A violation of the statute allowed the ‘chief lords of the fee immediate’, in this case Lancaster, to confiscate the land. This statute was created in order to halt the common practice of lands passing to the hands of ‘immortal institutions’, and out of the control and taxation system of the state. It also highlights that it was believed that the Statute of Mortmain was particularly harsh on the Church, laying them open to victimisation from corrupt officials: J. Sanders (ed.) *Documents of the Baronial Movement of Reform and Rebellion, 1258-1267* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 144, 145; Raban, *Mortmain Legislation and the English Church*, p. 29; E. H. Henderson (ed.), *Select Historical Documents of the Middle Ages* (Honolulu, 2004), pp. 148-149; W. Stubbs, *Select Charters and Other Illustrations of English Constitutional History, from the Earliest Times to the Reign of Edward the First*, 9th Ed. (Oxford, 1913), p. 451.

⁹⁸ *CPR, 1292-1301*, p. 481.

Lancaster was ‘surrounded by vassals quite used to defying the Crown’.⁹⁹ In this particular case Lancaster’s bailiffs appear to have been willing to openly subvert the inquest before the ‘ordinary’ court and therefore subvert its right to administer justice. The petition also appears to illustrate Lancaster’s apparent willingness to ignore the legal niceties that proved the ownership of the advowson by Croyland.

The petitioners’ plea was summed up with a declaration that it was only Lancaster’s power, and not any legal right, that allowed him to take the advowson. That they chose to bring their petition to a close with a direct reference to the abbey’s guardianship of the body of Saint Guthlac, which they stated they had held since their foundation, can only be explained by their wish to further highlight their community’s importance and therefore the level of Lancaster’s wrongdoing in allowing the ‘wild menaces’ the petition detailed. However, the petition perhaps did not achieve the immediate redress the abbot was hoping to achieve, as it was sent to chancery for further consideration. A further petition exists from Croyland Abbey with a request for an inquiry into the right to the same advowson; this is also accompanied by an accusation of menaces by Lancaster’s bailiffs (*manaces de ses baillifs*).¹⁰⁰ It is similarly dated but likely to have been presented after the petition just discussed, as it was simply endorsed ‘*coram rege*’, indicating that this appeal had been heard by the king.

Consideration of the semantics of the petitions relating to the actions of Lancaster in the immediate post rebellion period is a valuable tool in illustrating how the political situation of the time was used by the petitioners to gain advantage for their claims. For example, many petitioners focused on accusations of Lancaster having exploited his ‘power and lordship’ in order to increase his personal wealth at the expense of his tenants. A typical example is the plea for the restoration of the disseised lands of Nicholas de Audley, brought in 1322 by Audley’s heir, William de la Sale.¹⁰¹ The use of the common law legal term ‘disseised’ in the petition can be considered as a

⁹⁹ J. H. Ramsey, *Genesis of Lancaster: Or the Three Reigns of Edward II, Edward III and Richard II, 1307-1399*, vol. 1 (Oxford, 1913), p. 22.

¹⁰⁰ SC 8/100/4952.

¹⁰¹ SC 8/204/10168.

deliberate attempt to implicate Lancaster in illegal land confiscations.¹⁰² This petitioner, like many others, based his complaint around the accusation that rightful tenants had been ‘ousted by the power of the earl’. The petitioner asked for clear instruction as to who the lands in Bradwell, Staffordshire, belonged, and for their ultimate return. This plea was followed by an inquisition held in July 1322 that found the petitioner was the rightful heir to the lands. This would appear to support the notion of Lancaster’s guilt. However, this again assumes the integrity of an inquisition held in the aftermath of the rebellion, a period when it was politically acceptable to use Lancaster’s name as a solution to clear up what has been described as all kinds of ‘half-forgotten claims’.¹⁰³

A similar petition, also presented in 1322 by Adam de Clitheroe, was an attempt to regain a tract of land lost by Clitheroe’s father in Lancashire.¹⁰⁴ The petition recorded that Clitheroe’s lands formed part of the estates of Lancaster’s father-in-law, Henry de Lacy, coming into Lancaster’s ownership after Lacy’s death. Clitheroe began his petition by stating that his father had been ‘disseised’ of thirty-two acres of land by Lacy, going on to describe that having been inherited by Lancaster, his father’s lands were then held through his ‘power and lordship’. The use of this phrase and variants of it are found regularly in the petitions.¹⁰⁵ These were nonspecific but nonetheless useful phrases, which may be interpreted as an expression of a generally recognized misuse of power, the term being used to cover many degrees of perceived guilt. Clitheroe’s petition further suggested that Lancaster had manipulated and controlled his tenants’ access to the justice system for his own profit, stating that he could not obtain justice because of Lancaster’s influence. Clitheroe ended his petition with the request to receive ‘grace and remedy in the name of God’ (*prie grace e remedie pur dieu*), again one of many ‘stock’

¹⁰² Maddicott, *Thomas, Earl of Lancaster, 1307-1322*, pp. 38-39.

¹⁰³ For the order to raise an inquisition into Sales’ claim see SC 8/204/10166; for the result of the inquisition see SC 8/204/10167; Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster 1307-1322*, p. 33.

¹⁰⁴ SC 8/6/263.

¹⁰⁵ There are twenty-three instances of the term ‘power and lordship’ and variants such as ‘by his power’ or ‘by his lordship’, during 1320-1335, with only four petitions relating to Thomas of Lancaster: SC 8/6/263; SC 8/103/5124; SC 8/100/4952; SC 8/57/2827.

phrases used in the compilation of petitions to aid the request. However, it is also an example of the sub-text that can often be found in petitions, as this also illustrated the unspoken link between the Crown and God, as the power of the throne was considered to be the king's only through God's Grace. Therefore Clitheroe's use of this term perhaps suggests that the power to grant the return of his lands through the 'Grace of God' belonged to the king, and that Lancaster had usurped that right.

Clitheroe's petition can be assumed to have been considered a matter of some importance because it was considered *coram rege*. This significance is confirmed as the endorsement goes on to state that the land in question was part of the disputed inheritance of Alice de Lacy, dowager countess of Lancaster.¹⁰⁶ Clitheroe's petition was endorsed by an instruction to wait until the countess's claim had been settled by discussion in parliament.¹⁰⁷ Alice de Lacy, even though an extensive landholder herself through inheritance and dower, had not wielded any real power during Lancaster's lifetime, nor did she play any obvious part in her husband's political career. However, after Lancaster's death and the return of her dower lands, coupled with her *suo jure* title, she had become a significant landholder, and consequently a target for what has been described as the 'casual brutality' of 'the Despencers'.¹⁰⁸ There was no official position established for dealing with the widows of the rebels of 1322, but there is evidence of imprisonments and serious coercions against such eminent widows as the dowager countess. At stake were the lands pertaining to her personal inheritance from the Lacy family, including her inherited title of countess of Lincoln, and other dower lands. Therefore any petition relating to her substantial land holdings after Lancaster's death would have been considered of prime importance to both the king and his favourite,

¹⁰⁶ For a record of lands forfeit by Alice de Lacy see *CCR, 1318-1323*, pp. 563-564. For a further petition with the endorsement that the petitioner is 'to wait' related to the Duchess of Lancaster see *SC 8/7/318*.

¹⁰⁷ It is unlikely that this particular Adam Clitheroe (son of Hugh) is one and the same as Adam Clitheroe, son of the Lancaster adherent Robert Clitheroe: H. M. Jewell, 'Clitheroe, Robert (d. 1334)', *ODNB*. The petitioner appears, unlike his namesake, and merely from the content of this petition, to have been in opposition to Lancaster.

¹⁰⁸ Maddicott, 'Thomas of Lancaster', *ODNB*.

Hugh Despenser the younger, as part of what Fryde described as their greed induced confiscation of Contrariant lands.¹⁰⁹

Further evidence of accusations of Lancaster's misuse of his extensive powers can be found in other petitions from those under his jurisdiction, presented in the period after his downfall. For example, the petition, presented by the 'people of the lordship of Pickering' in the period c.1322 to 1327, included six complaints against Lancaster that collectively not only illustrated his grip on all aspects of this community but also an apparent willingness to flout his tenants' statutory rights.¹¹⁰ For example, the petitioners accused Lancaster of preventing them from taking advantage of their right to justice, through his refusal to allow them to take an 'attorney by writ to do suit' for him at court, a right which had been ordained in the Statute of Merton in 1236.¹¹¹ The petition also included a complaint that Lancaster had interfered in the distribution and transfer of lands through restricting or denying the petitioners' ability to sell or gift away property. The petitioners ended their complaint by describing how they had been 'disturbed lately' by Lancaster who had placed 'grievous fines' on them. There is no recorded endorsement and no further confirmation of the truth of the petitioners' accusations.

Another petition accusing Lancaster of having treated his tenants harshly was brought by one of Lancaster's tenants from further south in his Yorkshire holdings, the merchant John de Rypon of Pontefract, and is dated to c.1322. It described how Lancaster, in misusing his power over his tenants, had brought Rypon to the point of ruin by the 'prise' that the earl had applied in order to requisition various goods to provide provisions for Pontefract castle.¹¹² Rypon's petition is one of several that complain against the lengthy period of waiting for payment, often resulting in inadequate recompense, for goods taken by Lancaster. But this petition can also be used to illustrate how the petitioner, or scribe, had knowledge of, and exploited, the king's hatred of Lancaster's insistence on the full application of the Ordinances, of which clause four

¹⁰⁹ The results of this apparent greed may be illustrated through the three pages listing lands the duchess was forced to grant to Edward II: Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall*, pp. 79, 113; *CCR, 1318-1323*, pp. 574-576.

¹¹⁰ SC 8/258/12855; R. B. Turton, 'The Honor and Forest of Pickering', *The North Riding Record Society*, New Series, vol. 3 (London 1896), pp. 236-239.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

¹¹² SC 8/5/212; Ormrod, 'The Road to Boroughbridge', p. 82.

maintained that the king's abuses of prizes must be ended, thus suggesting the apparent 'double standards' of Lancaster.¹¹³ Rypon gave a detailed list of the provisions Lancaster's purveyors had taken, along with their value. For example, he stated that he had provided two beef carcasses and one of pork valued at 22 shillings and young swans (cygnets) at 28 pence (*deux carkoys de boef et un carkoys de pork, pris de xxii souts...et de cygnone xxviii denier*). These provisions, when added to the other goods listed, created a debt of £7 9s. 2d., a significant amount for a small town merchant to absorb, particularly during a period of severe famine, and when the price of food was subject to massive inflation.¹¹⁴ Rypon's petition was endorsed with the simple statement that 'the king does not pay the small debts of the earl' (*le roi ne paye mie le dette le conte*).¹¹⁵ This endorsement illustrates two aspects of the social and political climate of the period. For example, although it was probably the standard response for those requesting payment of Lancaster's debts not necessarily relating to the Crown's remit, it allows one to appreciate an aspect of the minutia of the workings of the administrative system set in place to cope with the influx of petitions relating to Lancaster's fall. Interpreted with a broader perspective the statement also allows one to see the consequences of the long famine, when the reduction in seigniorial expenditure and increased prices exaggerated the difference in the comparative wealth of the nobility and the mercantile class. What was considered as a 'small' debt to the Crown was a significant one for the merchant who claimed he had been brought to the point of ruin.

However, the number of the urban elite suffering the harsh treatment of Lancaster was small when compared to the vast majority of the population of Lancaster's forfeited lands. As discussed in the introduction the 'lower' social groups, notably the rural and urban poor, are inadequately represented in the records of the ancient petitions. This has been explained through 'bond' or unfree peasants' rights being represented legally through their lords, with the

¹¹³ G. B. Adams and H. M. Stephens (eds.), *Select Documents of English Constitutional History* (London, 1901), p. 93.

¹¹⁴ I. Kershaw, 'The Great Famine and Agrarian Crisis in England 1315-1322', *P&P* (1973), 59, pp. 3-50.

¹¹⁵ 'mie', literally 'object of little value', 'crumb': *The Anglo-Norman On-Line Hub* [<http://www.anglo-norman.net>].

majority of such cases remaining in the scope of the seigniorial courts and the communal courts of the county, hundred, borough and vill.¹¹⁶ The relative 'value' of any potential cases may also have made them unsuitable for presentation to the king. This, when coupled with the cost of both creating and travelling to present a petition, may have made it not financially viable for those with so little monetary wealth.¹¹⁷ It may also have been beneficial to the individual lord to keep the grievances of their villagers within their own communities, choosing to settle them within the remit of the manorial court. Petitioning allowed the Crown to keep watch on its authority by providing an opportunity to project royal power into the provinces, allowing it to scrutinise the actions of the local gentry and remedy any shortcomings.¹¹⁸ This may have been reason enough for the lords to try to restrict the poor to the justice of the manorial courts. The ideal of petitioning had far wider reaching implications for the local gentry than this, as the intervention of the Crown on behalf of the individual theoretically allowed the peasant to bypass local bureaucracy, established law and the wishes of their social superiors.¹¹⁹

However, two petitions that were apparently made by the poor that describe the effects of the rebellion and Lancaster's actions as a lord were both presented in c.1322. The first petition was brought by the community of the poor tenants of Hartington (*povers tenantz de Hartingdon*) in Derbyshire; the second petition was brought by the non-specified 'poor people of the land' (*povers gentz de sa terre*).¹²⁰ The petition brought by the poor of Hartington requested the return of their right to common pasture between the village of Hartington and the river Dove that, they asserted, by tradition had always belonged to them. They accused Lancaster of having seized it and withdrawing their rights to pasture there. Hartington had long been of interest to the Lancaster family: the manor of Hartington had been granted to Lancaster's father Edmund after the forfeiture of lands in 1269 by Robert de Ferrers, the

¹¹⁶ Dodd *Justice and Grace*, pp. 208-209.

¹¹⁷ Hyams, 'What Did Edwardian Villagers Understand by 'Law'?', p. 73.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 73; G. Dodd, *Crown, Magnates and Gentry: The English Parliament, 1369-1421*, PhD. Thesis, University of York, 1998; Dodd *Justice and Grace*, pp. 319, 322.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 318.

¹²⁰ SC 8/117/5812; SC 8/144/7193.

former Earl of Derby.¹²¹ That the so-called ‘poor people’ of Hartington chose to wait until after Lancaster’s downfall to present their petition raises questions about the timing of the petition, the petitioners insight into the political climate of the time, and the petitioners themselves. One must remain aware that the use of the term ‘poor’ in the petition may, at best, have been an exaggeration, used to highlight their plight and gain the sympathy of the king. For example, it is possible that these apparently minor members of Lancaster’s tenantry were in fact ‘higher’ members of the community of Hartington. This is supported by their ability to present a petition, which may indicate that they were ‘free’ peasants hoping to profit from Lancaster’s downfall by regaining (or even gaining) the use of a piece of Hartington’s common land. Although there is no way of knowing what the final result of this petition was, the ‘poor petitioners’ of Hartington were heard by the king himself, as the dorse of the petition is clearly marked *coram rege*.

The second petition presented by the non-specified ‘*povers gentz de sa terre*’, is both a more complicated and contentious one than that brought by the ‘*povers tenantz*’ of Hartington. There is no clear indicator of who was responsible for presenting the petition, and its contents are general enough to cover any number of offences. The main wrongdoers named in the petition are those ‘*counseilleurs, seneschals, baillifs e autres minestres*’ surrounding ‘Sir Thomas, formerly earl of Lancaster’ (*sire Thomas jadis counte de Lancastre*).¹²² Using the scapegoat of unnamed ‘wicked advisors’, the petition lays the blame for all wrong-doings at the hands of Lancaster’s servants.¹²³ The petition goes on to state that not only were these ‘wicked advisors’ guilty of generating ‘anguish by their prises’ but that they were also guilty of subverting the ‘services and customs previously due to the king’ (*eus servise e custumes avaunt dues al Roy*). This attempt to place the blame on Lancaster’s servants perhaps suggests that the petitioner/s were not willing to accuse the former earl outright.

¹²¹ J. R. Maddicott, ‘Robert de Ferrers, Sixth Earl of Derby (c.1239–1279)’, *ODNB*; D. Lysons and S. Lysons, ‘Hartington’, *Magna Britannia: A Topographical and Historical Account of Derbyshire*, vol. 5 (Wakefield, 1817), pp. 174-176.

¹²² SC 8/144/7193; *PROME* ‘Appendix of Unedited Petitions 1307-1337’; *Rot. Parl.*, vol. 1, p. 394a; R. B. Turton (ed.), ‘The Honour and Forest of Pickering’, *The North Riding Record Society*, new series, vol. 3 (London, 1896), pp. 256-257.

¹²³ Rosenthal, ‘The King’s “Wicked Advisors”’, pp. 595-618.

Even if one accepts that this petition was brought by one or several of the king's poorer subjects, one must not assume that there was any unity in belief, or any kind of cross-regional co-operation between the poor. Rather the use of the term '*povers gentz de sa terre*' must be assumed to be an example of the manipulation of semantics to suggest a collective complaint in order to give weight to the petitions claim.¹²⁴ The petition was endorsed by the comment that the king would like to be advised of the contents of the petition. The complaint and its endorsement reflected the Crown's continuing concern over the wrongful taking of prises. This concern is echoed in the recorded writ addressed to 'the bailiffs of all the cities and boroughs of England' of April 4 ordering that anyone arrested accused of unlawfully taking prises should be judged as a thief.¹²⁵ This writ was repeated on November 14 of the same year when it is clear that the practise of fraudulently taking goods for the supposed use of the king was still being carried out.¹²⁶ However, there were instances of petitioners whose professed poverty was genuine. For example the petition of Robert Freeman, presented between 1333 and 1334, claimed that he could not pay a fine handed to him in the common law courts.¹²⁷ It was endorsed with the instruction that he was to be pardoned of the fine due to his poverty. This is at some variance with the belief that the average peasant could not afford the cost of presenting a petition.¹²⁸

Although claims surrounding the injustice of Lancaster were common at this time, equally common were those petitions which claimed grievances against those responsible for bringing the Lancastrian rebels to justice. The plea of Andrew de Jarpunville, presented in 1322 is typical of these petitions.¹²⁹ Jarpunville appealed against his arrest as part of Lancaster's rebellion, stating that although he was a servant of Lancaster, and had 'taken the earl's robes', he was not part of the rebellion.¹³⁰ Jarpunville stated that he

¹²⁴ Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, p. 258.

¹²⁵ *CCR, 1318-1323*, p. 532.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 684-685.

¹²⁷ SC 8/47/2348.

¹²⁸ Hyams, 'What Did Edwardian Villagers Understand by 'Law'?', p. 73.

¹²⁹ SC 8/4/198.

¹³⁰ P. Coss, *The Origins of the English Gentry* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 225-227. It is interesting to note that Jarpunville had been named in the petition dating to c.1320 as one of those responsible for ousting John le Stretleye and his wife from their manor of

had been arrested by John de Olney as part of the rounding up of Lancastrian adherents. This is supported by the recorded order to arrest Jarpunville as a member of those who opposed the king (*domino rege contrariantes*).¹³¹ The petition was endorsed with the statement that the sheriff of Buckinghamshire, Philip de Aylisbury, should investigate Jarpunville's complaint.¹³² The result of this investigation led to Jarpunville's release.¹³³ The adjudication recorded that John de Olney had 'pretended' that the petitioner was an adherent of Lancaster (the reasons for Olney's deception remains unclear). The result of this investigation stated that the king did not consider the charge against Jarpunville to be reasonable and ordered his release.¹³⁴

However Jarpunville's case was not the only one to have been the result of such misinformation. The petition of William Blaket, in 1322, complained of the actions of Geoffrey de Bolestrode who 'maliciously gave him (the sheriff, Phillip de Aylesbury) to understand that William was an adherent of the king's enemies'.¹³⁵ Blaket was also released because the king considered there to be insufficient evidence against him.¹³⁶ What do these petitions tell us about the motivations of people such as Olney and Bolestrode in bringing apparently false accusations of Lancastrian adherence at this time? For example, were they guilty of personally motivated malicious intent or were they merely guilty only of following up every minor lead of Lancastrian allegiance? Olney, for example, was named as being 'appointed to arrest all the king's Contrariants' and may therefore have been merely guilty of being

Creslow in Buckinghamshire, the petition includes Jarpunville's name in the many men of the allegiance of Thomas of Lancaster (*plusours gentz qe se avowerent par le counte de Lancastre*) that carried out this raid: SC 8/3/127; CPR 1317-1321, pp. 543, 550; W. Page (ed.), 'A History of the County of Buckingham', VCH, vol. 3 (London, 1925), pp. 335-338.

¹³¹ SC 8/133/6610; *Rot. Parl.*, 1, p. 389.

¹³² 'Lists of Sheriffs for England and Wales from the Earliest Times to A.D. 1831', *Lists and Indexes* (Great Britain. Public Record Office): no. 9 (New York, 1963).

¹³³ CCR, 1323-1327, p. 451.

¹³⁴ This latter comment is significant as it indicates that the king's opinion had ultimately been sought, even though the original petition had not been noted as being dealt with *Coram Rege*. This could support the theory that the committee of 'triers' were not able, or were not allowed, to come to a final judgement alone: Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, pp. 104-107.

¹³⁵ SC 8/5/201.

¹³⁶ CCR, 1323-1327, pp. 450-451.

overzealous in his duties.¹³⁷ But his ‘pretence’ of Jarpunville’s guilt remains suggestive of a more personal motive.

Equally, however, these officials were also at the mercy of the possibility of their informants giving misleading information, and/or having malicious intent towards the accused. This is supported by the petition presented by Roger de Cave in 1322 which also named Olney as his arresting officer.¹³⁸ Cave accused Olney of having arrested him without indictment or warrant, therefore acting outside the legal necessities required for arresting those accused of rebellion. This is supported by the petition’s endorsement which required there to be an investigation into the circumstances of Cave’s arrest. The results of the enquiry record that Olney, by arresting Cave, was acting on the ‘prosecution of certain of his [Cave’s] enemies’.¹³⁹ However, the report of the enquiry does not comment on the accusation that Cave’s arrest was in any way suspect, rather it states that Olney was ‘acting by virtue of the king’s commission’ to arrest the rebels. In this way Olney was cleared of any accusation of misconduct. However, it is interesting to note that the complaint against Olney was given due consideration. Cave’s accusations were obviously taken seriously, perhaps negating the idea that Edward II was guilty of acts of indiscriminate vengeance against those who were suspected of supporting Lancaster. Cave was duly released from prison, the order stating that he was only guilty of wearing the robes of Henry de Berghersh, bishop of Lincoln.¹⁴⁰

In the aftermath of the fall of Lancaster it is unsurprising that the petitions reveal an eagerness of those accused of Lancastrian adherence to distance themselves from the rebellion. This is illustrated in the separate petitions of John de la Wodehalle and Henry de Sotehille presented in 1322, which used a denial of adherence to Lancaster in order to emphasise their pleas against wrongful imprisonment and the return of lands and goods.¹⁴¹ The

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 451.

¹³⁸ SC 8/7/329.

¹³⁹ *CCR, 1318-1323*, p. 451.

¹⁴⁰ The younger brother of Bartholomew de Burghersh, an active supporter of Lancaster, was imprisoned in the Tower of London until his release by the supporters of Isabella and Roger Mortimer in 1326: A. Verduyn, ‘Bartholomew Burghersh, the Elder, Second Lord Burghersh (d. 1355)’, *ODNB*.

¹⁴¹ SC 8/147/7326; SC 8/5/225; Ormrod, ‘The Road to Boroughbridge’, p. 88.

two petitions are similar in style and mention the same locations; however, on inspection, it is clear from the ‘hand’ that they were written by separate individuals. What can the similarity in style tell us about the two petitioners? Firstly both Wodehalle and Sotehille list the military actions at Tickhill castle, Burton-upon-Trent and Boroughbridge as examples of places where they had *not* supported the Lancastrian cause against the king. Both petitioners ended these lists with the all-encompassing phrase ‘nor elsewhere’, a final explicit denial of Lancastrian allegiance. However, through their denial, it is clear that they were both implicated in taking part in these military actions. But where the accounts of Wodehalle and Sotehille diverge is in their description of their level of involvement with Lancaster. Sotehille, who was in prison at the time of his petition, stated that he had never been part of the rebellion against the king (actually using the term ‘*rebelles*’). Sotehille’s denial is defensive, and attempts to establish that he had been coerced by Lancaster through threats ‘on pain of losing goods and chattels and in peril of [his] bod[y]’. His petition went on to claim that when he discovered Lancaster’s plans he had left the rebel forces leading to him being ‘pursued ... [and] robbed of ... all that he had, and [had] barely escaped alive’. Despite this, Sotehille stated, he had been imprisoned as a Lancastrian supporter. Sotehille concluded his petition with a claim for the king’s pity and grace. The reply to Sotehille’s petition is a simple denial, stating that ‘he is in prison and the king will ordain for his release...at his will’.

But where Sotehille’s petition had been defensive, Wodehalle’s was more frank. He stated that he had been imprisoned as an adherent of Thomas, late earl of Lancaster (*suit de la atendaunce Thomas jardis counte de Lancastre*), and that he had later been released, but denied any part in the actions against the king. He concluded with a request for ‘the king’s grace’ for the return of his lands and goods as ‘he had [already received] the king’s grace of the delivery of his body’.¹⁴² The difference between the two petitioners is further enhanced when one researches the eventual outcomes of their complaints. Wodehalle’s petition was endorsed by the order that he should

¹⁴² Literally he had received the king’s justice and been released from prison.

produce evidence of his release, 'he [was] to show his delivery'.¹⁴³ This was obviously done as there is evidence of Wodhalle's heir being granted the return of his father's lands after an enquiry had found that Wodehalle senior had not been an adherent of Lancaster, dying 'in the king's peace and faith'.¹⁴⁴ Sotehille, however, apparently languished in gaol, at the king's mercy.

1.3 Revolution and Rehabilitation

With the deposition of Edward II in 1327 and the resultant change in regime, Lancaster's reputation went through a dramatic transformation. After his execution in 1322 his reputation was to reach its lowest point, but after 1327, in the period of political and dynastic upheaval that culminated in the deposition and death of Edward II, he underwent something of a rehabilitation. He was no longer viewed as an enemy of the king, but rather a defender of the sovereignty of the Crown, notably through his opposition to the Despensers. He was even described in a petition presented in 1329 as a saint (*seint Thomas de Lancastre*).¹⁴⁵

The petitioner claiming Lancaster's sainthood, Geoffrey D'Abetot, is first mentioned in the records of the petitions in 1327. He is recorded as having been an active member of Lancaster's rebellion but, after the deposition, he nevertheless felt able to speak openly of his adherence to Lancaster.¹⁴⁶ There does not appear to have been any need in the petition for apology or excuse for this loyalty, as clearly there was a new 'enemy' of the Crown who had supplanted Lancaster, the final 'wicked advisor' of the new king's father, Hugh Despenser the younger.¹⁴⁷ D'Abetot complained about the loss of his manor of Redmarley through the coercion of Hugh Despenser the younger. D'Abetot accused Despenser of arresting him and holding him in

¹⁴³ Wodehalle would have been tried by the Justices of gaol delivery, a branch of the assize court: Prestwich, *Plantagenet England*, p. 218. For a discussion of the justice system: R. W. Kaeuper, 'Law and Order in Fourteenth-Century England: The Evidence of Special Commissions of Oyer and Terminer', *Speculum* (1979), 54, 734-784.

¹⁴⁴ *CCR, 1317-1321*, p. 624.

¹⁴⁵ SC 8/17/820.

¹⁴⁶ SC 8/239/11925; J. W. Willis-Bund and H. A. Doubleday, 'The Victoria History of the County of Worcester', *VCH*, vol. 3 (London, 1901-1971), pp. 481-486.

¹⁴⁷ Rosenthal, 'The King's "Wicked Advisers"', pp. 595-618.

prison until he granted him ownership of Redmarley, with no offer of recompense.¹⁴⁸ D'Abetot stated in the petition that, after Edward III's return to England with Queen Isabella, the manor was granted to John Sapy through Sapy's 'false and wicked information'.¹⁴⁹ Although the majority of D'Abetot's lands were eventually restored, the manor of Redmarley was not included. Therefore the petition of 1327 was joined by a second petition, in which he named Lancaster as '*seint*', presented in 1329.¹⁵⁰ This petition is illustrative of the rehabilitation of Lancaster in the years after the deposition of Edward II, and the growth of the cult surrounding him, with D'Abetot's use of the term '*seint*' after the deposition. D'Abetot clearly had knowledge of the transposed political reputations of Lancaster and the two Despensers at this time. He not only felt able to claim his support for Lancaster against the Despensers, but also openly linked himself with other Contrarians such as Humphrey de Bohun, earl of Hereford, who had died fighting with Lancaster at Boroughbridge and, perhaps most tellingly in the period of the deposition, the partner of Queen Isabella, Roger Mortimer. This petition also illustrates D'Abetot's increasing anger at his failure to regain his manor. He requested justice for the on-going four year old dispute and the petition was endorsed by the instruction that he was to have justice under the statute regarding rebel losses.¹⁵¹

This statute, which formalised the charges against the Despensers in the first parliament of Edward III's reign, had a massive impact on those who wished to gain redress for perceived wrongs done to them as a consequence of the Lancastrian rebellion. For example, the petition of Maud Botetourt, widow of John Botetourt, presented in 1327, was candid about her husband's

¹⁴⁸ *CPR, 1321-1324*, p. 102. The D'Abetot family had been active members of the Worcestershire gentry, traceable from as early as the Conquest and the Domesday records: J. H. Round and E. Mason, 'Urse D'Abetot, Administrator (c.1040-1108)' *ODNB; Cch.R, 1327-1341*, p. 464.

¹⁴⁹ The loss of Redmarley continued to irk D'Abetot, and it may be that he was one of the 'certain malefactors' that had broken into '*Ridmarle D'Abetot*' and 'carried away Sapy's goods' in 1327: *CPR, 1327-1330*, pp. 40, 73; Willis-Bund and Doubleday, 'The County of Worcester', *VCH*, pp. 481-486.

¹⁵⁰ SC 8/263/13101.

¹⁵¹ *Statutes at Large*, vol. 1, p. 189, vol. 10, pp. 16-19; *Statutes of the Realm, 1235-1377*, pp. 251-257.

involvement with Lancaster.¹⁵² Maud Botetourt's petition made two complaints. Firstly, she requested the return of the manor of Iselhampstead in Buckinghamshire, which she accused Hugh Despenser the younger of having forced her and her husband to grant to him as recompense for their involvement in his exile in 1321.¹⁵³ Secondly she requested that a fine made by her husband while he was in prison after 'the quarrel' of the earl of Lancaster be annulled. Maud's petition was endorsed by granting her aid through 'the statute'. Edward III, when setting out this statute in March 1327, began with a clause establishing the Despensers' guilt in the downfall of Edward II, noting their 'wicked [or evil] counsel' (*malveis conseil*).¹⁵⁴ It also immediately established that Lancaster was at the forefront of the move to have the two Despensers banished in 1321, underlining Lancaster's rehabilitated position as a defender of the Crown. The statute's third clause satisfied Maud Botetourt's complaints stating that 'all assurances made to the rebels [meaning at this point the two Despensers] by duress shall be void'.¹⁵⁵

For Maud Botetourt and other petitioners, 1327 was an important watershed in their attempts to achieve redress. The rule of Edward II had ended, accompanied by the removal of Lancaster's final adversaries, the two Despensers. Edward III along with his regents Queen Isabella and her partner Roger Mortimer were wholehearted in a desire to establish the young king's place as monarch and therefore sought both the restoration of Edward II's reputation and the vilification of the Despensers. It was therefore important that Lancaster's death was portrayed as being the result of his opposition to the regime that had so badly influenced the new king's father. In addition to this, Queen Isabella and Roger Mortimer were at this point closely allied with Lancaster's brother and heir, Henry of Lancaster, who wished to regain his brother's estates, titles and status, therefore it was politically acceptable for Lancaster's followers to attempt to re-establish themselves as supporters of the

¹⁵² SC 8/171/8534. This petition can be dated to the immediate aftermath of Edward II's deposition as it must have been presented before November 1328 when the petitioner was recorded as having died: *CFR, 1327-1337*, p. 112.

¹⁵³ Page, *A History of the County of Buckingham*, pp. 203-218.

¹⁵⁴ Rosenthal, 'The King's 'Wicked Advisers'', pp. 595-618; *Statutes at Large*, vol. 1, p. 189 and vol. 10, p. 31; *Statutes of the Realm, 1235-1377*, pp. 251-257.

¹⁵⁵ *Statutes at Large*, vol. 1, p. 190.

Crown, and attempt to gain the reversal of their punishments as part of Lancaster's rebellion.¹⁵⁶

An example of the changing way in which Lancaster's name was exploited is illustrated through the evidence of the petition of Richard de Messing 'citizen of London', dated to c.1327.¹⁵⁷ This petition, detailing a request for the restoration of lands leased by Messing in Essex, was the second presented concerning these lands, the first being brought in c.1322.¹⁵⁸ This earlier petition detailed how Messing's lands had been forfeited through their owner's, John de Goldyngton's, support of Lancaster.¹⁵⁹ This petition was dealt with through an enquiry, with the result that Messing was restored to his pre-rebellion lands.¹⁶⁰ The petition brought by Messing in c.1327 concerned the same lands. These had been returned as had been detailed in the record of the enquiry commissioned through Messing's earlier petition, but he had then been subsequently disseised of them by Thomas Gobioun, Sheriff of Essex, who Messing named as a supporter of an unspecified 'Hugh Despenser'.¹⁶¹ This petition was endorsed with a recommendation back to 'common law'. This is in line with the statute enacted in 1327 dealing with the actions of the two Despensers and their retainers, which stated that anyone who had been forced to release their lands by 'force or duress to the said persons' would have a 'writ out of chancery' to have their case heard in the common law courts.¹⁶² Messing's two petitions show a distinct difference in approach to the outcome for two very similar complaints. The original complaint was dealt with through the petitioning process, but the second petition dating to c.1327

¹⁵⁶This is illustrated by ten petitions from Henry of Lancaster regarding the return of rights and lands confiscated after Thomas of Lancaster's execution that can be firmly dated to between 1327 and 1330 SC 8/56/2773; SC 8/157/7819; SC 8/167/8318; SC 8/57/2806; SC 8/56/2768; SC 8/343/16152; SC 8/166/8275; SC 8/56/2766; SC 8/342/16127;

SC 8/57/2807B; Bothwell, *Falling From Grace*, p. 199.

¹⁵⁷ SC 8/14/674.

¹⁵⁸ SC 8/6/270.

¹⁵⁹ There are two further petitions relating to Goldyngton's forfeiture and arrest: SC 8/264/13172 and SC 8/5/215; his arrest being datable to January 30, 1323: *CPR, 1321-1324*, p. 238.

¹⁶⁰ *CCR, 1318-1323*, p. 595; *CIM, 1307-1349*, p. 149.

¹⁶¹ See Chapter Two for a discussion of those petitions that did not specify which Despenser they referred to.

¹⁶² *Statutes of the Realm, 1235-1377*, pp. 252-253. For an explanation of this distinction see the Introduction to Appendix A.

was to be addressed through the ordinary law courts. The two Despensers were to be considered as criminals and their actions treated as crimes.¹⁶³

The difference between the endorsements of Messing's two complaints may be explained by several factors. In 1327 the new regime was eager to establish Edward III's rights as sovereign, with an important part of this being the rehabilitation of his father's reputation through the re-establishment of his innocence. This was to be achieved by showing the guilt of the Despensers who, as outsiders and 'wicked advisors', were to be depicted as being separate from the royal family.¹⁶⁴ This separation of the Despensers from the ranks of the royal family is illustrated in the first three articles of Edward III's first statute which were all created to establish their criminality. Unlike the revocation of the pardons of the rebels of 1322 when Edward II named only Humphrey de Bohun, earl of Hereford and Essex directly, Edward III and his regents did not hesitate in the first statutes of the reign to place Lancaster in the position of defender of the Crown.¹⁶⁵ The statute described Lancaster as having pursued those (the Despensers) who Edward III, and co-incidentally Queen Isabella and Roger Mortimer, held responsible for the majority of the troubles of Edward II's reign. The statute named Lancaster by his titles of earl of Lancashire and Leicester and his role as the steward of England (*seneschal d'Engleterre*), the significance of this wording not only highlighted the earl's nobility and status but also illustrated his on-going rehabilitation.

Another petition that illustrated the dramatic reversal in the reputation of Thomas of Lancaster after the change in regime, and which is in total contrast to Wodehalle and Sotehille's denial of Lancastrian adherence of 1322, is the petition of the parson of Wigan, dated to 1327.¹⁶⁶ The wording of this petition suggests that Lancaster's reputation was still undergoing its transformation from rebel to '*seint*' at this point, leaving one with the impression that the cleric was unsure whether to deny or admit his support for Lancaster. He began his petition by admitting that he had been obligated to

¹⁶³ *Statutes of the Realm*, pp. 252-253.

¹⁶⁴ Rosenthal, 'The King's "Wicked Advisers"', pp. 595-618.

¹⁶⁵ According to J. S. Hamilton, Bohun was 'the natural leader of the opposition to the younger Despenser's territorial aggrandisement': J. S. Hamilton, 'Humphrey de Bohun (VII), Fourth Earl of Hereford and Ninth Earl of Essex (c.1276-1322)', *ODNB; Statutes at Large*, vol. 10, pp. 19-21, 31.

¹⁶⁶ SC 8/16/786.

Lancaster's lordship to provide prayers and a horseman for the earl, diplomatically naming Lancaster's rebellion as his 'enterprise'. By using this term the petitioner avoided accusing the earl of any wrongdoing, and goes on to justify his (and through association, Lancaster's), actions by stating that he did so in order to defend the king and Crown. He made this point by stating that he wished to protect Edward II from the 'poison' and 'bad counsel' that surrounded the king. The use of the term 'poison', the Anglo-Norman 'venyme', is noteworthy as, for this parson/petitioner, it would have had the additional significance of the direct religious imagery of the snake and its part in the original 'Fall from Grace', the term being used in this instance as analogous for the 'evil' councillors surrounding the king.¹⁶⁷ However, as evidence for the change in Lancaster's standing the importance of this petition lies in the petitioner's final plea. Following on from his earlier tentative statement of Lancastrian support he requested that his punishment should be repealed, stating that he was 'guilty of nothing'. From the conclusion of this petition we can see that Lancaster's actions in the rebellion were, in the aftermath of the deposition, to be seen as directed against the two Despensers rather than against the Crown.

Lancaster's reputation was to remain high throughout the post deposition period. For example, he became the focus of popular veneration with several attempts to gain his canonisation.¹⁶⁸ The first attempt was made in 1327 in a letter to Pope John XXII under the seal of Edward III, although more likely at the behest of Queen Isabella and Roger Mortimer. In it Lancaster was depicted as Edward III's 'most beloved kinsman', his death by execution being described as his having 'fall[en] asleep in God'.¹⁶⁹ This sponsorship by the new regime, firstly under the regency and later directly from Edward III, along with the fiscal significance for the Church of this popular veneration, is illustrated by two petitions presented around 1327 and

¹⁶⁷ Rosenthal, 'The King's "Wicked Advisers"', pp. 595-618.

¹⁶⁸ *Rot. Parl.*, Edward III, 2, p. 7. It is interesting to note that in the later middle ages there was not a single instance of a cult arising from 'self-promoted' men such as Piers Gaveston or Andrew Harcla: Bothwell, *Falling From Grace*, p. 227.

¹⁶⁹ W. M. Ormrod, *The Reign of Edward III: Crown and Political Society in England, 1327-1377* (Yale, 1990), p. 16.

1334 by the Prior and Priory of Pontefract.¹⁷⁰ The earlier petition complained that offerings left at the site of Lancaster's execution were being spent by the lay community to the detriment of the Church. The later petition complained that the priory was being denied the administration of the offerings to the chapel built for the veneration of Lancaster. The cult was therefore profitable enough to impact on the running of the Priory. These petitions are not only indicative of popular support for Lancaster's cult but also for its sponsorship by the established regime.

1.4 Conclusion

This chapter opened by asserting that Thomas, 2nd earl of Lancaster, at the start of Edward II's reign had not conformed to the image of an archetypal opponent of the Crown. But on March 11, 1322, only days before the battle of Boroughbridge, Edward II had denounced Lancaster and his associates as traitors.¹⁷¹ As Bothwell noted, 'to backbite within the court was one thing', but to be named as an opponent of the king, someone who had betrayed not only his king and kingdom but 'English society as a whole', was very much another.¹⁷² What do the petitions reveal about Lancaster's changing reputation at this time? Do they support the allegations that he not only acted tyrannously against those within his sphere of influence but was also a rebel and a traitor?

Anthony Tuck stated that all post-Conquest English reigns had two distinguishing features, 'a monarchy which enjoyed... authority throughout the realm... and a higher nobility which... sought to exercise political influence over the king'.¹⁷³ Lancaster's career certainly supports this theory. For a decade Lancaster had sought to install parliamentary reform and limit the king's power. But to attack the king for an assumed failure of his royal duties was tantamount to encroaching on perceptions of royal power, and could have been considered treasonous. However, the English had historically accepted

¹⁷⁰ SC 8/66/3283; SC 8/170/8471.

¹⁷¹ Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II*, p. 58; Bellamy, *The Law of Treason in England*, p. 49.

¹⁷² Bothwell, *Falling from Grace*, p. 13.

¹⁷³ A. Tuck, *Crown and Nobility 1272-1461: Political Conflict in Late Medieval England* (London, 1985), p. 9.

that ‘the Crown [was] something greater than the good of the king’.¹⁷⁴ This allowed for there to be a distinction between treason against the king and treason against the Crown. Treason against the king constituted acts specifically against the person of the king, whilst treason against the Crown was perceived as being against the common good of the realm.¹⁷⁵ This seems to be in line with a recurring concept found in thirteenth and fourteenth century political writings which stated that there should be a method of reviewing the conduct of a deficient monarch, by force if necessary. This was confirmed in both *Magna Carta* and the Boulogne Agreement of 1308, which stated that if the king was not willing to remove ‘the evil’ then ‘the evil must be removed by constraint’.¹⁷⁶ There was also a clear and distinct separation between acts of treason and rebellion with, according to Bothwell, internal dissent and rebellion being almost commonplace in medieval life.¹⁷⁷ Therefore, although raising troops to raid Despenser lands and even marching on London to demand their exile in parliament would not have been considered acts of treason, Lancaster's

¹⁷⁴ W. Childs, ‘Resistance and Treason in the Vita Edwardi Secundi’, in M. Prestwich, R. H. Britnell and R. Frame (eds.), *Thirteenth Century England VI: Proceedings of the Durham Conference 1995* (Woodbridge, 1997), pp. 182-183.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 182-183.

¹⁷⁶ In 1308 this ‘evil’ referred to Piers Gaveston; M. H. Keen, *England in the Later Middle Ages: A Political History* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 70-71; R. Barber, ‘Deposition of Edward II’, *University of Queensland Law Journal* (1978), 10, 2, 164-171, *passim*. Clause 61 of *Magna Carta* stated: ‘If we, our chief justice, our officials, or any of our servants offend in any respect against any man, or transgress any of the articles of the peace or of this security, and the offence is made known to four of the said twenty-five barons, they shall come to us ... to declare it and claim immediate redress. If we ... make no redress within forty days [the twenty five barons] may distrain upon and assail us in every way possible, with the support of the whole community of the land, by seizing our castles, lands, possessions, or anything else saving only our own person and those of the queen and our children, until they have secured such redress ... Having secured the redress, they may then resume their normal obedience to us’:

The British Library: Treasures in Full

[http://www.bl.uk/treasures/magnacarta/translation/mc_trans.html]; H. Rothwell, *English Historical Documents 1189-1327* (London, 1975), pp. 525-526; For a transcript of the Boulogne agreement see Appendix Four in J. R. S. Phillips, *Aymer de Valence, Earl of Pembroke, 1307-1324* (Oxford, 1972); Childs, ‘Resistance and Treason in the Vita Edwardi Secundi’, in Prestwich, Britnell and Frame, *Thirteenth Century England VI: Proceedings of the Durham Conference 1995*, p. 182; M. Prestwich, *English Politics the Thirteenth Century* (Basingstoke, 1990), p. 11.

¹⁷⁷ Bothwell, *Falling From Grace*, p. 13.

alleged correspondence with the Scottish king and his having effectively declared war against the king, with ‘*baner displaide*’, certainly was.¹⁷⁸

Contemporaneously Lancaster was depicted as either a traitor or a saint, with little middle ground being available to the, at best, subjective chroniclers. The Lancastrian supported author of the *Brut* spoke of Thomas of Lancaster as ‘*the gode*’ and ‘*gentil erl*’, and of his praying with ‘*pitouse wordes*’ on the way to his execution, pleading for God’s mercy, as the chronicler declared that ‘the earthly king has forsaken us’ (*þe erþely kyng haþ us forsake*).¹⁷⁹ This depiction emphasised Edward II’s role as part of a theocracy, a God appointed monarchy, but also Lancaster’s role as Steward of England as defender of the Crown. However, the author of the *Bridlingtoniensi*, readily depicted Lancaster as guilty of treason, noting an allegation made by the king that Lancaster had treasonously corresponded with Robert Bruce, king of Scotland.¹⁸⁰ However, the chronicler was unwilling to openly agree with Edward II’s accusation, even though he had reportedly seen one of Lancaster’s alleged letters, prudently asserting that only God could know the truth of the accusation.¹⁸¹ This caution was even shown by the pro-Edwardian author of the *Vita Edwardi Secundi*. Describing the same accusation he was also unwilling to openly accuse Lancaster of corresponding with the Scots which would have escalated rebellion into the act of treason, stating that it was for ‘more important persons to decide’.¹⁸²

Modern historians have similarly been divided in their assessment of the earl. For example, Stubbs and Tout focused only on the political impact of the career of Thomas of Lancaster, declaring that although he may have been

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 13; *Brut*, pp. 1, 21; Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster, 1307-1322*, pp. 279-289. However, according to Bellamy (and, incidentally, Henry of Lancaster in 1327), Thomas of Lancaster had technically not been guilty of treason as war had not been officially declared as the king had not unfurled his own banner: Bellamy, *The Law of Treason in England*, pp. 49-51, 202; *Rot. Parl.*, II, pp. 3-5.

¹⁷⁹ *Brut*, pp. 216, 221, 223.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 216, 221, 223.

¹⁸¹ *Bridlingtoniensi*, p. 78; Given-Wilson, *Chronicles*, p. 10.

¹⁸² *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, p. 76. Other chronicles do not mention an accusation of collaboration with the Scots at all. For example, the Lanercost chronicler, giving reasons for Lancaster’s beheading, noted only that he had been charged with bearing arms against the king: *Lanercost*, p. 234.

politically principled he was nevertheless an inept statesman.¹⁸³ Maddicott described the earl emotively as a ruthless, ‘rapacious’ and ‘grasping tyrant’, who behaved without compunction in punishing those who acted against him, whilst Fryde considered him to have been willing to compromise, or at least undermine, his political principles to satisfy personal animosities.¹⁸⁴ Maddicott added to his view of Lancaster, describing his attitude to the reform of the Crown through the implementation of the Ordinances and depicted Lancaster as remaining a steadfast but ‘isolated defender of [an] abandoned cause.’¹⁸⁵

A consideration of the changing portrayals of Lancaster within the petitions are equally suggestive of a complex individual whose personal and political motivations often warred against each other. For example, a consideration of Thomas of Lancaster’s life and finances outside of the royal court, as depicted through the content of the petitions, portrays a man whose own great wealth and power supports Maddicott’s statement that Lancaster placed ‘heavy pressure’ on his tenants and neighbours. This ‘tyranny’ was echoed in the words of certain petitioners who accused him of placing ‘*grevouses*’ obligations on them.¹⁸⁶ Conway Davies and Lawrence both concurred with, and emphasised this by noting that there were as many complaints that could be describes as acts of ‘tyranny’ brought against Lancaster after his downfall as there were against the Despencers in 1327.¹⁸⁷ The number of petitions directly relating to the rebellion, and particularly to Thomas of Lancaster himself appear to support this theory. Graph 1.1 clearly illustrates that the number of petitions relating to Lancaster rose dramatically after his execution (from one petition in 1321 to ninety in 1322).¹⁸⁸ However, this study has illustrated that this sudden rise in petitioning cannot be

¹⁸³ Stubbs, *The Constitutional History of England*, vol. 2, pp. 350-351; Tout, *The History of England*, pp. 265-266.

¹⁸⁴ Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster, 1307-1322*, pp. 325-326; Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II*, pp. 19-20.

¹⁸⁵ Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster, 1307-1322* p. 326.

¹⁸⁶ SC 8/258/12855; Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster, 1307-1322*, p. 33.

¹⁸⁷ J. Conway Davies, *The Baronial Opposition to Edward II: Its Character and Policy: A Study in Administrative History* (Cambridge, 1918), pp. 98-99; M. Lawrence, ‘Rise of a Royal favourite: the Early Career of Hugh Despenser the Elder’ in G. Dodd and A. Musson (eds.) *The Reign of Edward II: New Perspectives* (Woodbridge, 2006), pp. 205-219.

¹⁸⁸ Dropping to thirty-three in 1323 with only another seventy-three petitions being presented from 1324-1335: See Graph 1.1.

interpreted exclusively as a response to the petitioners having obtained access to justice after the removal of a tyrannous landlord. Although claims surrounding the injustice of Lancaster were common, and often deserved, so were those complaints against the failings of the bureaucracy dealing with the confiscations made after his execution. Rather than evidence of Maddicott's 'long howl of protest' against Lancaster, this study has shown that the increase in petitioning was at least in part due to Edward II and Hugh Despenser's ruthless capitalisation on the confiscated lands and property of Lancaster and the Contrarians.¹⁸⁹

Nevertheless, there are petitions that claim that Lancaster suppressed his tenants' rights, often through the '*outrajos manaces*' of his servants, which supports J. H. Ramsey's opinion that Lancaster was 'surrounded by vassals quite used to defying the Crown'.¹⁹⁰ Although there is little doubt that these servants acted under Lancaster's instruction, the idea that they also acted independently cannot be dismissed. The size of Lancaster's landholdings would have resulted in a necessary delegation of power by Lancaster, and a certain amount of administrative autonomy must have existed.¹⁹¹ When these considerations are taken into account, it is unsurprising that there was an increase in petitioning in a period when it was politically acceptable to use Lancaster's name to clear up all kinds of 'half-forgotten claims'.¹⁹² However, that Thomas, earl of Lancaster, was guilty of using his not inconsiderable influence over his own territorial holdings is unlikely to be challenged. The petitions also illustrate Lancaster's use of his servants to create an atmosphere of fear and therefore reluctance to attempt to proceed against him. Again quoting the petition of the abbot and convent of Croyland discussed above, there seems to be evidence of Lancaster having used the 'wild menaces' of his bailiffs in order to intimidate his tenants into submission.¹⁹³ These petitions may be considered as being evidence of Lancaster's willingness to suppress the right of his tenants to access the king's justice, and therefore constituted

¹⁸⁹ Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster 1307-1322*, p. 39.

¹⁹⁰ SC 8/100/4952; Ramsey, *Genesis of Lancaster*, p. 22.

¹⁹¹ Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster*, pp. 9-39; Prestwich, *Plantagenet England, 1225 – 1360*, p. 364; Walker, *The Lancastrian Affinity 1361-1399*; Whitaker, *History of Whalley*, p. 218.

¹⁹² Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster 1307-1322*, p. 33.

¹⁹³ SC 8/103/5124.

individual acts of ‘personal’ tyranny. As stated in the introduction to this study there are two definitions to the term ‘tyranny’. The modern definition can be applied to *anyone* who exercises power unjustly or oppressively.¹⁹⁴ By this modern definition, Lancaster can be declared as having acted tyrannously, there being evidence in the content of the petitions that he acted without consideration of his tenants’ rights, either directly or through the offices of his servants. However, one must remain aware that these petitions were presented in the years immediately after Lancaster’s downfall and may merely reflect the petitioners’ attempted exploitation of the notoriety of Lancaster engendered after the rebellion.

Whatever their opinions of their erstwhile lord, the petitioners appear to have been uncomfortable naming Lancaster as a traitor. This is illustrated through the use of expressions such as ‘Thomas, *formerly* earl of Lancaster’ which recognised Lancaster’s fall without resorting to any direct accusation of disloyalty or dishonour. This is also demonstrated in the terms used to describe Lancaster’s uprising, with only eight petitions including the word ‘rebellion’ (*rebellione, reellioun*). Significantly, seven of these were presented in the pre-deposition period, 1322-1326. This is in contrast to the forty-five instances of the term ‘quarrel’ used to describe Lancaster’s uprising. The different terms may be explained once again through the political sensitivity of the petitioners, this time to the king’s response to the death of his cousin. The use of the informal term ‘quarrel’ placed Lancaster’s part in the rebellion on the level of a familial ‘falling out’, agreeing with Stubbs who stated that the problems of the reign of Edward II were of ‘personal and family faction [rather than of] great causes’.¹⁹⁵

In the wake of the deposition the level of political astuteness shown by the ‘ordinary’ man is once again illustrated through the changing portrayal of Lancaster in the petitions. Lancaster was portrayed as a defender of the Crown, a loyal and honourable member of the royal family, in direct contrast to the two Despencers who, as both outsiders and ‘wicked advisors’, were to become the focus of blame for the catastrophic end to Edward II’s reign. But whatever changes in his political reputation are illustrated in the content of the petitions,

¹⁹⁴ Oxford English Dictionary: [<http://dictionary.oed.com>].

¹⁹⁵ Stubbs, *The Constitutional History of England*, pp. 304-305.

they can only indirectly add to our knowledge of the actual character of Lancaster. Lancaster the man remains something of an enigma. His essential loyalty to the Crown, if not the king, coupled with Edward II's familial regard for him is also underlined in the revocation of the pardons of the rebels of 1322 when Edward II named only Humphrey de Bohun, earl of Hereford and Essex directly.¹⁹⁶ Lancaster's influential background and the complicated political situation of the period, has each been studied at length. However, in agreement with the contention that Lancaster had received little mercy compared to Edward II, *this* consideration must remain with the evidence of the petitions. Although portraying him as a powerful (but not necessarily merciful) lord, an influential member of the royal family and a political power-broker, they never openly condemned his actions or labelled him as a traitor, even when political prudence would have dictated that they should.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶ Hamilton, 'Humphrey de Bohun (VII)', *ODNB; Statutes at Large*, vol. 10, pp. 19-21.

¹⁹⁷ Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster 1307-1322*, p. 318.

CHAPTER 2: HUGH DESPENSER, EARL OF WINCHESTER AND HUGH DESPENSER THE YOUNGER

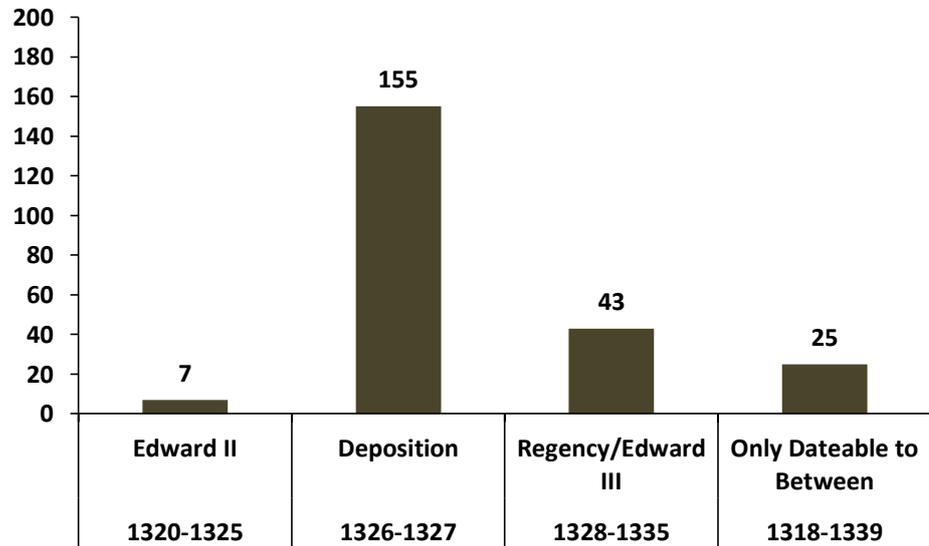
2.1 Tyranny, Revenue and Administrative Reform

The fall of Thomas of Lancaster in 1322, coupled with the abandonment of the Ordinances, greatly strengthened Edward II's basis of power. However, during the final years of his reign he singularly failed to take advantage of this position and once again allowed his reign to be dominated by an unwise choice of personal companion in the form of Hugh Despenser the younger. Edward II's growing dependence on the joint counsel of this favourite and his father, Hugh Despenser the elder, along with the exclusion of his erstwhile most trusted councillors, began the period that has become known as the 'tyranny' of Edward II.¹

In order to consider the careers of the two Despensers from the viewpoint of the petitioners, this chapter will be broken down into five sections. The first section will consider the effects of Edward II and the Despensers' acquisition of the lands and wealth of Lancaster and the Contrarians, through the concerns expressed by the petitioners. It will also consider the implications of administrative reform on the logistics of hearing the petitions. The second section will consider the implications of the promotion and actual use of the modern term 'the Despensers'. This term not only links father and son but has allowed a reputation to develop of an indivisibility of motive and action between the two that remains contentious. This study will discuss the validity of this 'indivisibility' in light of the evidence of the petitions, which clearly indicate that the actions of father and son *can* be separated. Therefore, in order to further study the concept of the two Despensers as a *divisible* unit, this section will also consider the incidence and implications of those petitions where it is not clear which of the two Despensers is being referred to. The following two sections will consider the contents of the petitions directly relating to the actions of the two Despensers individually; with the chapter concluding with a general deliberation of the overall results of the survey of the

¹ The 'tyranny' has been discussed many times, but notably by Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II*.

Despensers related petitions. Graph 2.1 illustrates the number of petitions related to the two Despensers presented during the time of their ascendancy, the period of the deposition and the first years of Edward III’s reign, covering the years c.1320 – c.1335.²



Graph 2.1: The petitions related to both Despensers, split by period, 1320-c.1335.³

An immediate expression of this so called ‘tyranny’ was conveyed by the seemingly ruthless exploitation by the king and the two Despensers of the forfeited lands of Lancaster and the Contrarians in the aftermath of their failed rebellion. As Bothwell noted, quoting the *Scalacronica*, Edward II kept ‘for himself whatever he was able to grab of the lands forfeited’ by Lancaster and the Contrarians.⁴ The petitions illustrate Fryde’s contention that the three were motivated primarily by monetary greed and that historians had ‘grotesquely underestimated and misunderstood the motives...of these men at the height of their power’.⁵ This is highlighted by the actions of the parliament of February 1324 which was held in an atmosphere of ‘administrative reform’, with the intention to ‘improve record keeping and ensur[e] the efficient collection of

² See Appendix A2 for a detailed breakdown of these petitions.

³ The category ‘only dateable between 1318 and 1339’ constitutes those petitions where the suggested dating extends beyond that of the other categories.

⁴ A. King (ed.), Sir Thomas Gray, *Scalacronica, 1272-1363* (Woodbridge, 2005), pp. 90-91, in Bothwell, *Falling From Grace*, p. 104.

⁵ Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II*, p. 3; Saul, ‘The Despensers and the Downfall of Edward II’, p. 3.

royal revenue'.⁶ Whether or not Edward II was keen to embrace administrative reform, he appears to have been eager to assess all forms of revenue available to him. This was to include the collection of all debts owed to the Contrariants (which were now owed to the Crown through forfeiture), a tallying of the returns from Templar forfeitures, and the proceeds of clerical subsidies granted to Edward II by the pope in 1323-1324 in aid of the Scottish wars (the majority of which, because of a new Scottish truce, went to the treasury).⁷ Although in early May 1322 the treasury had held no more than £1,195, an estimate of the royal revenue in January 1324 assigned Edward II a net annual worth of £60,549, with the income from the Contrariant confiscations amounting to £12,643, which alone exceeded the traditional income from the shires by £900.⁸

The petitions record the impact of this, with examples of claims made relating to debt and the payment of homage for forfeited lands. In the confusion of the post-Boroughbridge period, the petitions illustrate the apprehension of minor landowners through their requests for clarification of whether their lands were subject to the forfeiture of their lords, along with the subsequent financial obligations to the king. Take for example, the petition of 'Roger de Whatton, farmer of the manor of Kislingbury' who complained of the actions of Gerard del Isle, the heir of Warrin del Isle, a rebel who had forfeited his lands due to his adherence to Lancaster's cause.⁹ Whatton, who held some of Warrin del Isle's forfeited lands, accused Isle's son of robbing him. Due to this robbery, Whatton complained that he now had problems meeting his obligation to 'levy the king's debt from the chattels' of the former Contrariant.¹⁰ However, Whatton's appeal apparently found little sympathy with the triers, as the endorsement merely referred him back to common law.

⁶ There had been no meeting of parliament after that of November 1322, although 'writs of summons' for a parliament were issued on November 20, 1323, it was not due to meet until January 20, 1324. It was later postponed until February 23, 1324: *PROME*, 'Introduction', Parliament of February 1324.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Phillips, *Edward II*, pp. 419-422; Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II*, pp. 93-105; *PROME*, 'Introduction', Parliament of February 1324.

⁹ SC 8/147/7311.

¹⁰ 'Warin de Insula, a rebel' is recorded as having been forfeit in April 1323: *CPR, 1321-1324*, p. 273.

Another landowner, Thomas de Leukenore appealed twice for resolution over whether lands he held were subject to forfeiture and whether he therefore owed homage to the king for them.¹¹ But it is the endorsements of Leukenore's two petitions which give an insight into the crisis caused by the rebellion. The first of Leukenore's petitions concerned the manor of South Mimms in Middlesex, which had been formerly held from Humphrey de Bohun, earl of Hereford. It was endorsed by the instruction that if Leukenore attended chancery and served fealty, he would be issued with a 'writ of respite' from his debt (*fidelitatem et heat breve de respectum homage*).¹² However, the fate of Leukenore's second claim over the manor of Greatworth in Northamptonshire was seemingly a more complicated matter, this manor having been the property of Thomas of Lancaster. The petition was endorsed with the enigmatic comment that it was 'not possible to reply due to other causes', and is marked as having been seen 'before the great council' (*Coram Magno Consilio*).¹³ What these 'other causes' were remains unclear; however, one may speculate that the difference between the endorsements of the two Leukenore petitions sprang from when the estates came into the king's hands and to whom they had previously belonged. Leukenore's South Mimms estate, held from the king's brother-in-law, the earl of Hereford, would have been already considered a part of the king's estates even before the rebellion (Humphrey de Bohun's lands having been declared forfeit by the king before Boroughbridge on January 23, 1322).¹⁴ The fate of Leukenore's Greatworth estate, forfeit by Lancaster after his defeat and execution, was perhaps still not settled. Although the petition had been heard by the king's council it may have still needed the authorisation of the king to be finalised as the king sought to maximise the profit to be made from his cousin's downfall.¹⁵

This could be interpreted as an indicator of the modern widely held belief in the avaricious and merciless exploitation of the Contrariant forfeitures

¹¹ SC 8/123/6103; SC 8/122/6099.

¹² There is evidence of the Lewknor family holding the manor of South Mimms over succeeding generations until 1562: T. F. Baker and T. R. B. Pugh (eds), 'A History of the County of Middlesex', vol. 5, *VCH* (1976), pp. 282-285.

¹³ For a description of the Great Council see: Richardson and Sayles, *The English Parliament in the Middle Ages*, pp. 199-201.

¹⁴ Phillips, *Edward II*, p. 88; Hamilton, 'Humphrey de Bohun, *ODNB*.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*; Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster 1307-1322*, p. 307.

by Edward II. However, as the petition was not endorsed with any of the variations of the instruction that the petition should be heard *coram rege*, by the king himself, one cannot assume this was the decision of the king, or even if it ever received a royal hearing. Rather, the ‘remarkably sophisticated petitionary system’ allowed the ‘triers’ or ‘receivers’ to wield a level of power that allowed them to do justice on behalf of the king over the cases brought before them.¹⁶ However, under Edward II there had been far fewer ‘triers’ appointed to deal with a far heavier load of petitioning business than was the case later in the fourteenth-century.¹⁷ This does not necessarily suggest that Edward II was heavily involved in providing redress for his subjects, or that those petitioning expected to have access the king’s Grace. Rather, it may indicate an element of ‘streamlining’ of the council of triers during Edward II’s reign compared with the latter part of the fourteenth-century.¹⁸

From as early as 1290 it had become customary for there to be a number of ‘receivers’ appointed at each parliament to gather together the numerous private petitions received by the king.¹⁹ By 1320 these receivers’ roles had evolved to include the hearing of these complaints, as they became increasingly made up of professional and legal personnel. These panels of ‘triers’ were drawn from officials of the Church, members of the nobility and justices, along with the support of clerks and administrators from the various governmental departments such as the chancery or treasury.²⁰ By the period of this study the panel was split into two distinct committees, one to hear the petitions from England and the other those from Gascony, Ireland, Wales, Scotland and the Channel Islands.²¹ The work of the committee of triers for England, perhaps due to the volume of petitions generated from the king’s largest seat of power, was further supported by the advice of the Chancellor, Treasurer, Steward and Chamberlain.²²

¹⁶ Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, p. 86.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

¹⁸ For a discussion of the changing role of the ‘trier’ see: *Ibid.*, pp. 91-108.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 50-52.

²⁰ For example: *PROME*, ‘Parliament of October 1320’.

²¹ Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, pp. 56, 91.

²² For example, the roll of the parliament of January 1333 suggested that the ‘...triers and determiners of the same petitions, consult with the bishop of Winchester, the

The identities of those chosen to sit on these panels were often recorded in the parliamentary rolls. However, for the period 1320-1335, fifteen of the twenty-seven parliaments have no surviving 'roll', therefore the available records of the names of those appointed to 'try and determine' are inevitably scant.²³ Of the remaining twelve parliaments, only the records of three include the identities of the panels of triers: October 1320, July 1321 and January 1333.²⁴ This lack of evidence carries on until the parliament of March 1340 when the triers are again listed by name.²⁵ Because of the many gaps in the primary evidence, especially from those parliaments during or immediately after the crises under discussion in this thesis, research into their impact on the petitions is much curtailed. Therefore such questions as how the various political crises, changes of regime and the passage of time were reflected in the makeup of these groups cannot be fully addressed. But, more importantly for this study, an assessment of the impact of the triers' political, social and familial affiliations on their neutrality in hearing of petitions fails due to lack of evidence.

These groups of known named triers from the period under discussion were each made up of the usual split of justices, barons, members of the Church and administrators as described above.²⁶ The panels of 1320 and 1321 can further be shown to have contained many of the same members as that of the parliament of October 1318.²⁷ This may be illustrative of a continuing stability in the implementation of the king's justice due to the influence of the Ordinances of 1311.²⁸ However, due to the lack of extant parliamentary rolls for subsequent parliaments, one cannot tell if this group of triers remained unchanged after the repeal of the Ordinances. However, the records of the three extant lists of triers in the period reveal that five members were chosen in all three parliaments, having survived perhaps due to their apparent political

chancellor, ... the chief justice, the treasurer, or any of them ... when necessary' *PROME*, Parliamentary roll of January 1333: C 65/2, m.1. text and translation.

²³ *PROME*, 'Introduction' Parliament of January 1333.

²⁴ See Appendix B.

²⁵ *PROME*, Parliament of March 1340: C 65/7, text and translation; Richardson and Sayles, *The English Parliament in the Middle Ages*, p. 198.

²⁶ Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, p. 91.

²⁷ *PROME*, Parliament of October 1318.

²⁸ Clause twenty nine addressed Edward II's apparent unwillingness to hear petitions in the first part of his reign: Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, p. 72.

insight, administrative value or family connections.²⁹ A consideration of these five triers may reveal why their careers were able to span the three parliaments.

Geoffrey le Scrope is perhaps the most extreme example of the political longevity of these five triers. Scrope can be shown to have been a politically astute ‘mover and shaker’ whose chameleon-like political allegiances allowed him to remain in favour despite regime change. For example, during the reign of Edward II he took part in the trial of Thomas of Lancaster in 1322.³⁰ He went on to be so closely identified with the two Despensers that he was included with them in Mortimer’s alleged plot to murder them in 1323.³¹ But, by the end of 1326, he had once again managed to switch allegiances to Queen Isabella’s party, and in January 1327, he was part of the delegation that received Edward II’s abdication.³² In 1330, at the moment of Edward III’s reassertion of his personal rule and the end of the Regency, Scrope illustrated once again his ability to adapt to political change. He went on to become one of Edward III’s principle councillors.³³

Another of the five triers, Richard de Grey, not only served in all three parliaments but on both panels. His continued inclusion again may have hinged on his diplomatic expertise gained through his extensive service to Edward II in Gascony; however, that he was also son-in-law to one of the other five triers, the politically astute Hugh de Courtenay, may also have been significant.³⁴

²⁹ Hugh de Courtenay, Geoffrey le Scrope, Richard de Grey, John Stonor William Martin. The career of William Martin remains unclear, there being no record of his service, but this lack of record may indicate that his role was relatively minor one. D. Richardson, G. Kimball *Magna Carta Ancestry: A Study in Colonial and Medieval Families*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City, 2011), pp. 538-539; B. Vale, ‘Sir Geoffrey Scrope, (d. 1340)’, *ODNB*; Richard Grey in: S. Walker, ‘John Grey, Third Baron Grey of Codnor (1305x11?–1392)’ *ODNB*; P. J. Jefferies, ‘Sir John Stonor (c.1281–1354)’ *ODNB*.

³⁰ Vale, ‘Sir Geoffrey Scrope’, *ODNB*.

³¹ *Ibid.*; KB27/255: *Anglo-American Legal Tradition at the O’Quinn Law Library of the University of Houston* [<http://aalt.law.uh.edu/>]; E. L. G. Stones, ‘The Date of Roger Mortimer’s Escape from the Tower of London’, *EHR* (1951), 66, 97-98, p. 98; G. A. Usher, ‘The Career of a Political Bishop: Adam de Orleton (c.1279-1345)’, *TRHS* (1972), 5th series, 22, 33-47; P. Dryburgh, ‘The Last Refuge of a Scoundrel? Edward II and Ireland, 1321-7’, in Dodd and Musson, *The Reign of Edward II: New Perspective*, p. 128; *Parliamentary Writs*, 2, pp. 244-249.

³² Vale, ‘Sir Geoffrey Scrope’, *ODNB*.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *PROME*, Parliament of October 1320: SC 9/23, text and translation; *PROME*, Parliament of January 1321: SC 9/24, text and translation; *PROME*, Parliament of

Courtenay, like Scrope, can be shown to have been willing to change allegiances as the political climate dictated. For example, although he sided with the king at Boroughbridge, he was one of those who renounced their allegiance to Edward II at Kenilworth in January 1327.³⁵ However, Courtenay's survival as a trier can be explained purely due to his administrative credentials. In 1313 he had been elected as one of the Ordainers and, in 1318, a member of the king's Council.³⁶ He was therefore a sound administrative choice. Although these administrative positions were not likely to have gained him Edward II's favour, his position would have been further strengthened by his familial relationship to both the king and the Despensers. He was nephew to Hugh Despenser the elder, and the father-in-law of Margaret de Bohun, the granddaughter of Edward I.³⁷ By the time of the parliament of 1333 Courtenay's administrative experience as an Ordainer and his familial relationship to the royal family may have cancelled out the negative connotations of his relationship to the Despenser family.

Of the remaining two of the five triers included in all three parliaments little can be learned about the credentials of William Martin, but the final member, John Stoner, appears to have simply remained a dedicated justice who did not involve himself in politics, apparently having 'no political opinions of his own'.³⁸ His value as a politically neutral justice is further illustrated through his being named in the next recorded panel of triers in March 1340.³⁹ However, in November of the same year he was removed from office and imprisoned in the Tower of London and then at Nottingham Castle as part of a general purge of his administration by Edward III.⁴⁰ But he was restored to the office of Chief Justice in May 1342 in which position he remained until 1354

January 1333: C 65/2, m.1, text and translation; Richardson and Kimball, *Magna Carta Ancestry*, pp. 538-539.

³⁵ Philips, *Edward II*, p. 533.

³⁶ Richardson and Kimball, *Magna Carta Ancestry*, pp. 538-539.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 243, 535-540; M. Prestwich, 'Edward I, King of England and Lord of Ireland, and Duke of Aquitaine (1239-1307)', *ODNB*.

³⁸ C. Carpenter (ed.) *Kingsford's Stoner Letters and Papers, 1290-1483* (Cambridge, 1996), viii, p. 36. He had taken part in a number of important diplomatic missions to both France and Spain and had presided at the trial of rebels in 1323, 1327, and 1331: Jefferies, 'Sir John Stonor (c.1281-1354)', *ODNB*.

³⁹ *PROME*, Parliament of March 1340.

⁴⁰ Jefferies, 'Sir John Stonor (c.1281-1354)', *ODNB*.

when he retired, although he remained on the king's council until his death later the same year.⁴¹

It is clear from this brief review of these individuals that their political allegiances and family connections would have had a significant impact on their careers as triers, with their personal and political agendas influencing their impartiality in the hearing of the petitions. But these affiliations and agendas, without further supporting evidence, cannot be used to create an image of the impact of the triers on the resolution of the petitions for the whole period under consideration. Rather they provide us with only a suggestion of their potential value. Therefore this study will instead concentrate on the evidence provided from the uninterrupted flow of the petitions themselves, in order to reveal the intricate relationships between the king and his subjects, and their responses to political and social crises and the consequences of tyranny.

2.2 'The Despensers' - A Father and Son Alliance?

The generic use of 'the Despensers' along with other terms such as 'the Despenser regime' has resulted in the creation of a popular image of an indivisibility of actions and motives of the father and son that the evidence of the petitions does not support. These terms, and others like them, such as the extreme 'Despenser dictatorship', are rhetorical constructs created as a method of shorthand to speak about the two men.⁴² However, this is suggestive of a depersonalised 'wicked' alliance, based around the fact of their kinship and similarity of given name, which may not have been understood or even recognised by their contemporaries. One of the most striking of the results of this study is that there are only eighteen petitions that named both father and son in the same request/complaint.⁴³ This distinction is further qualified when one realises that none of these petitions actually contain the phrase 'the Despensers'. The two men are invariably named separately, for example, Lord Despenser the father and Lord Hugh the son (*Sire Despenser le pere et Sire*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² The terms 'the Despensers' and 'Despenser regime' are used throughout historiography, the term 'Despenser dictatorship' is found in Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II*, p. 4; Saul, 'The Despensers and the Downfall of Edward II', pp. 5-6.

⁴³ See Graph 2.2.

Hugh le fiz).⁴⁴ This separation creates a subtle distinction between the two men, leading to a concept of an individuality of action and motive that becomes lost in the use of such generic terms as ‘the Despensers’.

However, there is evidence that the father and son, if not actively collaborating, were nevertheless guilty of profiting from the actions of the other. For example, the petition of Alice Danvers, presented c.1322 to 1326, complained of the loss of her holding of Werham in Stratfield Turgis, Hampshire.⁴⁵ Danvers accused both Richard de Okelond and William de Horewode, a servant of Hugh Despenser the *younger*, of driving her out of her house and lands, robbing her and leaving her destitute. Her lands were eventually granted to Ingeham Berenger, whom she states was under the protection of Hugh Despenser the *elder*.⁴⁶ Even though this petition was presented before their fall in 1326, Danvers displayed no fear or hesitation in naming the two Despensers. Danvers specifically identified Okelond and Horewode as being of the joint ‘household of the king and Hugh Despenser the son’ (*mengnage nostre seigneur le roi et sire Hugh le Despenser le fitz*), who she clearly implicated as using his influence to hinder her from recovering her lands. It is interesting to note that Danvers cited the households of the king and Despenser the younger as being one and the same, with the use of the singular for ‘household’ (*meignage*), illustrating how closely Hugh Despenser the younger was associated with the king in the minds of the general populace of the time. His position of Chamberlain, coupled with his close friendship with Edward II created a situation where it was possible that his name was considered as being synonymous with that of the king.

⁴⁴ SC 8/84/4152.

⁴⁵ SC 8/42/2054: this is dated to before the Despensers’ downfall, as the wording of the petition actively suggests that they were alive, as it uses the present tense when requesting that there were no more ‘letters of great men’ (*letres de grant homes*) granted.

⁴⁶ Danvers’ accusation that Berenger was a member of Despenser the elder’s entourage is given credence by the fact that in 1321 Berenger was entrusted with all of Despenser the elder’s lands during his exile. Berenger being Despenser the elder’s ‘trusted servant and knight’: Davies, *The Baronial Opposition to Edward II*, pp. 89-90; Saul, ‘The Despensers and the Downfall of Edward II’, pp. 6-7; S. L. Waugh., ‘For King, Country and Patron: The Despensers and Local Administration, 1321-1322’, *The Journal of British Studies* (1983), 22, 23-58, pp. 29, 32-33; CCR, 1318-1323, pp. 385, 442; Davies, *The Baronial Opposition to Edward II*, pp. 89-90.

An almost identically worded petition, also relating to the actions of Okelond and Horewode under the protection of Despenser the younger, was presented in the same period (1322-1326) by Hugh de Hanford, also of Stratfield Turgis.⁴⁷ This petition also ended by citing that the petitioner's lands had been granted to Ingeham Berenger. Remedy through the petitioning process was effectively denied as both petitions were referred back to common law.⁴⁸ That these two petitions were brought during the same time period, worded almost identically, using a very similar 'hand' and pertained to the ownership of lands found within the same parish would seem to indicate that the two petitioners may not only have used the same scribe or legal professional to draft their complaints, but it may also indicate a deliberate act of collaboration.⁴⁹ The petitioners intentionally chose to present their complaints at the same time to add weight to their claims made at the height of the ascendancy of the two Despensers.

Why then did these two petitioners decide to present their petitions at this time when the Despensers were still so powerful? A deciding factor for Alice Danvers may have been her age at the time of petitioning. She is recorded as being the widow of Sir Robert de Hauford in the mid-thirteenth century, and in 1288 the widow of Ralph Danvers; therefore by 1322 she was clearly very elderly.⁵⁰ There is also proof of a longstanding hostility between Danvers and the Okelond family.⁵¹ The Okelond family were due to inherit Alice Danvers lands through reversion on the event of her death, including her holding of Werham. But, in 1303, John atte Okelond had led a failed pre-emptive attempt to dispossess Danvers of these lands.⁵² The 1322 petition named Richard de Okelond, almost certainly a relative of John atte Okelond, as joint perpetrator in the attack on Danvers. The petition of Hugh de Hanford,

⁴⁷ SC 8/50/2492.

⁴⁸ Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, p. 80.

⁴⁹ For a discussion on the authorship of the petitions see: *Ibid.*, pp. 302-316; Maddicott, 'The County Community and the Making of Public Opinion', pp. 27-43.

⁵⁰ W. Page (ed.), 'A History of the County of Hampshire', vol. 4, *VCH* (London, 1911), pp. 63-65.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 63-65; 'CP 25/1/204/14: *The O'Quinn Law Library of the University of Houston* [<http://aalt.law.uh.edu/>].

⁵² *Placitorum in Domo Capitulari Westmonasteriensi Asservatorum Abbreviatio: Temporibus Regum Richard I, John, Henry III, Edward I, Edward II* (London, 1811), p. 296; Page, 'A History of the County of Hampshire', pp. 63-65.

also of Stratfield Turgis, naming the same perpetrators, was presumably made to bolster the complaint of Danvers.⁵³

However, this does not explain why Danvers and Hanford risked naming the two Despensers in their petitions. A more careful consideration of the wording of the petitions brought by these petitioners may explain such an apparently risky strategy. Both Danvers and Hanford asked for the 'letters of great men' (presumably the Despensers) to be withheld from Okelond and Horewode. This may indicate that the inclusion of the names of the Despensers in the two petitions was not intended as a criticism, but rather as an ingratiating gesture, highlighting their positions as 'great men'. This explanation is further supported by the two petitioners deliberately setting out to emphasise the vulnerability of their own situation. Although the latter is considered a common rhetorical tool used in the petitioning process, in this case it was even more important for the petitioners to stress their vulnerability, as they appealed for the king's mercy against his favourites.⁵⁴ However, that both petitioners requested that the Crown disallow any further 'letters of great [powerful] men' (*lettres de grant homes*) may also suggest that the petitioners considered that the king and his council had the ability to curtail the actions of these two 'great men', appealing to Edward II's rightful role as purveyor of justice to his subjects.⁵⁵ It also conveys the impression, even if only rhetorically, that the Crown was not considered as being rendered powerless by the manoeuvrings of the two Despensers.

Both Danvers and Hanford stated that their lands had subsequently been granted to Ingeham Berenger, who was named as being under the protection of Hugh Despenser the elder, 'the earl of Winchester'. The inclusion of the elder Despenser in these two petitions, even though he was not actively accused of wrongdoing, can be interpreted in two ways. Either the petitioners were attempting to emphasise their vulnerability against these so-called 'great men' that had led to their 'poverty and misfortune' by the inclusion of another

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 63-65.

⁵⁴ Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, p. 297.

⁵⁵ G. Dodd, 'Parliamentary Petitions?' in Ormrod, Dodd and Musson, *Medieval Petitions: Grace and Grievance*, p. 12; C. J. Needham, 'Priests, Kings and Tyrants: Spiritual and Temporal Power in John of Salisbury's Policraticus', *Speculum* (1991), 66, 572-590.

famous name or, more unlikely, the petitioners were not sufficiently intimidated by either of the Despensers' reputations *not* to mention him.

If one contrasts these pre-deposition petitions with those brought in the immediate aftermath of their execution, and the deposition of Edward II, one can immediately see a difference in the way the two Despensers were depicted. Although the petitions in the study include some of the more colourful and well documented accusations against the two Despensers, it is perhaps the complaints of those less important people under their influence which add most to our understanding of the Despensers' reputations.⁵⁶ For example, the petition of Mary de Costowe of Oxfordshire, presented in 1327, described the actions of Richard Snede who, allegedly accompanied by the two Despensers, had beaten and mistreated Costowe, forcing her to agree to relinquish her lands.⁵⁷ This petitioner's use of the names of both Despensers bolstered her claim against the wrongdoings of a Despenser servant. This can be interpreted as suggesting that Costowe was attempting to exploit the fact that Queen Isabella and Roger Mortimer had based the legitimacy of the new reign on the need to remove the two Despensers. By adopting an anti-Despenser stance, Costowe effectively created a psychological bond with the new regime, with the Despensers as a common enemy.⁵⁸ This petition demonstrates the attitude of both the petitioner and the petitioned to the reputation of the Despensers. For example, one must question the validity of Costowe's accusation that two such important men would have been personally and actively involved in such a low key acquisition. But the petitioner evidently believed that the triers appointed by the new regime would be willing to accept such a charge. However, the petition's endorsement challenges this assumption. It was referred back to the

⁵⁶ Such as the alleged mistreatment and the confiscation of the lands of the widows Alice, Duchess of Lancaster and Mary de St Pol, Countess of Pembroke: SC 8/173/8631;

SC 8/174/8700; SC 8/56/2752; SC 8/56/2753; SC 8/56/2754; Prestwich, *Plantagenet England*, pp. 207-208; Saul, 'The Despensers and the Downfall of Edward II', p. 22; G. A. Holmes, 'A Protest Against the Despensers, 1326' (1955), *Speculum*, 30, 207-212, p. 209; Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II*, pp. 63, 79, 83, 109-118.

⁵⁷ SC 8/41/2003.

⁵⁸ Haines, *King Edward II*, pp. 175-194; Valente, *The Theory and Practice of Revolt in Medieval England*, p. 154; Doherty, *Isabella and the Strange Death of Edward II*, pp. 100-101; Phillips, *Edward II*, pp. 488-504; Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II*, pp. 176-194.

common law process, suggesting that the emotive content and language of the petition held little sway with those considering the petition.

In 1327 Queen Isabella and Roger Mortimer were eager to establish Edward III's rights as sovereign. An important part of this involved the rehabilitation of his father's character and the establishment of his innocence. This was to be achieved through the confirmation of the guilt of the two Despensers who, as 'outsiders' and 'wicked advisors', were to be shown as being separate from the royal family. This separation is illustrated in the first three articles of Edward III's first statute. The creation of the statute against the Despensers benefited both the new king and his two regents, as it had the effect of not only officially establishing the Despensers' role in the downfall of Edward II but endorsed the actions of Queen Isabella and Roger Mortimer in deposing Edward II, and established the rights of Edward III as the new monarch. However, the statute also had the effect of opening an avenue of opportunity to find redress for those who wished to complain about the actions of the Despensers; it also obliged the legal system to ensure its administration. As S. J. Harris stated, the 'crown [had] added considerably to the arsenal of weapons that could be mobilised by ... the king's subjects'.⁵⁹

An example of one such petition that names both Despensers and whose endorsement cites this statute, is that brought by Roland de Vaus in 1327.⁶⁰ Vaus complained that he had been forced in 1324 to grant the reversion of his land in Babcary, Somerset to Walter Stapledon, then Bishop of Exeter, who was under the 'protection of [both] Hugh Despenser the father and the son' (*meintenaunce sire Hugh le Despenser le pere et le fiz*).⁶¹ Although there does not seem to have been any verification of the accusations made against the Despensers, the petition was endorsed by the statement that Vaus should sue by 'the statute' if the complaint referred to the actions of the Despensers *after* their exile in 1321, but stipulated that nothing should be done if the events took place *before* their exile. This demarcation between the actions of the Despenser before and after their exile highlighted that the new regime was

⁵⁹ Harris, 'Taking your chances: Petitioning in the Last Years of Edward II' in Ormrod, Dodd and Musson, *Medieval Petitions: Grace and Grievance*, pp. 173-192.

⁶⁰ SC 8/81/4001.

⁶¹ That he signed over this reversion to Stapledon in 1324 is confirmed by a fine appended to this petition: SC 8/81/4002.

intent on depicting the recall of the Despensers, and by inference all their subsequent actions, as illegal. This was not only significant for the establishment of the legitimacy of the new regime's actions against the Edward II and the Despensers, it could also be taken as a justification for the actions of Roger Mortimer during the same period, when he had not only acted against the king, but had been one of those instrumental in forcing the Despensers' brief exile in 1321-1322.⁶²

Having established that the two Despensers were usually named separately in the petitions also implies that the two Despensers were equally well known and that it had been necessary to create some separation of identity between them. However, there are fifty-four petitions that named 'Hugh Despenser' with no further qualification. Through a consideration of both geographical context and the identification of those supporters and servants of the Despensers, many can be identified. Graph 2.2 details the results of this scrutiny, showing only twenty four petitions where it remains unclear to which Despenser the complaint refers.⁶³

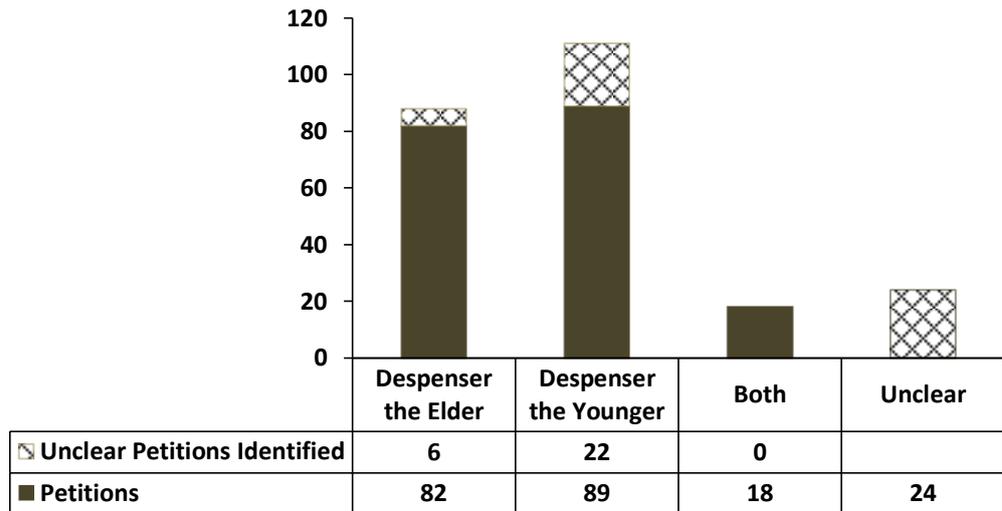
An example of the process of ascertaining the identity of either father or son is the petition of William Bretoun of Houghton, presented in 1327.⁶⁴ Although it is unclear whether the 'Hugh Despenser' named in the petition is the elder or the younger, the petition also names 'John de Seint . . . brother-in-law of Hugh le Despenser'. John St. Amand can be shown to have married Margaret, the daughter of Hugh Despenser the elder.⁶⁵ Therefore it is fairly straight forward to conclude that the petition refers to Hugh Despenser the younger. However, there are those petitions that remain enigmatic having only circumstantial evidence as to which Despenser the petition refers. One such

⁶² The *Vita Edwardi Secundi* gives a clear indicator to the reasons behind this enmity, stating that Despenser the younger had 'coveted certain castles' belonging to Mortimer and that he blamed the Mortimer family for the death of his grandfather, Hugh Despenser the Justiciar, at the battle of Evesham in 1265, swearing vengeance on both Roger Mortimer and his uncle, Roger Mortimer of Chirk: *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, pp. 108-109; Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II*, p. 10.

⁶³ The Graph 2.2 shows the results of this, with the 'reallocated' petitions being represented by the cross-hatched section at the top of each column.

⁶⁴ SC 8/294/14675.

⁶⁵ From the biography of their son: R. Frame, 'Almaric St Amand, Third Baron St Amand, Justiciar of Ireland (1314-1381)', *ODNB*.



Graph 2.2: The Distribution of Petitions relating to Hugh Despenser the elder and younger, 1320 to c.1335, with an illustration of reallocated single Despenser petitions.

petition is that of Roger de Birthorp, brought in 1327.⁶⁶ This petition relates to an apparently long-running dispute between Birthorp and John de Camelton, the Prior of Sempringham. Birthorp complained that the prior was protected by ‘my lord Hugh Despenser’ (*mounsire Hugh le Despenser*), but without any further distinction. The problem of establishing the identity of ‘my lord Hugh Despenser’ is further compounded by the fact that, although Sempringham priory was the home of two of Hugh Despenser the elder’s daughters, the vast majority of the Lacy lands in Lincolnshire (of which Sempringham was a part) were held by Hugh Despenser the younger.⁶⁷ Therefore either of the two men could be cited as the Despenser responsible for protecting the prior.

The existence of these problematical petitions could have several interpretations. For example, they may illustrate that these petitioners were ignorant of the importance of differentiating between the two Despensers, or even that they were not known outside the localities under their influence. However, it is unlikely that there was anyone unaware of the existence of both Despensers, and the latter argument is also unlikely due to the geographic

⁶⁶ SC 8/34/1671.

⁶⁷ That the Lacy family had long associations with the order of Gilbertines living at Sempringham see: B. M. Laughton, *St. Gilbert of Sempringham, 1089-1189* (London, 1913), p. 233; W. Page (ed.), *A History of the County of Lincoln*, vol. 2, *VCH* (Folkestone, 1906), pp. 179-187; Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II*, p. 113; Phillips, *Edward II*, p. 447.

‘spread’ of the two Despensers holdings, which were extensive.⁶⁸ Phillips described the Despensers estates as having been ‘vast’, giving as an example that between the two, along with Edward II and the earl of Arundel, they owned almost ‘three-quarters of Wales’.⁶⁹ Saul underlined this belief by stating that the extensive nature of their landholdings meant they must be considered as a family of national standing.⁷⁰

However, taking into account the professionalism, education and knowledge of the scribes/clerks and lawyers responsible for composing the petitions, a more likely explanation for these petitions is that there was an expectation that the triers would recognise which Despenser was being accused. This may indicate that the two Despensers were not considered as being equally guilty of wrongdoing. This is perhaps further supported when one considers the number of these petitions that *can* be allocated to one or other of the Despensers.⁷¹ Twenty two of these petitions can be shown to refer to the actions of Hugh Despenser the younger, whereas only six can be shown to be related to Despenser the elder. This is a clear indicator that Hugh Despenser the younger was seen as *the* ‘Despenser’.

In light of the theory that Despenser the elder was a relatively minor ‘actor’ in the events of the final years of Edward II’s reign, the next section will consider what the evidence of the petitions can reveal specifically about the actions and reputation of Hugh Despenser the elder.

2.3 Hugh Despenser the Elder

‘A King’s Man in Every Sense of the Word’?⁷²

Hugh Despenser the elder has been considered as ‘a king’s man in every sense of the word’, an ardent royalist.⁷³ But he has also been portrayed as colluding

⁶⁸ For a breakdown of where to find evidence for the two Despensers holdings see: Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II*, ‘Appendix 1’, pp. 228-232.

⁶⁹ Phillips, *Edward II*, pp. 416-419.

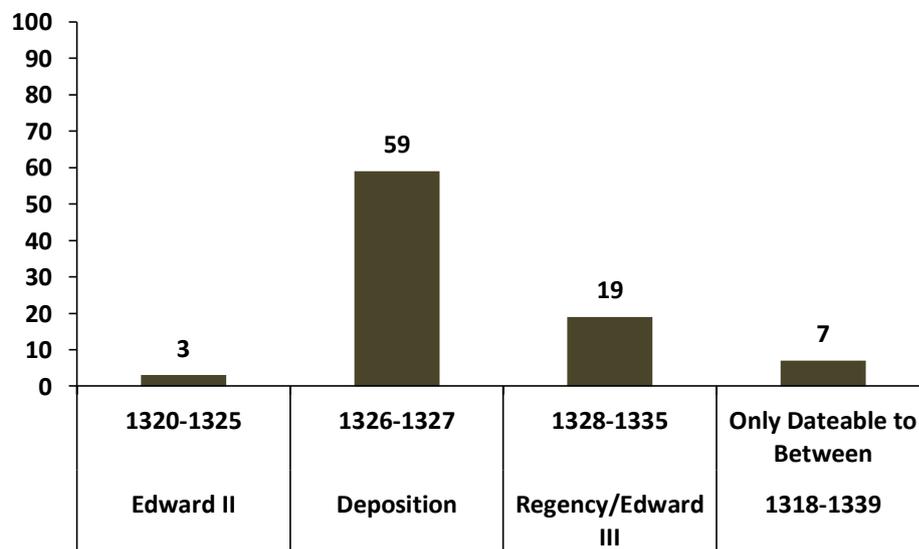
⁷⁰ Saul; ‘The Despensers and the Downfall of Edward II’, p. 9.

⁷¹ See Appendix A2.

⁷² Lawrence, ‘Rise of a Royal Favourite’, in Dodd and Musson, *The Reign of Edward II*, p. 214.

with his son to exploit his position as friend and councillor to the king for his own gain, and that he was part of one of the ‘most oppressive regime[s]... in medieval England’.⁷⁴ The apparent indivisibility of action by the father and son was summed up by Martyn Lawrence who stated that ‘it was hard to differentiate between the two Despensers’.⁷⁵ However, the petitions do not support this statement; there are eighty-eight petitions that are related to Hugh Despenser the elder from c.1320 to c.1335, which suggests he was well known as an individual in his own right.⁷⁶

Graph 2.3 illustrates how the petitions relating to Despenser the elder are distributed throughout the period. These include those that named Despenser the elder through direct actions, and those which name him but refer to the actions of his servants and those retainers who owed loyalty to Despenser and who wore his livery. Unsurprisingly it can be seen from this graph that petitioning against Despenser the elder appears to have peaked in the deposition period of 1326 to 1327, remaining elevated (if at a much reduced level) during the regency and after the re-emergence of the personal power of the king.



Graph 2.3: The Distribution of petitions naming Hugh Despenser the elder, 1320-c.1335.

⁷³ J. S. Hamilton, ‘Hugh Despenser the Elder, Earl of Winchester (1261–1326)’, *ODNB*.

⁷⁴ Ormrod, ‘Agenda for Legislation, 1322-c.1340’, p. 1.

⁷⁵ Lawrence, ‘Rise of a Royal Favourite’, p. 218.

⁷⁶ See Graph 2.2.

Despenser the elder was an influential member of Court circles throughout Edward II's reign, and the petitions can be used to assess his status in the period leading up to 1320. For example, a petition brought by Matilda Upton, the Abbess of Godstow, described Despenser the elder's alleged misconduct during his tenure as Keeper of the Forest south of the Trent.⁷⁷ Her complaint related to the confiscation of pasture land at Pan's Hill (Panchehale), Buckinghamshire, granted to the abbey by the 'king's ancestors'. She claimed that Despenser had 'by colour of his office' seized the land, subsequently under-valuing it and gifting it to John de Handlo, one of the sub-foresters, and a Despenser retainer.⁷⁸ Despenser the elder had been removed from the office of Keeper of the Forest in February 1315 as part of a commission appointed by the Crown to consider 'the frequent complaints of acts of oppression' alleged to have been committed by the Keepers of the Forests.⁷⁹ The use of the plural in the wording of the commission suggests that there may have been a general historic misuse of power by these officials, but it is clear from the records of the commission that Hugh Despenser the elder was considered as its main focus, with his removal being recorded in February 1315.⁸⁰ The results of this commission meant that when a petition by John and Alice de Benham was presented at some point in the period 1315 to 1322 requesting the return of

⁷⁷ SC 8/50/2473. Originally known as 'justices of the forest' the term 'keeper of the forest' had become the accepted title by the time of Despenser's removal as the Southern keeper in 1315. A generally administrative role, it was nevertheless a significant one. Other important holders were Piers Gaveston (northern) in 1310 and Aymer de Valence, earl of Pembroke (southern) from 1320-1324: Tout, *The Place of the Reign of Edward II*, pp. 359-360.

⁷⁸ L. Toulmin Smith (ed.), 'Parliamentary Petitions Relating to Oxford', in M. Burrows, *Collectanea* (Oxford, 1896), pp. 110-111; Saul, 'The Despensers and the Downfall of Edward II', pp. 7-8; Waugh, 'For King, Country and Patron', p. 47. The term 'the colour of his office' appears to have been commonly used to describe the power of those holding official posts or those in receipt of the favour of the powerful; a search of the SC 8 series reveals thirty-six results for the term 'colour of his office' between 1300 and 1400, with half being found in petitions dating to between 1320 and 1335.

⁷⁹ This was not the first time that Despenser the elder had been found guilty of wrongdoing during his tenure as Keeper of the Forest: in March 1313 a pardon was granted to Despenser 'of all trespasses committed by him in the king's forests': *CPR, 1313-1317*, pp. 407-408, 558; *CFR, 1307-1319*, p. 230; Saul 'The Despensers and the Downfall of Edward II', p. 16.

⁸⁰ *CFR, 1307-1319*, p. 230; for a record of these justices or keepers of the forest from 1297 to 1326 see: Tout, *The Place of the Reign of Edward II in English History*, pp. 359-360.

lands that had been seized by Hugh Despenser ‘late keeper of the forest’, it was answered with a recommendation for further investigation.⁸¹ Thus, the difference between the resolutions found by Matilda Upton and the Benhams appears to have been dependent on the results of the commission that had led to Despenser’s dismissal as Keeper of the Forest. The Crown was clearly influenced by the commission’s findings, in spite of the probability of the Benhams’ petition being presented as late as 1322 when Despenser the elder was one of the king’s closest advisors.⁸²

Despenser the elder’s dubious actions as Keeper of the Forest were also reflected in the charges made against him at the time of his brief exile in 1321.⁸³ The *Vita Edwardi Secundi* described how Hugh Despenser the elder had amassed lands to the value of one thousand pounds through acts of verbal and physical coercion (*multos nequiter exheredavit, quosdam in exilium compulit, iniquas redemptiones a pluribus extorsit*).⁸⁴ Although this representation of the ‘brutal and greedy’ Despenser the elder may be seen as being once again influenced by the author’s wish to exonerate the king, the petitions corroborates that this was a commonly used accusation in the years following Despenser the elder’s execution.⁸⁵ But in the period 1320-1325, when complaints brought against such an influential landowner, whose illegal activities would have impacted on so many, there were only three petitions related to the elder Despenser and, apart from the petition of John and Alice de Benham mentioned above, none of these accused him of wrongdoing. This illustrates the extent of the elder Despenser’s protected position. As the father of the king’s favourite the petitioners may have been unwilling to complain against him, even though, at the parliament of Westminster of October 1320, Edward II had ‘in his great desire ...to do all things which concern a good lord

⁸¹ SC 8/81/4050.

⁸² *CFR, 1307-1319*, p. 230.

⁸³ H. G. Richardson and G. Sayles, *Rotuli Parliamentorum Anglie Hactenus Inediti; 1279-1373* (London, 1935), pp. 92-93.

⁸⁴ ‘Many he vilely disinherited, and some forced into exile, and plucked unjust ransoms from many’: *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, p. 114.

⁸⁵ A. Gransden, *Historical Writing in England II: c.1307 to the Early Sixteenth Century* (London, 1982), p. 33; *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, p. 114.

for the benefit of his realm and of his people' increased his petitionary workload.⁸⁶

Indeed, there is an example of a petition brought in *support* of Despenser the elder in this period of increased petitioning activity from 'the poor people of ...[the] Earl of Winchester of the town of Loughborough' (*les povres gentz ...counte de Wyncestre de la ville de Loughteburgh*).⁸⁷ This petition, presented in 1323, is related to a complaint brought by Despenser the elder in the same year against various Lancaster supporters, including Robert Holland.⁸⁸ Despenser had accused them of forcibly entering his manors in Leicestershire, sacking the houses and stealing various goods and animals. The petition of the poor people of Loughborough concerned the same attack. The inclusion of Robert Holland as one of the transgressors immediately sets the date of events described in the petition to before March 1322 when Holland had defected from the Lancastrian cause to that of the king, leading to his almost immediate and lengthy imprisonment.⁸⁹ The attack on Loughborough mentioned in both the petition and in the complaint of Despenser the elder, almost certainly dates to early July 1321 when a resumption of attacks on Despenser properties was made, instigated by Thomas of Lancaster.⁹⁰ In this instance, forces led by Robert Holland seized and occupied the Despenser manor of Loughborough as part of more generalised attacks on the Despensers' Leicestershire estates.

⁸⁶ PROME, Parliament of October 1330: C 49/43/20F text and translation; *Parliamentary Writs*, pp. 219-230; Phillips, *Edward II*, pp. 357-358.

⁸⁷ SC 8/106/5268.

⁸⁸ *CPR, 1321-1324*, p. 309; also William Trussel, William de Bredon and Ralph and Roger la Zusche. Ralph and Roger la Zuche were later found guilty of attacking and murdering Roger Belers in 1326, a former adherent of Lancaster who changed sides to become one of Hugh Despenser's leading supporters: Phillips, *Edward II*, pp. 444-446, 492; Waugh, 'For King, Country and Patron', pp. 25, 44; Tout, *The Place of the Reign of Edward II*, p. 180; E. L. G. Stones, 'The Folvilles of Ashby-Folville Leicestershire, and Their Associates in Crime', *TRHS* (1957), 5th series, 2, 117-136, pp. 119-120.

⁸⁹ *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, p. 122; Mortimer, *The Greatest Traitor*, p. 123; Phillips, *Edward II*, p. 416; Holland was, on his release, murdered, probably at the instigation of Henry of Lancaster: Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II*, pp. 56, 74, 218; Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster, 1307-1322*, p. 295; Maddicott, 'Thomas of Lancaster and Sir Robert Holland', p. 468.

⁹⁰ Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster, 1307-1322*, p. 279; Maddicott, 'Thomas of Lancaster and Sir Robert Holland', p. 467.

Why then did the poor petitioners of Despenser the elder wait until 1323 to present their case and what can we determine about their motives from the petition's focus on the wrongdoings of the Lancastrians? This question becomes more pertinent when one investigates the fate of the two Despensers' Leicestershire manors during and after their 1321 exile. There is evidence that, during the exile, the forfeited Leicestershire estates became the focus of both Lancastrian raiders *and* corrupt bureaucratic practices which carried on throughout the period of the rebellion. For example, in March 1322, almost simultaneously with the Lancastrian defeat at Boroughbridge, a commission of oyer and terminer was granted to investigate the actions of 'persons who entered the castles, manors, towns ... [which were] in the king's hand through forfeiture' as well as the actions of 'the keepers and ministers of the king' responsible for the forfeited lands of Despenser the elder in Leicestershire.⁹¹ In addition, in May 1322 a commission was granted to Despenser the elder to investigate the actions of Lancastrian forces in his lands in Leicestershire, including Loughborough.⁹² A further grant of oyer and terminer is recorded on the same day (May 28) against several different groups of Lancastrian rebels, including those led by Holland, the commission apparently instigated on 'the king's information'.⁹³ Therefore the timing of the petition from the poor of Loughborough could be explained by its having been presented at the instigation of Despenser the elder himself to add weight to his complaint. But, as this petition was presented during the period of the Despensers' ascendancy, the need to highlight his complaint would appear to be unlikely. More credibly, the petitioners may have chosen to complain at the same time as Despenser to add substance to *their* complaint. That the petitioners chose to gain redress against the disgraced Lancastrian supporters rather than against the king's ministers is perhaps unsurprising. One may assume that the king would favour accusations of wrongdoing by the disgraced Lancastrians over those against his own servants.

⁹¹ *CPR, 1321-1324*, p. 156.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 168. There is also evidence that the complaint by Despenser the elder against the Lancastrian forces continued into 1323 and 1324, perhaps reflecting Despenser's determination to maximise his profits from the downfall of the Contrarians in March 1323 and January 1324: *CPR, 1321-1324*, pp. 309, 386-387; Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II*, p. 8.

⁹³ *CPR, 1321-1324*, p. 167.

However, another possible reason for both the focus and the timing of the petition is seen when one reads further and notes that ‘the poor people of ...[the] earl of Winchester’ were attempting to claim, perhaps for their own profit, the forfeited goods and chattels of Holland and Bredon that had come into the king’s hands. This would explain their insistence on describing themselves as being so closely allied with Despenser the elder, being intent on using his name as leverage to gain favour from the king. If this is correct then the petition failed in its aim, as it was endorsed with a refusal from the king to grant aid to these petitioners, stating that ‘the king is not minded to make satisfaction from the forfeited goods of the trespassers coming into his hands for trespasses committed by them’.⁹⁴ The refusal to lend aid to the petitioners from the confiscated goods of the Contrariants perhaps reflects the theory that Edward II and the Despensers were motivated primarily by monetary greed in the post-Boroughbridge period.⁹⁵ However, one must not dismiss the more mundane interpretations of the endorsement, for example, that it was merely a statement of refusal against an opportunist claim or even that this was the ‘official’ response to such requests.

The allegation that Despenser the elder was motivated by greed, showing little mercy to those he ‘oppressed’ during his ascendancy, was common in the period after his execution in 1326. For example, a complaint brought against him in which he is portrayed as acting not only acquisitively, but also with a willingness to exploit his position in order to accumulate those ‘thousand librates of land’ described in the *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, is illustrated in a complaint made against him by Richard de Williamscoth in 1327.⁹⁶ Williamscoth petitioned for the return of his land in Noke, Oxfordshire, confiscated in the aftermath of the rebellion of Thomas of Lancaster as a consequence of his being part of the retinue of Maurice, second baron of Berkeley, a Lancastrian supporter.⁹⁷ Williamscoth described how he had lost his lands in Oxfordshire through Despenser’s ‘evil’ or ‘wicked’ seizure of them

⁹⁴ SC 8/106/5268.

⁹⁵ Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II*, pp. 8, 98-99, 109; Saul, ‘The Despensers and the Downfall of Edward II’, pp. 3, 32.

⁹⁶ SC 8/14/681; *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, p. 114.

⁹⁷ M. D. Lobel (ed.), ‘A History of the County of Oxford’, vol. 6, *VCH* (Oxford, 1959), pp. 268-276; Cokayne, *The Complete Peerage*, p. 128; Saul, ‘The Despensers and the Downfall of Edward II’, p. 21.

(*malveis purchase*). The language used in this petition is illustrative of a readiness to exploit the repercussions of the Despensers' downfall coupled with the anti-Despenser stance of the new regime, in order to find redress. For example, with the change of regime and the new focus on the rehabilitation of the memory of Edward II and Thomas, earl of Lancaster, Williamscot had no hesitation in openly admitting to being part of the retinue of a Lancastrian supporter.⁹⁸ Although the petition relates to the actions of the elder Despenser, Williamscot opened his petition by stating that he had been part of the 'quarrel' against the 'enemies of our lord the king', naming both Hugh Despenser the father *and* the son. Having thus established a common anti-Despenser bond with the new regime, Williamscot went on to describe how he had been forced to grant the reversion of his lands in Noke to Despenser the elder as payment of a rebellion-related fine. That the petition was brought during the reign of Edward III is further supported by its endorsement which referred it to the court of the king's bench in order to find redress through 'the statute' established for cancelling fines (*l'estatut fait de anentir les fins*) related to the Lancaster-led rebellion.⁹⁹

Another petition that aided the rehabilitation of Lancaster's reputation at the expense of Despenser the elder's is that of John Mauduit, son and heir of Thomas Mauduit, presented in 1327.¹⁰⁰ This petition is typical of complaints brought by the families of Lancastrian supporters attempting to regain rights lost through the 'quarrel' between Lancaster and Edward II.¹⁰¹ Mauduit's claim clearly illustrates the rehabilitated reputation of Lancaster compared to the vilification of Despenser's character at the beginning of the new reign. The endorsement particularly made plain that the charges against Lancaster were to be considered erroneous having been repealed and annulled (*revocet et adnullet*) by parliament.¹⁰²

There are only five petitions relating to Despenser the elder that were granted redress through 'the statute', the formalisation of the charges against

⁹⁸ Ormrod, *Edward III* (2005), p. 15.

⁹⁹ *Statutes at Large*, vol. 1, p. 189; *Statutes of the Realm*, pp. 252-253; *Rot. Parl.*, p. 382.

¹⁰⁰ SC 8/63/3112.

¹⁰¹ *CFR, 1327-1337*, p. 25.

¹⁰² Ormrod, *Edward III* (2005), p. 15; *Rot. Parl.*, pp. 3-5; Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster, 1307-1322*, p. 226.

the Despensers, made in the first parliament of Edward III's reign.¹⁰³ Of these, two were heard during the period 1327-1330, the remaining three were brought during the first years of the majority rule of Edward III. For example, the petition presented in 1327 by Henry atte Hok which was endorsed 'if the deed was done after the exile, he is to sue the process ordained by statute', once again emphasised the separation of the actions of the Despensers pre and post exile. The petition asserted that Despenser the elder took Hok hostage to force him to grant a quitclaim on land bordering Despenser's manor of Fastern in Wiltshire, notably in Lydiard Tregoze.¹⁰⁴ Evidence of Despenser's wish to extend this manor exists in a record dated February 1320 granting the abbot and convent of Stanley and the abbot of Malmesbury the right to give to Despenser three hundred acres respectively of their lands to 'hold in chief' at Bradon and Brinkworth, both bordering the Fastern manor 'for the enlargement of his park'.¹⁰⁵ Hok's petition is a typical claim concerning dubious land acquisitions made against Despenser the elder during the post deposition period. Unfortunately there is no record of the fate of this petition.

However, the petition of Nicholas de Plescy, presented in 1330, which was also endorsed through the aid of 'the statute', has a fuller record of process.¹⁰⁶ In this petition the Plescy family were clearly eager to acknowledge their part in the Lancastrian rebellion. The rehabilitation of Thomas of Lancaster had continued, perhaps growing even more important with the removal of the regency and the re-emergence of the personal power of the king. Having thus established their loyalty to the Crown, the Plescys were at pains to show that they had lost their lands as a consequence of this loyalty. The petition complained of the forced confiscation of Plescy lands by Despenser the elder due to his (Plescy's) adherence to Thomas of Lancaster. However, as Plescy is recorded as not having gained his majority until 1339, and must therefore have been a child at the point of the Lancastrian rebellion, it is more

¹⁰³ *Statutes at Large*, vol. 10, pp. 16-19, 189; *Statutes of the Realm*, pp. 251-257.

¹⁰⁴ SC 8/17/848.

¹⁰⁵ *CPR, 1317-1321*, pp. 431-432; J. Sanders, *Documents of the Baronial Movement of Reform and Rebellion, 1258-1267* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 144, 145; S. Raban, *Mortmain Legislation and the English Church, 1279-1500* (Cambridge, 1982), p. 29; E. Crittall (ed.), 'A History of the County of Wiltshire', vol. 9, *VCH* (Oxford, 1970), pp. 186-205.

¹⁰⁶ SC 8/135/6747.

likely that this referred to his deceased father, Edmund de Plescy.¹⁰⁷ Edmund is recorded as having died by May 1327, with his widow Maud being granted wardship of Nicholas in June 1327.¹⁰⁸ This petition is simply endorsed by the comment ‘let him use the statute’. However, a further petition dated to 1348 clearly indicates that the Plescy family were still attempting to gain the return of these lands some years later, perhaps indicating that the processing of cases dealt with through ‘the statute’ was at best thorough or, at worst, ineffective.¹⁰⁹

Why then did Plescy choose not to petition at the time of the downfall of the Despensers, in the parliament of January 1327, when so many other petitions were being heard on similar charges? Although this complaint originally sprang from Despenser the elder’s accumulation of lands from former Lancastrian rebels, the ownership of the lands in Bardsley, Gloucestershire, became embroiled in the political upheavals of the post-deposition period. The reasons for this are explained in the petition presented by Nicholas de Plescy in 1348, which detailed the consequences of his father’s ill-timed death and his own minority on the recovery of his lands.¹¹⁰ The petition stated that Edmund de Plescy had instigated proceedings to reclaim his estates but had died before this was settled, the process being terminated on the event of his death. It went on to state that the lands in Bardsley had, after the execution of the two Despensers in 1326, been gifted to Edmund of Woodstock, earl of Kent, uncle to the new king.¹¹¹ The reputation of the earl of Kent’s loyalty to the Crown had, at the time of the deposition, reached its zenith as he had been instrumental in the downfall of the Despensers. He had taken part in the tribunal that condemned Despenser the elder to death and had participated in the trial of Despenser the younger in November 1326.¹¹² He was called to the first parliament of the new regime and was part of the regency council.¹¹³ Because of his close familial connection to the new king and his continuing services and loyalty to the Crown, he received gifts from the lands

¹⁰⁷ *CCR, 1339-1341*, p. 31.

¹⁰⁸ *CFR, 1327-1337*, pp. 38, 48.

¹⁰⁹ SC 8/13/631; for a writ ordering various escheators to deliver seisin of the lands to the Plescy family: *CCR, 1339-1341*, p. 30.

¹¹⁰ SC 8/13/631.

¹¹¹ S. L. Waugh, ‘Edmund, first earl of Kent (1301–1330)’, *ODNB*.

¹¹² T. F. Tout, ‘Edmund of Woodstock’, *ODNB*.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

of the Despensers and their supporters, presumably including the Plescy lands in Bardsley.

The earl of Kent was considered an influential and close member of the royal family until, first in 1328 and again in 1330, he took part in ill-fated plots to remove the regency of Queen Isabella and Roger Mortimer.¹¹⁴ The final plot, based on the earl's belief that his brother, Edward II, was alive and imprisoned, was soon discovered and he was indicted and executed on March 19, 1330.¹¹⁵ It had perhaps not been politically prudent for the Plescy family to make a claim for the lands awarded to the king's uncle before his downfall. The reason why the Plescy family did not achieve final redress until the presentation of the 1348 petition is unclear. However, noted on the dorse of the petition there is a more credible suggestion that it was probably presented at the time of Nicholas de Plescy's coming of age in 1339.¹¹⁶ This is supported by the record of the return of the full seisin of his father's lands to Nicholas de Plescy in 1339.¹¹⁷

Although Hugh Despenser the elder can be shown to have been a conscientious bureaucrat who maintained a long standing loyalty to the Crown, the contents of the petitions, although not challenging this image, also show a man guilty of exploiting his bureaucratic position for his own profit and who, if not directly involved in, was certainly aware of and profited from, the actions of his son. Therefore the next section will consider the career and reputation of Hugh Despenser the younger to discover whether he really was the archetypal image of 'wicked advisor' who was to eventually bring down the rule of a legitimate king, and who the *Vita Edwardi Secundi* condemned, stating that 'the malice of the son [far] outweighed the father's harshness'.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ Ormrod, *Edward III* (2005), p. 110.

¹¹⁵ Phillips, *Edward II*, pp. 565-568, 577-581; *Murimuth*, pp. 253-257; *Lanercost*, pp. 264-265; Waugh, 'Edmund, first earl of Kent', *ODNB*.

¹¹⁶ *PROME*, 'Introduction', Parliament of January-February 1348.

¹¹⁷ *CCR, 1339-1341*, p. 30; 'seisin': the legal right of possession, of lands.

¹¹⁸ *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, p. 115; Rosenthal, 'The King's "Wicked Advisers"', pp. 595-618.

2.4 Hugh Despenser the Younger: The Architect of his own Downfall?

The early career of the younger Hugh Despenser was certainly enhanced by the likely nepotism of his father who, as established in the previous section, was one of Edward I's most loyal advisors. His 'career' began when he was knighted by the future Edward II on May 22, 1306. Later in the same year, Edward I granted his marriage to Eleanor de Clare, the eldest daughter and joint heir to the Earl of Gloucester, and Edward I's own granddaughter.¹¹⁹

But, in spite of this apparently auspicious beginning, he was neither a man of wealth nor influence at the beginning of Edward II's reign. For example, in May 1309 after the king had granted him the manor of Sutton in Norfolk, his income rose to a relatively modest £200 per annum.¹²⁰ His father also gifted him several properties in Cambridgeshire, Suffolk and Essex, the legacy of Alina Basset, Despenser the younger's grandmother.¹²¹ Although his wife, Edward II's niece, was a favourite at court there is little evidence his having any significant political influence during the years leading up to the battle of Bannockburn in 1314.¹²² However, with the death of the Earl of Gloucester at this disastrous battle, Despenser the younger, through his wife's inheritance, effectively became the recipient of a third of the Clare estates, which were located primarily in south Wales.¹²³ The final partitioning of the Gloucester estates, described by Denholm-Young as 'the most important

¹¹⁹ J. S. Hamilton, 'Hugh Despenser, the Younger, First Lord Despenser (d. 1326)', *ODNB*; Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II*, p. 28; Haines, *King Edward II*, p. 105; Lawrence, 'Rise of a Royal Favourite', p. 213.

¹²⁰ Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II*, p. 3.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31; Hamilton, 'Hugh Despenser the Younger', *ODNB*.

¹²² The significance of the favour shown to Despenser the younger's wife, Eleanor, has been interpreted as indicative of an affectionate relationship between the king and his niece. Where Fryde merely commented on the favour she found at court, other historians have taken this further to suggest a sexual liaison between the two: Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II*, p. 30; Haines, *King Edward II*, pp. 170, 375 n. 93; M. Prestwich, 'The Court of Edward II' in Dodd and Musson, *The Reign of Edward II*, p. 71; Prestwich, *Plantagenet England*, p. 214; Paul Doherty even went as far as to suggest that Edward II wished to indulge in wife-swapping with Despenser the younger: Doherty, *Isabella and the Strange Death of Edward II*, pp. 101-102.

¹²³ *Rot. Parl.*, pp. 353-355. For a transcript of the grant of lands for Despenser the younger see: J. Taylor, 'The Judgement of Hugh Despenser the Younger', *Medievalia et Humanistica* (1958), 12, 70-77; Davies, *The Baronial Opposition to Edward II*, p. 92; Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II*, pp. 27-36; M. Buck, *Politics, Finance and the Church in the Reign of Edward II: Walter Stapeldon, Treasurer of England* (Cambridge, 1983), p. 132.

territorial upheaval of the reign', was delayed for some time by a spurious claim of pregnancy by the dowager duchess.¹²⁴ The evident frustration of Despenser the younger caused by this delay came to a head in 1315 when he attacked and took the castle at Tonbridge in Kent, held by the Clare family from the archbishop of Canterbury.¹²⁵ This impetuous attempt to hasten the possession of his wife's inheritance ultimately ended with him having to return the castle to the archbishop. This reckless undertaking may perhaps be considered indicative of the 'avaricious and violent tendencies' for which Despenser was to become notorious.¹²⁶

Ultimately, this inheritance was to make Despenser the younger an exceptionally influential man, the value of his wife's inheritance is estimated at between £1300 and £1500.¹²⁷ However, his newly acquired status did not immediately reveal itself in an improvement in his political standing. For example, he did not make an appearance as a witness in the charter rolls of Edward II until May 1316.¹²⁸ However, as early as 1314 there had been a clear demarcation made between father and son in these rolls, with Despenser the elder thereafter being referred to as Hugh Despenser senior.¹²⁹ The reason for this division is unstated, however it may be that, with the death of the duke of

¹²⁴ *CIPM*, vol. 5, p. 353; Richardson and Sayles, *The English Parliament in the Middle Ages*, p. 73; Prestwich, *Plantagenet England*, p. 195; J. C. Davies, 'The Despenser War in Glamorgan', *TRHS* (1915), 3rd series, 9, 21-64; the order to allocate Gloucester's inheritance to Despenser the younger and his wife finally took place in November 1317: *CFR, 1307-1319*, p. 350; *CPR, 1313-1317*, pp. 660-661; M. Altschul, *A Baronial Family in Medieval England: The Clares, 1217-1314* (Baltimore, 1965), pp. 165-174; Buck, *Politics, Finance and the Church in the Reign of Edward II*, p. 134; *Flores Historiarum*, p. 194; *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, pp. xii-xiii, 115; Davies, 'The Despenser War in Glamorgan', pp. 27-31; Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II*, p. 34.

¹²⁵ *CFR, 1307-1319*, p. 248; *CIPM*, vol. 5, pp. 351-352; Davies, *The Baronial Opposition to Edward II*, p. 92; Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II*, p. 33.

¹²⁶ Hamilton, 'Hugh Despenser the Younger', *ODNB*.

¹²⁷ The value of Despensers' share in the Gloucester estates is given very precisely as £1276.6s.9¼d in E. B. Fryde, 'The Deposits of Hugh Despenser the Younger with Italian Bankers', *The Economic History Review*, New Series (1951), 3, 344-362, p. 348; Hamilton, 'Hugh Despenser the Younger', *ODNB*.

¹²⁸ Despenser the younger's appearances on witness lists rose dramatically after his first appearance, he was named in 68.6% and 78.8% of lists in 1320 and 1321 respectively, rising to a remarkable 83.3% in the final year of his ascendancy: J. S. Hamilton, 'Charter Witness Lists for the Reign of Edward II', in N. Saul (ed.), *Fourteenth-century England*, vol. 1 (Woodbridge, 2000), 1-20, p. 5.

¹²⁹ For example: *CCh.R, 1300-1326*, pp. 197, 340, 366; for a discussion of this see Saul, 'The Despensers and the Downfall of Edward II', pp. 5, 6.

Gloucester, it was necessary to recognise Despenser the younger's newly elevated position as being distinct from that of his father. Despenser the younger's career took another dramatic leap when, in July 1318, he became Edward II's chamberlain.¹³⁰ This position, effectively the head of the royal household which had become not only a major court position but a politically significant one in the reign of Edward II, allowed him to 'vet' access to the king, thus placing him in an unprecedented position of power, not equalled even by the king's former favourite, Piers Gaveston.¹³¹ This ability to segregate the king from his barons, who the ideals of kingship at the time stipulated to be his natural advisors, had long term connotations for the fate of Despenser the younger.¹³² As with Piers Gaveston, in alienating the king's barons, Despenser the younger can perhaps be described as being the instigator of his own downfall.¹³³

Another factor in the turbulence of Despenser the younger's long-term relationship with the king's magnates was his unashamed and violent pursuit of his very significant tenurial ambitions. These aspirations were particularly evident in Wales. As he ransacked the remaining Clare estates in order to establish an 'empire' in south Wales, the belief that he ultimately desired to acquire control of the earldom itself could not have seemed impossible.¹³⁴

¹³⁰ Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster, 1307-1322*, p. 261.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 261. For a discussion of the power of the chamberlain: G. Dodd 'Patronage, Petitions and Grace: the Chamberlains' Bills of Henry IV's Reign, in G. Dodd and D. Biggs (eds), *The Reign of Henry IV: Rebellion and Survival, 1403-1413* (York, 2008), pp. 105-135; H. Summerson 'Lord Chamberlains of the Royal Household' *ODNB*.

¹³² That the barons and magnates felt slighted and excluded from their rightful place as king's advisors is evident from the charges made against the Despensers, with the reference to the removal of the barons' right to counsel the king being mentioned in various forms at least eight times: *CCR, 1318-1323*, pp. 492-494; Rosenthal, 'The King's "Wicked Advisers"', p. 610; J. Watts, *Henry VI and the Politics of Kingship* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 14, 19; Valente, *The Theory and Practice of Revolt*, p. 27; J. Ferster, *Fictions of Advice: The Literature and Politics of Counsel in Late Medieval England* (Pennsylvania, 1996), pp. 25, 70-71; Ormrod, *Edward III* (2005), p. 122.

¹³³ Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II*, p. 36; Hamilton, 'Hugh Despenser the younger', *ODNB*; Phillips, *Edward II*, p. 319; Waugh, 'For King, Country and Patron', p. 25; Saul, 'The Despensers and the Downfall of Edward II', p. 5; Altschul, *A Baronial Family in Medieval England*, p. 174.

¹³⁴ For the accusation that Despenser the younger coveted the earldom of Gloucester, see: *CCR, 1318-1323*, p. 494; M. J. Lawrence, *Power, Ambition and Political Rehabilitation: The Despensers, c.1281-1400*, PhD thesis, University of York, 2005, pp. 26-27.

These increasingly acquisitive ambitions led to heightened tensions with the barons as he cut across the traditional rights of the Marcher lords.¹³⁵ On May 4, 1321 this antagonism came to a head when these same lords attacked and seized Despenser lands in south Wales.¹³⁶ By August of the same year the disgruntled lords were in a position to lay down charges against Despenser the younger and his father in parliament.¹³⁷ Both Despensers were found guilty and sentenced to be exiled. Despenser the elder retreated to Bordeaux whilst Despenser the younger remained at large. Ensconced in the Cinque Ports, he tried his hand at piracy.¹³⁸ The *Vita Edwardi Secundi* accused him of being a 'sea-monster' (*belua marina*), notably, for attacking a Genoese ship, killing its crew and seizing its cargo, as well as raiding the town of Southampton.¹³⁹ However, the exile proved to be short-lived and, after his reinstatement, Despenser the younger remained closely associated with the king until his execution in 1326.

The final years of the reign of Edward II were highlighted by an upturn in the king's wealth and a reassertion of his personal power through the defeat and execution of Thomas, earl of Lancaster and the removal of the 'contrariant' barons. This had resulted not only in the removal of one of the king's most vehement critics, and the rescinding of the Ordinances; it also allowed Despenser the younger to achieve apparent domination over Edward II. This led to the latter years of his reign being 'rightly described as a period of tyranny'.¹⁴⁰ This phrase, describing Despenser the younger's apparent exploitation of his position as chamberlain and as so-called 'favourite' of the king, refers to his seeming subversion of the royal prerogative to administer justice and the accumulation of wealth and power at the expense of the common people. Does the evidence of the petitions support this generally

¹³⁵ Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster, 1307-1322*, p. 27.

¹³⁶ Waugh, 'For King Country and Patron', p. 32; *CCR, 1318-1323*, pp. 541-546.

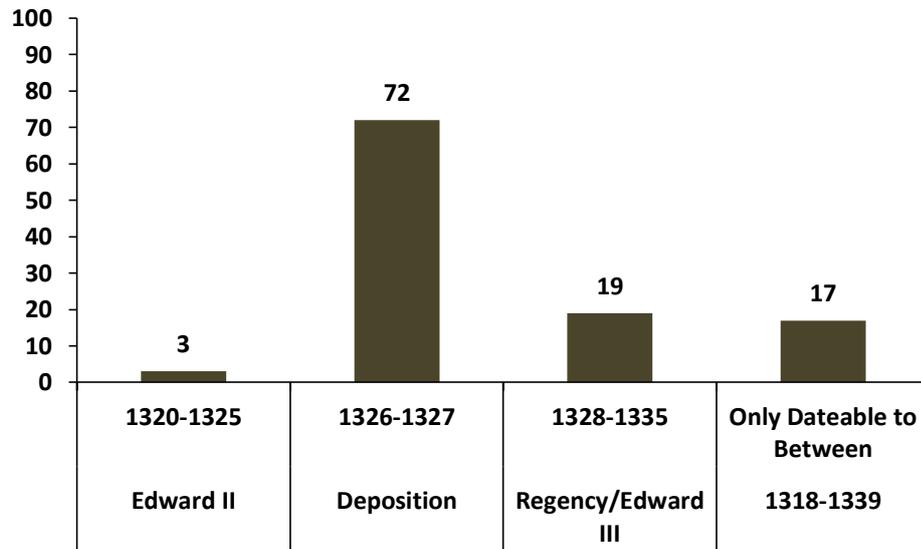
¹³⁷ *CCR, 1318-1323*, pp. 492-494; these accusations were reminiscent of the charges brought against Piers Gaveston: Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II*, p. 45.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

¹³⁹ *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, pp. 115-116; *Flores Historiarum*, vol. 3, p. 198; *Malmesberiensis*, p. 297; Bothwell, *Falling From Grace*, p. 155; Buck, *Politics, Finance and the Church in the Reign of Edward II*, p. 136; *CCR, 1318-1323*, p. 506.

¹⁴⁰ M. V. Clarke, *Fourteenth Century Studies* (Oxford, 1968), p. 132; Hamilton, *Piers Gaveston, Earl of Cornwall*, p. 12; Phillips, *Edward II*, p. 368.

accepted theory? Graph 2.4 illustrates the distribution of the petitions relating to Despenser the younger.



Graph 2.4: The distribution of petitions naming Hugh Despenser the younger, 1320 – c.1335.¹⁴¹

The fear of Despenser’s power shown by these petitioners is perhaps illustrated by the small number of petitions which named Despenser the younger during the period 1320-1325.¹⁴² Although one may consider this to be strange when he was such an extensive landowner and intrinsically linked to the king’s court, the three petitions that *were* presented appear to only be indirectly related to Despenser, including his name because of his role as part of the establishment of the time. For example, the petition of William Dautreuve presented c.1323, related to his imprisonment for his part in the Lancastrian rebellion. Dautreuve did not complain of the actions of Despenser the younger, but simply stated that he could not be released until he had paid a fine to ‘the king and Sir Hugh’ (*raunson ove le roi et ove sire Hugh*).¹⁴³ This statement illustrates the extent of the influence of the younger Despenser, not only in his role as chamberlain but also through a common acceptance of the existence of the close bond between the king and Despenser; Dautreuve’s use of Despenser’s given name perhaps underlined his accepted position as a member of the royal household. The endorsement of this petition commented that Dautreuve should

¹⁴¹ The category ‘only dateable between 1318 and 1339’ constitutes those petitions where the suggested dating extends beyond that of the other categories.

¹⁴² SC 8/14/671; SC 8/33/1647.

¹⁴³ SC 8/14/671.

‘sue by the way that is ordained for those of this complaint’.¹⁴⁴ This endorsement suggests the important point of there having been the legal apparatus in place for prisoners to challenge their sentences.

The second petition indirectly naming Despenser the younger, presented in 1324, probably in his capacity as chamberlain, is that of John Biset, son and heir of the similarly named John Biset.¹⁴⁵ This petition was presented as a result of problems finalising the younger Biset’s inheritance on his coming of age, of which he stated he had been deprived of by Despenser and by John Hotham (Bishop of Ely and royal treasurer).¹⁴⁶ It was endorsed with the instruction that the inquisition should appear before the court. Biset certainly achieved redress, as is made clear by a writ to the treasurer and barons of the Exchequer ordering them to acquit Biset, and for the escheator to stop intermeddling with Biset’s affairs, made on March 12, 1324.¹⁴⁷ It is interesting to note that Despenser’s part in the complaint was not mentioned in either the endorsement or the subsequent order. Biset’s petition is particularly interesting as it was a complaint against the king’s ministers (treasurer, barons of the Exchequer and escheators) that nevertheless achieved a favourable outcome, indicating that the Crown was willing to concede that it had ‘overstepped’ its remit. This endorsement, when considered in conjunction with the outcome of Dautreve’s petition discussed above, clearly contradicts the idea that in this period (and particularly during the reign of Edward II), the Crown was willing to tyrannise its subjects by denying their right to appeal against their sentences.¹⁴⁸

If one accepts the commonly held opinion of Despenser the younger’s reputation, it is hardly surprising that the petitioners were unwilling to bring direct accusations of wrongdoing against him before his downfall. This is also reflected in those petitions which named Despenser in relationship to accusations against those in receipt of his support during the period of his

¹⁴⁴ The ‘writ of imprisonment’, mentioned in the petition, may have referred to a writ of *Habeas Corpus* (literally ‘you have the body’) and would have allowed Dawtrely to challenge the terms of his incarceration in court: A. D. R. Zellik, R. J. Sharpe, S. Atrill and J. Farbey, *The Law of Habeas Corpus* (Oxford, 2011), pp. 2-3.

¹⁴⁵ SC 8/33/1647.

¹⁴⁶ M. C. Buck, ‘John Hotham (d. 1337)’, *ODNB*.

¹⁴⁷ *CCR, 1323-1327*, p. 100.

¹⁴⁸ Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, p. 82.

ascendency which are similarly scarce. Of these, a petition presented against a royal commissioner Edmund de Impington, can convincingly be shown to implicate Despenser the younger in wrong-doing, if only by association.¹⁴⁹ The petition, dated as belonging to the period 1323 to 1327, the period of the Despenser ascendancy, was presented by Richard de Stirthorp.¹⁵⁰ With regard to a royal commission given to Impington to confiscate John de Mowbray's lands on the Isle of Axholme in Lincolnshire after Mowbray's defection to the Lancastrian cause, Stirthorp stated that Impington had confiscated one hundred marks worth of wheat and beans from his lands at Althorpe at Axholme.¹⁵¹ Stirthorp concluded by alleging that he could not obtain justice because of the false returns of Impington and the menacing letters of Despenser the younger (*fauz returnes...et letters de manasses...*). However, that Stirthorp felt able to accuse Despenser the younger as acting in collusion with Impington seems to challenge the concept of the influence of Despenser the younger in the corruption and tyranny of the Crown in this period. However, this suffers something of a set-back when one considers the general order not to hinder Impington in the course of his duties, and again by the petition's endorsement, that it should be referred to common law, both of which indicate a disregard of the petitioner's rights by denying him access to the king's direct justice.

However, the short period between the Despenser the younger's execution in November 1326 and the death of Edward II on September 21,

¹⁴⁹ SC 8/18/861.

¹⁵⁰ The contents of the petition allows one to date the alleged crime to the sixteenth regnal year of Edward II's reign (July 6, 1322 to July 7, 1323), further pinpointing it to after the feast of saint Gregory 1323 (March 12). This date can be narrowed down further as the king, at Westminster in May 1324, issued an order that Impington was not to be punished for his pursuance of the Contrariants, dating the period of the 'pursuance' as being between October 17, 1322 and April 15, 1323, thus neatly covering the date of Stirthorp's complaint: Cheney, *A Handbook of Dates*, p. 74; *CCR, 1323-1327*, pp. 99-100. This, along with a note for Impington to deliver goods confiscated to the Crown is dated to June 16, 1322, 'at the information of Robert Baldock', supports the legality of Impington's commission: *CFR, 1319-1327*, pp. 134-135.

¹⁵¹ R. E. Archer, 'John Mowbray, 2nd Lord Mowbray (1286–1322)' *ODNB*. There is no evidence that Stirthorp was a member of the Lancastrian party. Therefore his accusation that Impington had confiscated his property may indicate either a bureaucratic mix-up, Stirthorp's goods being taken as part of the confusion of the post Boroughbridge period, or an underlying criminality of those tasked with confiscating the goods of the Contrariants.

1327, was to see a great increase in petitioning.¹⁵² These petitions include two that appear to have contained accusations against Despenser before the removal of Edward II from the throne. A close scrutiny of their provenance reveals that they were probably compiled during that short period of time between Despenser the younger's execution in November 1326 and the final deposition of Edward II in the parliament of January 1327.¹⁵³ The first is a petition from Thomas le Blount and his wife Julianne (the widow of John, second Lord Hastings the nephew of Aymer de Valence 11th earl of Pembroke).¹⁵⁴ This petition requested the right to part of her dowry from her first marriage, stating that Despenser the younger had withheld it through his guardianship of Julianne's son.¹⁵⁵ The date of this petition can be further verified through its mention of the death of Joan, Countess of Atholl.¹⁵⁶ The countess' death had occurred in either June or July of 1326, but the petition makes no reference to the death on December 28, 1326 of the Count of Atholl, suggesting a date of after June but before December 1326.¹⁵⁷ Added to this, the petition can be shown to have been presented after the invasion of Queen Isabella and her party on September 24, 1326, but before the deposition of Edward II in January 1327, as it was addressed to the 'King, Queen and the lord the Duke'. At this point the petitioners were seemingly unwilling to exclude the king from their address, Edward II still being the rightful monarch, but felt it necessary to include the queen and the future Edward III. Their inclusion in the address by the petitioner demonstrated their increased status as co-rulers at this time.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵² See Graph 2.4.

¹⁵³ SC 8/270/13479; SC 8/162/8084. According to Dodd, the reason that petitions did not require a date is explained by it being the *outcome* of the petition that was important: Dodd, 'Parliamentary Petitions?', p. 15. For a discussion of this important parliament see Chapter 3.

¹⁵⁴ W. M. Ormrod, 'Juliana Leybourne, Countess of Huntingdon (1303/4–1367)' *ODNB*; F. Watson, 'John Hastings, 1st Lord Hastings (1262–1313)', *ODNB*.

¹⁵⁵ Julianne was to marry for a third time after Blount's death in 1328 when she became Countess of Huntingdon: Ormrod, 'Juliana Leybourne, Countess of Huntingdon' *ODNB*; W. M. Ormrod, 'William Clinton, Earl of Huntingdon (d.1354)', *ODNB*.

¹⁵⁶ F. Watson, 'David Strathbogie, Styled 10th Earl of Atholl (d. 1326)', *ODNB*.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ For a comprehensive discussion of the petitions spanning the period of the deposition see: Sneddon, 'Words and Realities', pp. 193-205. Further support for the argument that the unnamed 'lord duke' was the future Edward III rather than Roger Mortimer can be assumed through the improbability that Mortimer would have been included when Edward II was still officially king, there being no need at that point for

The petition presented by Nicholas de la Beche in 1326, which requested the return of his lands and goods after his imprisonment by the ‘false procurement’ of Despenser the younger, can similarly be proven to date to after the death of Despenser but before the deposition of Edward II.¹⁵⁹ This provenance rests simply on the timing of the judgement on this petition, which was recorded as being given at Kenilworth on December 10, 1326. This was some sixteen days after the execution of Despenser on the November 24, 1326, signifying that the petition was presented after Despenser’s downfall if not actually after his execution, and notably *outside* of parliament.¹⁶⁰ Although ‘caution is understandable’ and the opinion that ‘a large proportion, and possibly even the greater part’ of petitions were heard in a parliamentary setting can be generally accepted, petitions such as that of Nicholas de la Beche can be used to establish how often petitioners were offered redress at other times and places.¹⁶¹ This highlights an opportunity to counterbalance the accepted historical value of petitioning as evidence for the evolution of parliament, with a new approach to the study of ancient petitions that allows one to gauge the attitudes of the ‘ordinary’ citizen, and their expectation to have the right to obtain justice from the king whenever and *wherever* the opportunity arose.

The sudden surge in petitioning against Despenser the younger after 1326 seemingly supports the idea of these petitions being the result of the removal of a tyrannous landlord and oligarch. A petition perhaps illustrating this power in the period of Despenser the younger’s ascendancy, filtered through accusations made against those claiming his maintenance, was that presented in 1326 by Geoffrey Fitz Waryn.¹⁶² Fitz Waryn stated that, having indicted the Despenser retainer Sir Ralph de Wedone for his part in the death of

a regent. Edward III did not act independently of Edward II until after his father’s ‘abdication’: C. Valente, ‘The Deposition and Abdication of Edward II’, *EHR* (1998), 113, 852-881.

¹⁵⁹ SC 8/162/8084.

¹⁶⁰ *CCR 1323-1327*, p. 627; L. Ehrlich *Proceedings against the Crown, 1216-1377* (Oxford, 1921), pp. 252-253; Haines, *King Edward II*, p. 185. Edward II was held at Kenilworth in the custody of Henry of Lancaster from December 5, 1326: E. M. Hallam, ‘The Itinerary of Edward II and his Household, 1307-1328’, *List and Index Society*, vol. 211 (London, 1984), pp. 291-292.

¹⁶¹ Dodd, ‘Parliamentary Petitions?’, pp. 14-15, 45.

¹⁶² SC 8/111/5536.

Alice Beauchamp, Wedone had been pardoned through the offices of the younger Despenser.¹⁶³ Fitz Waryn went on to complain how, after his pardon, Wedone had physically attacked him, describing in dramatic terms how Wedone had burned his house with Fitz Warren only having escaped ‘by the grace of God, half naked’ (*il les eschapa par la grace de dieu mi sans draps*).¹⁶⁴ Even with this striking description of Wedone’s wrongdoing coupled with Despenser’s interference in the carrying out of justice, the petition was merely endorsed by the comment that it should be referred to common law. The dating of this petition becomes more significant when one considers the possible reasons for this endorsement. If the petition was presented earlier than 1326 then its return to the common law process could perhaps point to this type of complaint being both unremarkable and acceptable during Edward II’s reign, when corrupt practices were common in ‘all aspects of public life...[which were] were tainted with corruption’.¹⁶⁵ However, the validity of this is brought into doubt if the petition was presented after the removal of Edward II, when such a dramatic complaint against Despenser the younger and his retainer could have been expected to have received a more positive response from the Crown.

This petition also reveals the apparent power and importance of those immediately affiliated to Despenser the younger. For example, although Fitz Waryn stated that Wedone had been issued a pardon by Despenser, his complaint focused on the issue of the maintenance of Robert Baldock, stating that it was through *his* influence (as chancellor) that he could receive no justice. As Chancellor of England, Robert Baldock held one of the most powerful positions in the kingdom and was one of the king’s most trusted servants. Being described occasionally as Edward II’s secretary, Baldock was also known to be a close ally and protégé of Despenser the younger.¹⁶⁶ Baldock

¹⁶³ Wedone is mentioned in several petitions and is often linked to the actions of Despenser the younger. For example, in the petition of the ‘People of the three hundreds of Chiltern’ discussed in section 2.2: SC 8/84/4152.

¹⁶⁴ Kaeuper, ‘Law and Order in Fourteenth-Century England’, pp. 779-780; Saul, ‘The Despensers and the Downfall of Edward II’, p. 27.

¹⁶⁵ G. Dodd, ‘Corruption in the Fourteenth-Century English State’ *International Journal of Public Administration* (2011), 34, 720-730, pp. 720-721.

¹⁶⁶ R. M. Haines, ‘Robert Baldock (d. 1327)’, *ODNB*; L. B. Dibben, ‘Secretaries in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries’, *EHR* (1910), 25, p. 440; Davies, *The*

has even been described as ‘the brain and hand of the younger Despenser’, and of being ‘only [marginally] less powerful than the Despensers’.¹⁶⁷ According to the records in *Rymer’s Foedera*, it was Baldock, not Despenser, whom Edward II considered to be his ‘voice’, with him being described as the instrument of the king’s will (*Robertum de Baldok clericum quem ... rex ... constituit organum suae vocis*).¹⁶⁸ However, how influenced Baldocks’ ‘voice’ was by Despenser the younger remains debatable. The extent of his influence is further underlined by his inclusion as one of the targets of a plot in 1323, apparently instigated by Roger Mortimer, to have him murdered along with the two Despensers; coupled with his accompaniment of the king and Despenser the younger during their flight from the armies of the queen and Roger Mortimer in 1326. He was captured and finally died in prison ‘miserably abused’ on May 28, 1327.¹⁶⁹ Baldock’s rise to power, aided by the sponsorship of Despenser, supports the consensus that Despenser the younger was the master of the exploitation of the practice of so-called ‘double’ allegiance, placing his servants and retainers in positions of power through his role as chamberlain and court favourite, thus creating divided loyalties between royal administrators who owed their allegiance to both the king and their patron.¹⁷⁰

Baronial Opposition to Edward II, p. 119; Waugh, ‘For King, Country and Patron’, p. 25.

¹⁶⁷ M. Saaler, *Edward II, 1307-1327* (London, 1997), p. 102; Tout, *The Place of the Reign of Edward II in English History*, p. 137; Stones, ‘The Date of Roger Mortimer’s Escape from the Tower of London’, pp. 97-98.

¹⁶⁸ In a protestation against the admission and renunciation to the bishopric of Winchester, April 1320: *Rymer’s Foedera*, p. 827; Dibben, ‘Secretaries in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries’, p. 444.

¹⁶⁹ A detailed description of this plot is given in the King’s Bench Records for the Hilary term of 1324: KB27/255; Stones, ‘The Date of Roger Mortimer’s Escape from the Tower of London’, p. 98; Usher, ‘The Career of a Political Bishop’, pp. 33-47; Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II*, p. 193; Haines ‘Robert Baldock’, *ODNB*; Saaler, *Edward II*, pp. 130-135.

¹⁷⁰ Tout, *The Place of the Reign of Edward II in English History*, p. 123; Phillips, *Edward II*, pp. 445-446; Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II*, p. 47; Waugh, ‘For King, Country and Patron’, p. 23. Of those that can be definitely linked to both Despenser and the king in this study, Robert Baldock is by far the most commonly mentioned, with sixteen petitions referring to him by name. The dominance of Baldock’s appearance in the petitions is further underlined by the retainer with the second most appearances, William Aylemer who was named in only five petitions during the period of the study.

2.5 Conclusion

This study of the petitions relating to the two Despensers has, similarly to Chapter One, illustrated that the petitioners were willing to tailor their pleas to exploit the changing political situation. But the petitions concerning the two Despensers have also revealed a more nuanced picture of the two men as individuals. This is particularly significant due to their actions and motivations being so intrinsically linked by historians that they are seen as being equally guilty of heading one of the ‘most oppressive regime[s]... in medieval England’.¹⁷¹

Do the content of the petitions support the views of Davies and Lawrence that Hugh Despenser the elder was a conscientious bureaucrat who was essentially loyal to the Crown, but was inevitably implicated in the actions of his son?¹⁷² He was an intimate and trusted member of the royal retinue from before the beginning of Edward II’s reign, and his personal relationship with the young Edward II has even been described as being that of surrogate father.¹⁷³ Davies stated that Despenser the elder did not pursue the ‘wanton and purely selfish aggrandisement’ of his son, but rather depicted the two as having distinct (but not separate) roles during the ‘tyranny’. He portrayed Despenser the younger as a royal favourite, whilst Despenser the elder he considered merely a royal servant and advisor who, because of the machinations of his son, was destined to meet the same fate.¹⁷⁴ Fryde disagreed with Conway Davies, clearly stating that Despenser the elder must also be considered as a favourite but qualified this by stating he was the less important partner of ‘the Despensers’.¹⁷⁵

The petitions do not entirely support these views. They clearly indicate that the elder Despenser was willing to exploit his position for fiscal gain. He achieved this through his role of Keeper of the Forest and, as the father of the

¹⁷¹ Ormrod, ‘Agenda for Legislation’, p. 1.

¹⁷² Davies, *The Baronial Opposition to Edward II*, pp. 98-99; Lawrence, ‘Rise of a Royal Favourite’, p. 218.

¹⁷³ Mortimer, *The Greatest Traitor*, p. 33; Lawrence, *Power, Ambition and Political Rehabilitation*, p. 25; Lawrence, ‘Rise of a Royal Favourite’, p. 214.

¹⁷⁴ Davies, *The Baronial Opposition to Edward II*, pp. 98-99.

¹⁷⁵ Fryde names Despenser the elder as a favourite continuously throughout: Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II*, p. 1, *passim*.

royal favourite in the aftermath of the Lancastrian rebellion, received lands from the estates of the Bohun, Badlesmere, Damory and Giffard families, as well as from the Lacy estates.¹⁷⁶ Although the content of the petitions do not indicate that he actively collaborated with his son, he cannot be shown to have been innocent of accepting the benefits from, or condoning his actions. However, the impact of his unbroken loyalty to both Edward I and Edward II must not be downplayed as it was, contemporaneously, one of the two main shortcomings of Despenser the elder in the eyes of the barons, with his loyalty to the king making him willing to stand against their wishes and advice. The second, and perhaps most understandable, fault was that he was guilty of ‘parental devotion’ to his ‘hated son’, Despenser the younger, who, according to Prestwich, was certain of his own ambitions, which were that he ‘may be rich and may attain our ends’.¹⁷⁷

Hugh Despenser the younger has been depicted as having treasonously subverted the royal prerogative to administer justice and accumulated lands and wealth through acts of tyranny against the ‘ordinary’ people. The records of the Bridlington chronicler, writing in the aftermath of the deposition, gave a shortened version of the indictment against him. This included accusations that he had not only been guilty of ‘procur[ing] the death’ of (the now ‘saintly’) Thomas of Lancaster, but that on the return journey from Bannockburn, he had abandoned the queen at Tynemouth, despite the fact that, as the chronicler colourfully described, the enemy had ‘flowed around her’ (*hostes undique confluebant*).¹⁷⁸ Indeed, Despenser is portrayed as the cause of the king’s ill-fated Scottish campaign that ended with the deaths of ‘twenty thousand men’ at

¹⁷⁶ For example: SC 8/159/7907; SC 8/311/15502; SC 8/17/830; Waugh, ‘For King, Country and Patron’, p. 32; S. L. Waugh, *The Confiscated Lands of the Contrariants in Gloucestershire and Herefordshire in 1322: An Economic and Social Study*, PhD thesis, University of London, 1975, pp. 118-122; Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II*, pp. 69-86, 90, 106-118; Saul, ‘The Despensers and the Downfall of Edward II’, p. 27. For a list of forfeited Contrariant lands and who they were subsequently granted to: CCh.R, Edward I and II, pp. 441-452.

¹⁷⁷ Davies, *The Baronial Opposition to Edward II*, p. 99; Mortimer, *The Greatest Traitor*,

p. 1; Prestwich, *Plantagenet England*, p. 208.

¹⁷⁸ *Bridlingtoniensi*, pp. 88-89; Phillips, *Edward II*, p. 482; Taylor, ‘The Judgement of Hugh Despenser the younger’, p. 71.

Bannockburn.¹⁷⁹ The stage was set for Despenser the younger to be cast as the main villain of Edward II's reign.

Few historians have been willing to consider the younger Despenser as anything other than the epitome of a tyrannical (or wicked) advisor. For example, when considering the pro-Despenser chronicle of Tewkesbury, Given-Wilson declared his belief in the essential guilt of the younger Despenser, stating that the Tewkesbury chronicler had 'show[n] a ... misplaced loyalty to Despenser', adding that 'few others doubted that Despenser richly deserved his fate'.¹⁸⁰ Despenser the younger's role in the downfall of Edward II is also supported by a common acceptance of the claims of his self-aggrandisement at the expense of the subjects of the realm. The evidence of the petitions certainly goes some way in supporting these views. For example, Lawrence's description of the 'brutality and vindictive dominance' of Despenser the younger is a typical representation of his reputation and is echoed in the opinion of Waugh who stated that Despenser acquired his lands through 'favouritism...and terror'.¹⁸¹ This is certainly supported by the string of petitions relating to Despenser's apparent illegal acquisition of the manor of Lashley in Essex, and upholds the commonly held view of Despenser the younger's tenurial ambitions, which Davies described as his 'overpowering greed for land' and Given-Wilson as his 'ruthless land-grabbing' ambition.¹⁸²

The case involving the ownership of the Lashley estates obviously held some notoriety contemporaneously, as it was included in the charges against Despenser the younger that led to his and his father's exile in 1321.¹⁸³ However, its inclusion in the indictment may also be indicative of the exceptional circumstances surrounding the case, as there are no indicators that it was being used as an example of common practice. It was not until after the deposition, in 1327 and 1328, that the Lashley family finally presented a

¹⁷⁹ For a description of the battle of Bannockburn see *Bridlingtoniensi*, pp. 46-47; *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, pp. 50-56; Phillips, *Edward II*, pp. 228-237.

¹⁸⁰ C. Given-Wilson, *Chronicles: The Writing of History in Medieval England* (London, 2004), p. 84.

¹⁸¹ Lawrence, 'Rise of a Royal Favourite', p. 207; Waugh, 'For King, Country and Patron', p. 30; Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II*, pp. 27-36, 228-232.

¹⁸² Given-Wilson, *The English Nobility in the Late Middle Ages*, p. 32; Davies, *The Baronial Opposition to Edward II*, p. 97.

¹⁸³ For a transcript of these charges see *CCR, 1318-1323*, pp. 492-494.

succession of complaints, including several from various Lashley tenants, that described the effect of Despenser the younger's actions in acquiring the Lashley lands.¹⁸⁴ These petitions were presented as a result of what Davies emotively called a 'shameless proceeding' by Despenser.¹⁸⁵ This referred to the apparent flouting of the king's justice by Despenser through the removal of John de Lashley from the keeping of the Sheriff of Essex (Ralph Giffard) at Colchester prison.¹⁸⁶

In his first petition, dated to 1327, John de Lashley described how he was removed from the king's prison by Despenser the younger and held by him until he quitclaimed the rights to his Essex estates.¹⁸⁷ He went on to describe how the ownership of his estates was then passed on (along with the imprisoned Lashley) to Bartholomew de Badlesmere, by whom he was again incarcerated until he granted him the manor of Lashley. There is obviously some confusion in the wording of Lashley's petition, as it began by stating that he had already granted his lands to Despenser. Davies explained this by suggesting that Despenser had ultimately failed in forcing Lashley to quitclaim his lands and had therefore passed him on to Badlesmere.¹⁸⁸ However, the notion of Despenser failing to acquire the lands under these circumstances hardly corresponds with Davies' image of a land hungry tyrant. The events are better explained by the evidence of a later petition presented in 1328, again brought by Lashley, but not quoted by Davies, which explained that Despenser had enfeoffed Bartholomew de Badlesmere and his wife Margaret with the

¹⁸⁴ Lashley petitioned for a pardon in 1327 which was subsequently granted on May 26, 1327: SC 8/56/2759; *CPR, 1327-1330*, p. 116; SC 8/14/682; SC 8/56/2760; SC 8/70/3461; SC 8/155/7728; SC 8/171/8531; SC 8/162/8098; Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II*, p. 48; Wilkinson, 'The Sherburn Indenture', pp. 26-27.

¹⁸⁵ Davies, *The Baronial Opposition to Edward II*, p. 97.

¹⁸⁶ He was held accused of attacks against Isabel de Vescy, the widow of John de Vescy, Lord of Alnwick. One of Queen Isabella's household, and a prominent favourite of Edward II, she was named specifically in, and banished by, the ordinances of 1311, this was later repealed as having been prejudicial to the king, in 1313. Therefore she must be considered to have been an influential and sympathetic figure during this period: *CPR, 1313-1317*, pp. 27, 29; Davies, *The Baronial Opposition to Edward II*, pp. 97, 369-371, 403-404, 487; Phillips, *Aymer de Valence*, p. 66; Phillips, *Edward II*, p. 203; T. F. Tout, revised by H. W. Ridgeway, 'John de Vescy (1244-1289)', *ODNB*.

¹⁸⁷ SC 8/56/2760.

¹⁸⁸ Davies, *The Baronial Opposition to Edward II*, p. 97.

manor.¹⁸⁹ This is supported by later petitions brought by Lashley, presented in 1328 and 1330, that detailed his continuing struggle against the Badlesmere family for the recovery of ‘the manor of Lashley and of lands elsewhere in the county’.¹⁹⁰ In 1327 Lashley requested the withdrawal of a sentence of outlawry made against him at the forest Eyre of Essex, stating that he had been unable to attend court to answer the charges brought against him through the ‘malice and persecution of Despenser’, a pardon was subsequently granted, at York on May 26, 1327.¹⁹¹

It seems that the Lashleys’ complaints were valid, with evidence of physical coercion and of Despenser the younger having flouted the king’s justice. However, in contrast the petition of Philippa de Bradbourne, the widow of Roger de Bradbourne, a Lancaster retainer, is an example of how the petitioners were willing to exploit Despenser the younger’s name for their own advantage.¹⁹² Bradbourne’s widow stated that Despenser had disseised her of lands in Derbyshire after they were returned to her by the court through a previous petition.¹⁹³ However, this claim appears to be false, or at best misleading. On considering the petition’s endorsement along with the findings of the resultant enquiry, it is clear that although her original claims were true; her lands had been forfeited due to a suspected Lancastrian allegiance and had subsequently been returned. Her assertion that they had then been ‘disseised by Despenser’ simply referred to their being taken back into the king’s hands as the result of a bureaucratic mix-up in 1325.¹⁹⁴ Why did Bradbourne implicate Despenser in this complaint, when all charges against those of the Lancastrian

¹⁸⁹ SC 8/162/8098. For the receipts exchanged between Despenser the younger and de Badlesmere for the person of John Lashley see: SC 8/56/2761; SC 8/56/2762.

¹⁹⁰ SC 8/162/8098; SC 8/163/8102; SC 8/64/3160. Evidence of Despenser’s apparent determination to obtain the Lashley manor is also found in the petitions presented by John de Lashley’s tenants. There are four petitions that detail the complaints of these tenants, who accused Despenser the younger of either forcibly ejecting them from their tenancies, or using imprisonment and coercion to obtain their lands: SC 8/14/682; SC 8/171/8531; SC 8/70/3461; SC 8/155/7728.

¹⁹¹ SC 8/56/2759; *CPR 1327-1330*, p. 116.

¹⁹² SC 8/158/7879.

¹⁹³ This earlier petition is datable to between 1322 and 1323 through an order to the keeper of forfeited lands in Derbyshire not to meddle with Bradbourne’s lands, dated January 25, 1323: *CCR 1318-1323*, p. 625; *CIM 1307-1349*, no. 576; SC 8/8/396.

¹⁹⁴ This is explained in *CFR 1319-1327*, pp. 332-333.

rebellion were to be annulled?¹⁹⁵ It may be that Bradbourne simply used Despenser's name in the petition as a rhetorical tool in order to aid her claim in the immediate aftermath of his downfall. In doing so she re-affirmed Despenser the younger's reputation as being vicious and land greedy and, at the same time, firmly established her place in the ranks of the newly rehabilitated Lancastrians.

This study of the petitions has shown that there was a clear separation of the actions of the father and son which does not support the concept of the use of the generic descriptive label of 'the Despensers'. The use of this phrase along with other terms such as 'the Despenser regime' and the extreme 'Despenser dictatorship' are rhetorical constructs created as a method of shorthand to speak about the father and son, but have resulted in the creation of a popular image of an indivisibility of actions and motives of the two men.¹⁹⁶ A typical example of the ready acceptance of this collaboration between father and son was made by Lawrence who stated that 'by 1321 it was hard to differentiate between the two Despensers'.¹⁹⁷ This widespread acceptance of the two Despensers' reputations and joint culpability in the downfall of Edward II was highlighted by comments such as that of Saul who stated that after 1322 the removal of Edward II was the only way to rid the country of *their* influence.¹⁹⁸ Continuing in this vein, Saul discussed the role of the Despenser family in the downfall of Edward II, reaffirming the concept of their joint actions by regularly referring to both father and son as 'the favourites'.¹⁹⁹ The number of petitions naming the two men apparently support this combined guilt. For example, Graph 2.1 illustrates the two hundred and thirty petitions naming the two men between c.1320 and c.1335. However, when one considers the petitions individually one immediately sees that the majority make a clear distinction between the two men. Can the evidence of the

¹⁹⁵ *Statutes of the Realm*, pp. 252-253.

¹⁹⁶ The terms 'the Despensers' and 'Despenser regime' are used throughout historiography, the term 'Despenser dictatorship' is found in Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II*, p. 4; Saul, 'The Despensers and the Downfall of Edward II', pp. 5-6; Bothwell, *Falling From Grace*, *passim*.

¹⁹⁷ Lawrence, 'Rise of a Royal Favourite', p. 218.

¹⁹⁸ My Italics. N. Saul, 'Review': Seymour Phillips' Biography of Edward II, *History Today* (2010), 60, p. 59; Buck, *Politics, Finance and the Church in the Reign of Edward II*, p. 133.

¹⁹⁹ Saul, 'The Despensers and the Downfall of Edward II', *passim*.

petitions help to come to a considered conclusion about the consequences of the use of the generic term ‘the Despensers’? Although, as stated in section 2.1 above, the term ‘the Despensers’ has become an accepted generic term, it clearly does not reflect the contemporary perception of the two men as illustrated through the content of the petitions. Therefore the extensive use of term ‘the Despensers’ must be considered as an example of the concept, described by Elizabeth Brown, as ‘the tyranny of a construct’.²⁰⁰ Brown, speaking of the historiographical reliance on the term ‘feudalism’, stated that the adoption of any label could lead to the ‘tendency to disregard ... documents not easily assimilable into that frame of reference’.²⁰¹ This certainly appears to be the case with the records of the ancient petitions. Although there have been various considerations of the father and son separately, no study has used the petitions in any depth to consider the actions of the two Despensers. This has led to evidence of a contemporaneous acceptance of a separateness of action between High Despenser the elder and younger being overlooked.

If Roger Mortimer, as another outsider, was in his turn to be depicted to be as guilty as Despenser the younger in his exploitation of his position will be considered in the next chapter. This will discuss the petitions presented during the regency of Queen Isabella and her partner Roger Mortimer, the after-effects of the removal of a rightful king, the period of the regency and the eventual assertion of the king’s personal power.

²⁰⁰ E. A. R. Brown ‘The Tyranny of a Construct: Feudalism and Historians of Medieval Europe’, *The American Historical Review* (1974), 79, 4, 1063-1088.

²⁰¹ Brown, ‘The Tyranny of a Construct’, p. 1063.

CHAPTER 3: QUEEN ISABELLA AND SIR ROGER MORTIMER OF WIGMORE

3.1 The Queen and the Rebel

Once the two Despensers had been removed and Edward II imprisoned, England was delivered, according to Mark Buck, into ‘the hands of Roger Mortimer and his whore’, Queen Isabella.¹ Ian Mortimer elaborated on this controversial image by depicting Roger Mortimer as the ‘greatest traitor’, stating that ‘his actions against the royal family amounted to treason on a scale never known ... before or since’.²

With the king in custody it was essential for the success of the coup that the new regime was seen to act legitimately, even with the apparent ‘consent’ of Edward II. However, only the king could call a parliament, and this was a step that Isabella’s party was perhaps reluctant to attempt and with which the king was unwilling to comply.³ Therefore, the queen and Mortimer made the decision to call a ‘parliament’ in the name of Prince Edward, who had been appointed guardian of the realm in his father’s absence.⁴ This ‘parliament’, perhaps more properly described as a ‘general meeting of the Church and the people’ (*consilium generale totius cleri et populi*) finally gathered on January 7, 1327.⁵ It had been summoned to justify and ‘authorise the substitution of one king with another’.⁶ It was essential that Edward’s deposition was seen to be based on conformity to law, and that he had

¹ Buck, *Politics, Finance and the Church in the Reign of Edward II*, p. 223.

² Mortimer, *The Greatest Traitor*, p. 265.

³ For a possibly contemporary treatise which suggested the ideal version of English parliament, and who could call parliament: *Modus Tenendi Parliamentum*, pp. 2-6.

⁴ *PROME* ‘Introduction’ to the Parliament of January 1327.

⁵ W. H. Dunham jnr and C. T. Wood, ‘The Right to Rule in England: Deposition and the Kingdom’s Authority, 1327-1485’, *The American Historical Review* (1976), 81, 738-761, p. 740; this parliament had been scheduled to meet in December 1326, the original writs being issued in the name of Edward II on October 28: Sneddon, ‘Words and Realities’, in Ormrod, Dodd and Musson, *Medieval Petitions, Grace and Grievance*, pp. 193-205. The reason for this postponement was noted as being ‘for certain necessary causes’: *PROME* ‘Introduction’ to the Parliament of January 1327. There is no existing roll for this ‘parliament’ but it can nevertheless be dated fairly accurately through the chronicles, although some ‘chronological uncertainties’ remain: Butt, *A History of Parliament*, p. 225.

⁶ M. V. Clarke, ‘Committees of Estates and the Deposition of Edward II’, in J. Edwards, W. H. Galbraith, and E. F. Jacobs (eds), *Historical Essays in Honour of James Tait* (Manchester, 1933), p. 30.

willingly ‘ousted himself’ in favour of Edward III, ‘with good-will and by common counsel and assent of the prelates, earls and barons... and the whole community of the kingdom’.⁷ Whether the deposition was affected *by* or merely *in* parliament remains contentious, but one contemporary chronicle, with perhaps a little overstatement, noted that the deposition was decided with the ‘cry of the whole people’ (*clamorem totius populi*) behind it.⁸ This parliament was also important to establish that the responsibility for the deposition was to be ‘place[d] on as many shoulders as possible’ whilst, as Benz St. John noted, ‘where Isabella [was], Mortimer was not far behind’ and as Haines dramatically stated, ‘behind the scenes lurked Mortimer and Isabella’.⁹

Therefore, this chapter will discuss to what extent the content of the petitions can be used as evidence of the popular portrayal of Queen Isabella and Roger Mortimer. As formal legal documents it is unlikely that the petitions can provide evidence to illustrate such emotive images as that given by Davies, who accused Isabella of having ‘degrad[ed] her regal position, her marriage obligation and her womanly qualities’, or Tout, who saw Mortimer as ‘the greedy marcher’ who remained in power as the result of the ‘besotted infatuation of the queen-mother’.¹⁰ But the petitions can be used to assess if Queen Isabella and Mortimer, like the Despencers before them, were considered to have exploited their positions of power for their own gain. The petitions can also be used to assess the response and support Isabella and Mortimer received for the removal of Edward II, and the manner in which they were portrayed after the end of the regency and the execution of Mortimer. Graph 3.1 illustrates the number of petitions relating to Queen Isabella and/or Roger Mortimer during the period c.1320 to c.1335 revealing very similar numbers of petitions for each of them. However, when one illustrates the

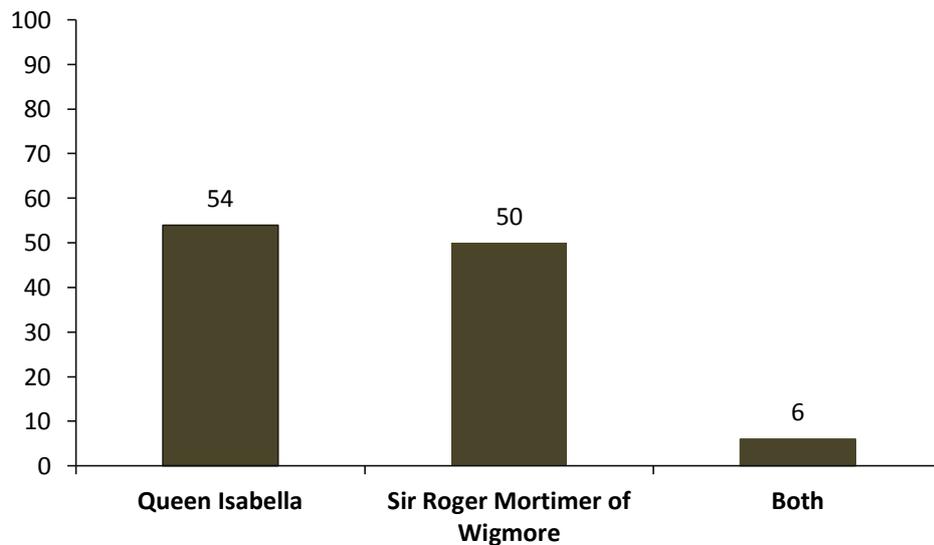
⁷ Dunham and Wood, ‘The Right to Rule in England’, p. 739; Ormrod, *Edward III* (2005), p. 57; Haines, *King Edward II*, pp. 187-189.

⁸ Valente ‘The Deposition and Abdication of Edward II’, pp. 864-866; M. V. Clarke, *Medieval Representation and Consent* (London, 1936), p. 184, n. 3.

⁹ R. M. Haines, ‘The Episcopate During the Reign of Edward II and the Regency of Mortimer and Isabella’, *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* (2005), 56, 657-709, p. 690. Benz St. John, *Three Medieval Queens*, p. 140.

¹⁰ Davies, *The Baronial Opposition to Edward II*, p. 107; Tout, *The History of England*, p. 305.

number of petitions presented in the same period related to Queen Isabella and Roger Mortimer alongside the number of petitions presented relating to the other main political characters considered in this study,

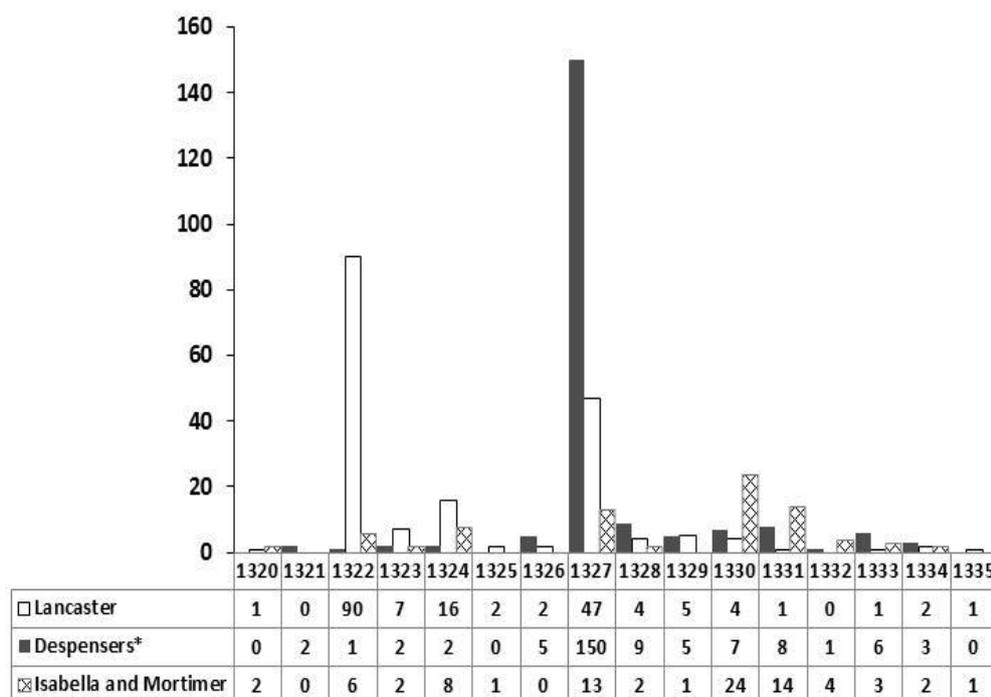


Graph 3.1: The Split of petitions relating to Queen Isabella and/or Roger Mortimer, c.1320 -c.1335.

one is immediately aware that they represent a relatively small number in comparison (see Graph 3.2). This is particularly striking from 1330 onwards, when their reign as regents came to an end, compared to similar comparisons made in Chapters One and Two relating to the immediate period of the downfall of Thomas of Lancaster in 1322 and the two Despencers in 1326/1327, when there was a sudden and notable rise in petitioning related to them.¹¹

This difference in the volume of petitioning levels may indicate that Isabella and Mortimer were not considered the focus for accusations of wrongdoing in the period of their ascendancy (1327-1330), which both

¹¹ For example, the number of petitions related to Thomas of Lancaster rose dramatically to over 80% of the total of the petitions presented in 1322-1323, the period of his rebellion and execution, returning to a mere 4% of the petitions presented during the period 1324-1335. These percentages were calculated from Dodd's research into the value of the evidence of the warranty notes, see Graphs 2 and 8 in Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, pp. 65, 115.



Graph 3.2: A comparison of the number of petitions presented to the main characters under discussion c.1320 – c.1335.¹²

Lancaster and the two Despensers achieved. When Edward III finally asserted his majority in 1330 the regency came to an immediate end. There would have been no obvious moment of crisis other than the arrest and execution of ‘the king’s notorious enemy’, Roger Mortimer.¹³ Therefore, to add a new insight into the portrayal of Queen Isabella and Roger Mortimer of Wigmore, this chapter is split into two further sections. The first section considers the career of Roger Mortimer as portrayed through the petitions. This will include a consideration of the period before his alliance with Queen Isabella, including his rebellion against Edward II, his subsequent surrender, imprisonment and escape, along with his eventual re-emergence as ‘king in all but name’.¹⁴ The second section will consider the career of Queen Isabella. This will include a consideration of how she was portrayed in the petitions from the period of her

¹² The petitions illustrated in Graph 3.2 include four that named Isabella and Mortimer together which were not included in their individual graphs below. Those petitions categorised as having an ‘uncertain date range’ depicted in other graphs are not illustrated here.* The number for the two Despensers was calculated using both individual and joint petitions, and includes those petitions where it remains unclear which of the two men the petition refers.

¹³ C54/143, ms. 14d, TNA, quoted in P. Dryburgh, *The Career of Roger Mortimer, First Earl of March (c.1287-1330)*, PhD thesis, University of Bristol, 2002, p. 98.

¹⁴ *Lanercost*, p. 265; Davies, ‘Roger Mortimer’, *ODNB*; Ormrod, *Edward III* (2005), p. 16.

being regarded as a faithful wife and queen, to the successful removal of Edward II through deposition and alleged murder. Her relationship with Roger Mortimer and the period of the regency will also be studied, to establish if she demonstrated the characteristics associated with her modern sobriquets the 'new Jezebel' and the 'she-wolf'. The section will end with the period of her forced retirement when Edward III asserted his majority rule.¹⁵

3.2 Roger Mortimer

'The King's Notorious Enemy'¹⁶

Until 1318 Roger Mortimer played no significant role in English politics, although he is recorded as having been a trusted and able soldier and servant of the king. He had been the recipient of many royal favours including the position of Lieutenant or Justiciar of Ireland in 1317. He was returned to this position again in 1319, as a reward for defeating the Scottish invasion of Ireland led by Edward Bruce, heir to the Scottish throne.¹⁷ Those petitions that mentioned Mortimer during his tenure as justiciar support the impression that he was both a strong and able commander who carried out his duties with the approval and sanction of the king.¹⁸ For example, the petitions presented during the period 1317-1320, which outlined the complaints relating to the confiscation of lands from supporters of Edward Bruce in Ireland, illustrate a typical example of the attitude to Mortimer in this period. These petitioners

¹⁵ Doherty, *Isabella and the Strange Death of Edward II*, pp. 22, 49.

¹⁶ SC 8/51/2518, discussed below.

¹⁷ For a discussion of unrest in the English colony in Ireland during the fourteenth century see Duffy, *Ireland in the Middle Ages*, pp. 134-155, *passim*; Orpen, *Ireland Under the Normans*, p. 192; *CCR, 1313-1318*, pp. 451, 563; Duncan, 'Edward Bruce, Earl of Carrick', *ODNB*; Dryburgh, 'The Last Refuge of a Scoundrel?', in Dodd and Musson, *The Reign of Edward II*, p. 121; Mortimer, *The Greatest Traitor*, pp. 81-98; Evans, *The Family Mortimer*, pp. 210-211. An interesting factor influencing the decision to grant Mortimer the justiciarship, in the light of his future career, was his reputation as having been politically neutral in the 'venomous politics of the period': Davies, 'Roger Mortimer', *ODNB*.

¹⁸ Edward II's reliance and trust in Mortimer is underlined by there being only two mentions of Mortimer in the Chancery rolls of Ireland, in 1308-1309. These records of enrolled letters to and from the king and his Irish subjects were notably more eclectic than their English counterpart and include many other types of document including charters, fines, writs of liberate, writs of parliamentary summons, and returns of inquisitions of post mortem: *Circle: A Calendar of Irish Chancery Letters* [<http://chancery.tcd.ie/>].

made no complaint against his methods of handling the confiscations, but merely commented on his part in the process of carrying out the king's commands. For example, two petitions, brought separately by Adam de Kermerdyn and Agatha de Kermerdyn, between 1317 and 1321 both concerned the return of lands confiscated from the Kermerdyn family by Mortimer.¹⁹ These had been declared forfeit due to the petitioners' relationship to a Bruce sympathiser, John de Kermerdyn, who had been outlawed in 1317.²⁰ Neither petition complained of Mortimer's manner of confiscation, but merely commented on his role in the forfeiture. There were no accusations of wrongdoing or evidence of any negative connotations towards Mortimer from these Irish petitioners. Both petitions received similar endorsements requiring the justices of Ireland to refer the cases to common law or to the 'customs of those parts'.

Other petitions presented in this period also indicate Edward II's reliance on Mortimer's advice as an administrator. For example, the petition presented in 1319 by Adam de Cusak requested the office of Constable of Drogheda castle as reward for his services in the king's campaign against Edward Bruce.²¹ It was endorsed with the reply that 'the king sent Roger Mortimer to Ireland to guard his lands' and did not wish to make any decision 'without his advice'.²² Mortimer's military and diplomatic success was also described in a politically flattering letter sent to Edward II from the 'communality of Dublin' in which Mortimer was praised for saving and keeping the peace of the land (*le Mortumer ... sauver e garder la pees de vostre terre*).²³ Indeed, Mortimer has been considered to be the only magnate during Edward II's reign to have excelled militarily.²⁴

¹⁹ SC 8/83/4125; SC 8/55/2710.

²⁰ A note recording the forfeiture of John de Kermerdyn's lands and Agatha's land entitlements see: E. O'Farrell, 'Appendix 1', in *The Forty-Second Annual Report of the Deputy Keeper of the Public Records* (Dublin, 1911), p. 19; Orpen, *Ireland Under the Normans*, pp. 192-197; P. Connolly (ed.), 'Irish Material in the Class of Ancient Petitions (SC8) in the Public Record Office, London' *Analecta Hibernica*, 34 (1987), 3-106, p. 29; Orpen, *Ireland Under the Normans*, p. 198, n. 2.

²¹ SC 8/99/4910.

²² Connolly, 'Irish Material in the Class of Ancient Petitions', pp. 33-34.

²³ Mortimer, *The Greatest Traitor*, pp. 96-98; J. T. Gilbert (ed.), 'Historic and Municipal Documents of Ireland, AD 1172-1320 from the Archives of the City of Dublin', *Rolls Series*, 53 (London, 1870), p. 392.

²⁴ Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II*, p. 39.

However, by 1322 Mortimer was imprisoned as a rebel and his image as a capable and trusted governor had become somewhat tarnished. An example of this can be found in the words of the Irish petitioner Richard de Clare, a king's clerk, who complained how, through the 'aid and procurement' of Mortimer, the archbishop of Cashel had ousted him from his living of Dungarvan church in Ireland.²⁵ Clare stated that the archbishop, William Fitz John, had 'bought [from Mortimer] confirmation from the king' of the advowson of the church of Dungarvan; in effect accusing Mortimer of fraudulently granting Fitz John the right to oust Clare from his living. This is further supported by the successful outcome of Clare's petition. A ruling dated May 1, 1322 reinstated him, citing that 'the king consider[ed] that he [had] been deceived' and that the grant had been fraudulent, illustrating Edward II's apparent disillusionment with his administrator.²⁶ This image of Mortimer working against the king's will was in distinct contrast to that evident in earlier petitions, which portrayed him as a faithful servant and advisor of the king. However, a petition presented in 1332 by 'John O'Grada, Archbishop-elect of Cashel', brings an interesting end-note to the discussion of the reputation of Mortimer in Ireland.²⁷ It referred to the petition, discussed above, concerning the return of the living of Dungarvan church to Richard de Clare.²⁸ O'Grada complained that Clare had petitioned 'under false representations in the time of the king's father' at the parliament of York, 1321-1322 'in the absence of the archbishop' (by adding this rider, O'Grada diplomatically directed the blame away from the previous archbishop, William Fitz John). O'Grada petitioned for the patronage of Dungarvan church and its lands to be returned from Maurice Fitz Thomas, earl of Desmond to whom it had been subsequently granted. The wording of this petition clearly exonerates Mortimer whilst placing the blame entirely on the dishonesty of Richard de Clare. The petition's endorsement stated that the claims would be considered, and finally gives permission for the return of the church and its lands.²⁹

²⁵ SC 8/104/5179.

²⁶ SC 8/104/5180; *CPR, 1321-1324*, p. 114.

²⁷ SC 8/104/5178.

²⁸ SC 8/104/5179.

²⁹ SC 8/104/5181; *CPR, 1330-1334*, p. 492.

How had Mortimer's standing changed from that of the trusted (and therefore protected) servant of the king, portrayed in the petitions prior to 1322, to one against whom the petitioner Richard de Clare felt accusations of corruption could be levelled (and whose petition was subsequently to be successful in its outcome)? The obvious change in Mortimer's fortunes at this date was his involvement with, and eventual imprisonment as a result of his part in, the rebellion of Thomas, earl of Lancaster. Having left his extensive lands in county Meath in Ireland, Mortimer had encountered a complicated political situation on his return to England.³⁰ The ambitious younger Despenser, in his attempts to forge a tenurial 'empire' in southern Wales, had created a state of increased tension amongst Mortimer's fellow Marcher barons that threatened to erupt into violence.³¹ However, even though there had been a long-standing feud between the Mortimer and Despenser families, Mortimer was not at first openly hostile to the favourites.³² Instead, he chose to side with the so-called 'middling party' which attempted to maintain a balance between the coercive methods of the Lancastrians and the tyranny of the Despensers.³³

However, in early 1321, with Despenser the younger's continuing land acquisitions in south Wales particularly his annexation of Gower, Mortimer was forced to choose between his loyalty to Edward II (and therefore the Despensers) or to become part of the rebellion.³⁴ He finally chose to side with his enraged Marcher compatriots, who the *Vita Edwardi Secundi* stated had been described by Despenser the younger as treasonous (*sed et barones talia*

³⁰ A. Cosgrove, *A New History of Ireland, Medieval Ireland 1169-1534*, vol. 2 (Oxford, 1987), pp. 280, 299-300.

³¹ Phillips, *Edward II*, pp. 366-369, 375.

³² Despenser the Younger had sworn vengeance upon 'each of the [Mortimers]' for the death of his grandfather, Hugh Despenser 'the Justiciar': *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, pp. 108-109; Lawrence, *Power, Ambition and Political Rehabilitation*, p. 25; Phillips, *Edward II*, p. 367. Ian Mortimer, rather dramatically recounted the death of Despenser's grandfather at the battle of Evesham in 1265, describing how during the battle, 'with rain dripping down [his] face... [Mortimer killed Despenser] with his own hands': Mortimer, *The Greatest Traitor*, p. 8. This vivid description of Mortimer's actions cannot be verified, although contemporary sources noted the activities of both men in the lead up to the battle and record that Despenser met his death there: *Brut*, pp. 175-176; *Flores Historiarum*, pp. 4-7. If this feud between the two families existed, Despenser must have considered the chance of advancement at the expense of Mortimer family an added bonus and a fitting penance for the death of his grandfather.

³³ Evans, 'The Family Mortimer', pp. 204-272.

³⁴ Mortimer, *The Greatest Traitor*, p. 102.

allegantes lese maistatis videbatur arguer).³⁵ The king acknowledged this new allegiance with the removal of Mortimer from his post as Justiciar of Ireland.³⁶ With the blessing (if not active participation) of Thomas, earl of Lancaster, the Marcher lords attacked Despenser lands in May 1321.³⁷ The success of the raids and the capture of Despenser estates placed the Marcher lords in a position of increased power which, according to Fryde, ‘could not be permanently sustained’, but which nevertheless forced parliament to meet in July and August of 1321.³⁸ This parliament, which the *Brut* designated as ‘the parliament with the white bends’ (*þe parlment wiþ whit bendes*), due to the colours of the baronial coalition’s common uniform, succeeded in the short term in forcing the two Despensers into exile.³⁹ The Marcher victory was complete when the king was forced to grant pardons to all those lords involved in the plot, including Roger Mortimer.⁴⁰

Thereafter Edward II plotted vengeance for what was an attack not only on the royal prerogative, but one which constituted a personal affront and humiliation.⁴¹ The success and subsequent fallout from this ‘vengeance’ for Mortimer is recorded in the petitions of 1322 when the ‘Community of Wales, of North Wales and South Wales’ (*la comunaute de Galeys de Northgalys et Suthgaleys*) petitioned the king, and described their fears over the suggested reinstatement of Mortimer and his uncle, Roger Mortimer of Chirk, to their lands in Wales.⁴² This petition not only states that the Welsh feared the reinstatement of Mortimer, but also illustrates the vulnerability of Edward II’s

³⁵ *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, p. 109; cited in: Bothwell, *Falling From Grace*, p. 18 n. 16. For a discussion of the differences between the theories of medieval rebellion and treason see the conclusion to Chapter One.

³⁶ Mortimer, *The Greatest Traitor*, p. 102.

³⁷ Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II*, p. 39; Evans, *The Family Mortimer*, pp. 213-214; McKisack, *The Fourteenth-Century*, pp. 58-70.

³⁸ According to Fryde the ‘ferment of ideas’ brought about by the Marcher lords’ inability to reconcile their lawful authority with their actual military success ... and...ambiguous position in parliament’ was the inspiration for the creation of the *Modus Tenendi Parliamentum*: Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II*, pp. 46-49; Phillips, *Edward II*, p. 400.

³⁹ *Brut*, p. 213; Prestwich, *Plantagenet England*, p. 199. For a description of the uprising: *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, pp. 108-116.

⁴⁰ Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II*, p. 49; Mortimer, *The Greatest Traitor*, p. 110; *CPR, 1321-1324*, p. 15.

⁴¹ Evans, ‘The Family Mortimer’, p. 223.

⁴² SC 8/6/255; *Rot. Parl.*, p. 400, a-b, no. 76; L. Smith, ‘Roger Mortimer (IV), first Lord Mortimer of Chirk (c.1256–1326)’, *ODNB*.

hold on the loyalties of the Welsh. The petitioners began by reminding the king that they had gone against the Mortimers, their sworn lords (this probably the basis of their fear of the Mortimers' reinstatement), in order to support the king's cause during the rebellion of 1321. This reminded the king not only of his debt to them, but also suggested their indispensability in the king's defeat of the Marcher lords. They went on to specify that if the Mortimers were to be reinstated to their confiscated lands they would be forced to defend their freedom from Mortimer dominance; the petition remained ambiguous to whether this was a threat of attack against the Mortimers or the king.

Who were the so-called communities of North and South Wales? That the two areas of Wales chose to be separately assigned may be explained through the different roots for their hostility to Mortimer. North Wales had strong anti-Mortimer sentiments from early in Edward II's reign, caused by the reportedly harsh treatment of the Welsh by the king's servants under the leadership of the Justiciar of Wales, Mortimer's uncle, Roger Mortimer of Chirk, which resulted in an enquiry only six months after the end of his tenure in 1315.⁴³ This was also echoed in a petition from West Wales, presented in c.1322 to 1326, which went into some detail over complaints made about Mortimer of Chirk who had introduced 'English law' to their community.⁴⁴ The use of the term 'English law' further illustrates a generalised Welsh dissatisfaction with English rule rather than any notable Mortimer focused discontent. In contrast, the southern Welsh were seen as the natural enemies of Roger Mortimer as they remained stalwart supporters of the king. This loyalty had complicated roots dating to the earliest days of Edward II's reign, when he had inherited many of Edward I's Welsh servants. They had been drawn from

⁴³ Mortimer of Chirk held the office of Justice of Wales twice, in 1308 to 1315 and again in 1321 to 1322: W. Rees (ed.), *Petitions Relating to Wales, 13th to 16th Centuries* (Cardiff, 1975), p. 247; *CCh.W.*, pp. 179-180, 406; *CPR, 1313-1317*, pp. 229, 406; *CCR, 1313-1318*, p. 186; R. R. Davies, *Conquest, Coexistence, and Change: Wales, 1063-1415* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 409-410, 415-416; Mortimer, *The Greatest Traitor*, p. 166.

⁴⁴ SC 8/146/7288. It seems likely that this petition was presented after Mortimer of Chirk's removal in 1322, as it mentions the 13th regnal year of Edward II (1320 - 1321), but it was probably presented before 1326 when the return of Roger Mortimer would have made complaints against his uncle unwise. There are a number of petitions that relate to the dissatisfaction of the Welsh under English control in the first period of Mortimer of Chirk's Justiciarship, an example being: SC 8/64/3179, SC 8/1105455, SC 8/79/3925, SC 8/79/3922.

the *uchelwyr*, a class of Welsh freemen, with the more powerful Welsh members of the household making up what J. B. Smith described as a virtually new Welsh aristocracy.⁴⁵ Therefore, is it significant that the pro-royalist southern Welsh were also willing to be seen to take a stance against the king in order to stay independent of the Mortimer family? Not necessarily, as one must remain aware that although this petition was designated as being from the ‘community of Wales’ it cannot be assumed to have encompassed the wishes of the entire population. For example, the evidence provided by the petitions reflected that satisfaction with English sovereignty was not necessarily shared by those lower down the social order of Wales. A petition presented by the people of Caerwedros, Gwynionydd and Mebwynion, in Cardiganshire in 1309 described in detail their wish to maintain the traditional practices of Wales which, the petitioners stated, the English law did not provide for.⁴⁶ Therefore, the petition of the ‘Community of Wales, of North Wales and South Wales’ may well merely have reflected the wishes of those who personally rose up against Mortimer, ‘their lord’, in aid of the king, and who it may be assumed were eager to protect themselves from the consequences of this betrayal.⁴⁷

Can the content of the petitions therefore support the premise that Mortimer was the focus of a generalised hatred by his Welsh tenants? As has already been discussed, a far more likely scenario for the apparent anti-Mortimer sentiments expressed in the petition of the ‘Community of Wales, of North Wales and South Wales’ is that it was merely an expression of part of a *general* Welsh enmity against the whole of the Marcher barony and, in this particular instance, merely of the landholders of Welsh society rather than against Mortimer alone. Further corroboration for this enmity is also illustrated in the many instances of insurgency by the Welsh against the English, reflected by the author of the *Vita Edwardi Secundi* who stated that rebellion was ‘an old standing madness’ of the Welsh who, having ‘keep quiet for ... years ... [were] then athirst for battle’.⁴⁸ Edward II exploited this enmity, as part of

⁴⁵ J. B. Smith, ‘Edward II and the Allegiance of Wales’, *Welsh History Review* (1976), 8, 139-171, p. 140.

⁴⁶ SC 8/268/13375; Smith, ‘Edward II and the Allegiance of Wales’, pp. 143-144.

⁴⁷ Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, pp. 254-255; J. R. Maddicott, *The Origins of the English Parliament, 924-1327* (Oxford, 2010), p. 344; Mortimer, *The Greatest Traitor*, p. 114.

⁴⁸ *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, p. 68.

his long term strategy of vengeance against his rebellious nobles, by springing surprise attacks on the Marcher lords' lands.⁴⁹ This is supported by evidence of a grant, dated December 13, 1321, of £12 12s 8d to provide military equipment for the Welsh, made through a warrant of the privy seal to Gruffydd Llwyd, the representative of the king in Wales.⁵⁰ Llwyd, along with Rhys ap Gruffydd, an esquire of the king's household and a southern Welsh magnate, were instructed to put down any insurrection. Both were rewarded well for their actions.⁵¹ Rhys ap Gruffydd was made the successor to Roger Mortimer of Chirk as Justiciar of Wales.⁵²

With the king's victory over the barons and the continued breakdown of the rebel coalition, Mortimer became increasingly isolated.⁵³ On January 22, 1322 Mortimer, having been promised by Aymer de Valence, Lord Pembroke, that he would be spared and pardoned, submitted himself to the king at Shrewsbury castle.⁵⁴ Pembroke's promises had been false. Mortimer was arrested and imprisoned in the Tower of London, along with his aging uncle, Mortimer of Chirk, where they were to remain, 'lest repenting of what they had done' (*ne forte prioris facti poenitentes*).⁵⁵ A perhaps more contentious reason for their imprisonment came from the author of the *Literae Cantuarienses*,

⁴⁹ Mandates to levy 'all the forces, horse and foot...to suppress any insurrection in those parts', shows a well formulated but generalised strategy by Edward II against the Marcher lords: Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II*, pp. 53-54.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 53; *Parliamentary Writs*, pp. 545-554; J. G. Edwards, 'Sir Gruffydd Llwyd', *EHR* (1915), 30, 589-601, p. 593; Mortimer, *The Greatest Traitor*, p. 114; J. B. Smith, 'Sir Gruffudd Llwyd (d. 1335)', *ODNB*.

⁵¹ *CPR, 1321-1324*, p. 35; *CCR, 1318-1321*, pp. 506-507; Llwyd was granted the castles of Chirk and Welshpool: *CPR, 1321-1324*, pp. 48, 49; Edwards, 'Sir Gruffydd Llwyd', p. 593; Rhys ap Gruffydd was also rewarded the custody of Manorbier Castle and the lordship of Narberth, Pembrokeshire for life in 1322, and custody of the castle and lordship of Llandovery in 1323: R. A. Griffiths, 'Sir Rhys ap Gruffudd (c.1283-1356)' *ODNB*.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Dryburgh, 'The Last Refuge of a Scoundrel?', p. 125; Prestwich, *Plantagenet England*, p. 199.

⁵⁴ Phillips, *Aymer de Valence, Earl of Pembroke; Vita Edwardi Secundi*, p. 119; Prestwich, *Plantagenet England*, p. 200; Dryburgh, 'The Last Refuge of a Scoundrel?', p. 125. For a dramatic description of the confiscation of Mortimer's land and goods and the treatment of his wife and family by the king: Mortimer, *The Greatest Traitor*, pp. 116-121.

⁵⁵ *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, p. 119.

who added that Despenser the younger had them imprisoned so that he 'might slay them, without any cause but a coveting of their estates'.⁵⁶

However, after notoriously arranging for the administration of poison to the Tower constable Stephen de Seagrave and his guards, Mortimer escaped to France on August 1, 1323.⁵⁷ Later in the same year Mortimer was implicated in a plot, masterminded from France, to have Despenser the younger and his main supporter, Robert Baldock, murdered.⁵⁸ The contents of the petitions agree with the rumours of the period which indicated that Mortimer intended to launch an attack against the king. For example, the 1324 petition of Thomas de Neubygyng, who described himself as having been with Mortimer in France, explained how on his return to England he had given himself up to the king.⁵⁹ His petition requested his release from prison and the freedom to speak because, as he stated, 'the adherents of Mortimer will increase in strength unless he is able to warn the king'. The resultant enquiry revealed a plot which apparently permeated throughout the British Isles.⁶⁰

However, there has been some doubt over the veracity of reports of Mortimer's plotted 'campaign of terror'. Explanations such as that the rumours had been orchestrated by the Despensers to further discredit the king's enemies were perhaps as plausible as those which suggested that Mortimer had been responsible for the spread of these suspicions in order to destabilise an already fearful regime. None of the accused 'spies' were ever punished and

⁵⁶ J. Brigstocke Sheppard (ed.), *Literæ Cantuarienses - The Letter Books of the Monastery of Christ Church, Canterbury*, 3 vols. (London, 1887-1889), vol. 3, p. 409; Bothwell, *Falling From Grace*, p. 135.

⁵⁷ For the most detailed description of Mortimer's escape from the Tower see: Riley, 'Johannis de Trokelowe', *Chronica et Annales*, pp. 145-146; Mortimer, *The Greatest Traitor*, pp. 114-115; Davies, *The Baronial Opposition to Edward II*, p. 561; Phillips, *Edward II*, pp. 403, 440-441; Stones, 'The Date of Roger Mortimer's Escape from the Tower of London', pp. 97-98; Despenser the elder was ordered to capture Mortimer 'with power to punish all persons' who stopped him from carrying out his orders: *CPR, 1321-1324*, p. 335; Bothwell, *Falling From Grace*, p. 139, n. 78.

⁵⁸ A detailed description of this plot is given in the King's Bench records for the Hilary term, 1324: KB27/255; Stones, 'The Date of Roger Mortimer's Escape from the Tower of London', p. 98; Usher, 'The Career of a Political Bishop', pp. 22, 33-47; Dryburgh, 'The Last Refuge of a Scoundrel?' p. 128; *Parliamentary Writs*, 2, pp. 244-249.

⁵⁹ SC 8/128/6395.

⁶⁰ Related petitions to the Neubygyng case include those from the accused conspirators: SC 8/90/4482, SC 8/128/6397; Dryburgh, 'The Last Refuge of a Scoundrel?' p. 128.

Neubyggyng's evidence was later discredited.⁶¹ However, the king was sufficiently concerned to renew efforts to identify any would-be rebels and to issue a parliamentary ordinance stating that there was to be no further communications with Mortimer.⁶² This is echoed in the petitions which reveal how, between c.1327 to 1332, Richard de Betoyme accused Neubyggyng of wrongly taking him prisoner in November 1323, allegedly for his part of these plots.⁶³ Although Betoyme's petition is likely to have been brought in the wake of Neubyggyng's disgrace, the innocence of Betoyme must not be assumed. It can be shown that he was one of Mortimer's closest supporters, and one of the London merchants whose 'connivance, if not... active assistance' had aided Mortimer's escape from the Tower of London.⁶⁴

It was not until his alliance with Isabella that Mortimer finally struck against the king.⁶⁵ The first evidence of the relationship between Queen Isabella and Roger Mortimer was given on February 8, 1326 by Edward II himself, who proclaimed that the queen had 'given herself up to... Mortimer, the king's notorious enemy and rebel' (*sest done au consail le Mortimer nostre enemi notoire et rebel*).⁶⁶ Their subsequent invasion was to lead to the deposition of Edward II and the coronation of the fourteen year old Edward III.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

⁶² *CCh.W, 1244-1326*, p. 553; Dryburgh, *The Career of Roger Mortimer*, p. 93.

⁶³ SC 8/90/4482. The petition refers to events relating to the reign of 'the father of the present king', therefore dating it to the reign of Edward III. Although probably not to the parliament of 1327, as Betoyme was mayor of London at that time and does not describe himself as such in the petition: SC 8/90/4482. For a list of the lord mayors of London: 'The City of London' [www.cityoflondon.gov.uk]. For the record of the case between Bethune and Neubyggyng: *Parliamentary Writs*, vol. 2, p. 247.

⁶⁴ Phillips, *Edward II*, p. 441; R. R. Sharpe, *Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London*, vol. E: 1314-1337 (London, 1903), pp. 1-32; *British History Online* [<http://www.british-history.ac.uk>]; *Annales Paulini*, p. 318; Haines, *King Edward II*, pp. 183-184; Mortimer, *The Greatest Traitor*, pp. 130, 166-168. Royal disquiet at this time can be illustrated in a letter of November 1323, in which Edward II alerted his ministers to a plot to invade England and murder the king and his councillors, after the 'confessions' of two supposed Mortimer 'agents' Richard Fernhale and Thomas de Neubyggyng: *Rymer's Foedera*, vol. 4, pp. 22-23; *CPR 1321-1324*, 349-350; Dryburgh, *The Career of Roger Mortimer*, pp. 92-93.

⁶⁵ Dryburgh, 'The Last Refuge of a Scoundrel?' p. 129.

⁶⁶ He also placed a bounty of £1000 on Mortimer's head and seized Wigmore castle: Bothwell, *Falling From Grace*, pp. 146, 153; C54/143, m. 14d. quoted in Dryburgh, *The Career of Roger Mortimer*, p. 98; *CCR, 1323-1327*, p. 543; *Rymer's Foedera*, II, p. 619.

As discussed in Chapter Two, the petitioners took full advantage of the fall of the Despensers and, at the same time, managed to forge a favourable connection with Mortimer and the new regime. One such example is the petition of Edmund de Hauberdyn presented in 1327.⁶⁷ Hauberdyn, the parson of White Waltham near Windsor, described the actions of Despenser the elder who had removed him from his living because he supported ‘Mortimer enemy of the king’ (*Mortimer le enemy le Roi*).⁶⁸ In his statement of support for Mortimer, Hauberdyn strengthened the idea that on the brink of the deposition the rebellion of 1322 was to be considered as a legitimate action against the Despensers. The use of the term ‘*Mortimer le enemy le Roi*’, in a petition that Hauberdyn may have expected Mortimer to have heard, must be considered to be significant. It could be construed as an opportunity for the petitioner to emphasise the attempt by Despenser the elder to defame Mortimer, who at this point was eager to establish that he was not an ‘enemy of the king’ but, rather, was to be considered as supporting the establishment of the reign of Edward III. This statement of adherence, coupled with an opportunity for the petitioner to share a moment of accord with Mortimer against Despenser, can be seen as being deliberately formulated to gain the best possible result for the petitioner.

The ‘Kynge of Folye’⁶⁹

As with the Despensers in the period of their ascendancy, there were few petitioners willing to accuse Mortimer of wrongdoing during the regency of 1327 to 1330 (see Graph 3.3). But by 1328 those surrounding the king were becoming increasingly angered with the actions of Roger Mortimer. This irritation was highlighted by Mortimer’s son, Sir Geoffrey Mortimer, who is recorded as having publically joked that his father was to be considered the ‘Kynge of Folye’.⁷⁰ Henry, earl of Lancaster, who, as effective head of the regency council, had seen himself and other members removed from key posts, registered his displeasure by refusing to attend the third and fourth parliaments

⁶⁷ SC 8/51/2518.

⁶⁸ In this petition Despenser the elder was given the title ‘Count of Windsor’ (*conste Wyndesere*), indicating his power in the area rather than any actual title.

⁶⁹ *Brut*, p. 262.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 262; Mortimer, *The Greatest Traitor*, p. 227; Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II*, p. 208; Bothwell only speaks of the possibility of Geoffrey de Mortimer being Mortimer’s son: Bothwell, *Falling From Grace*, p. 106.

of 1328.⁷¹ With Lancaster's absence, the final parliament of 1328 saw Mortimer firmly in control; it was made up of a predominance of his supporters and granted him the new title of Earl of March. This new position placed him firmly above the other Marcher lords.⁷² Isabella and Mortimer's hold over the kingdom had become even more unyielding, with Mortimer even being described by Geoffrey le Baker as 'the lover of the queen and the master of the king' (*amasius regine, magister Regis*).⁷³

Mortimer's role in this period of the 'sham...conciliar governance' of the regency, remains unclear.⁷⁴ However, the petitions can be used to gauge the level of Mortimer's power as a leading (if not *the* leading) noble of the time. But it is perhaps through a *lack* of petitions that one can discern the power of Mortimer, with only two petitions mentioning him during the three year period of 1327-1329 (see Graph 3.3).⁷⁵ This lack of petitioning may have several explanations, including, a fear of bringing complaints against Mortimer at the pinnacle of his power and the assumption that any complaint against him would have little chance of success. Although Mortimer held no *official* position this did not prevent him-wielding the great power he held at court through his alleged relationship with Isabella, the dowager queen. His position in the royal household is illustrated by his having been granted royal livery and being regularly referred to as 'the king's kinsman'.⁷⁶ But he nevertheless had no institutional basis to his power, and was not a member of the council

⁷¹ The first three parliaments of 1328 were all concerned with the peace negotiations with Scotland and the financial straits of the new reign which had virtually emptied the royal coffers: Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II*, pp. 214-216; Ormrod, *The Reign of Edward III*, p. 4. As with the parliaments of Edward II's reign, the 1328 parliaments have few enrolled petitions: *PROME* 'Introduction' to the Parliaments of February, April, July and October 1328.

⁷² *Galfridi*, p. 42; *Brut*, p. 260; Dryburgh, *The Career of Roger Mortimer*, p. 128.

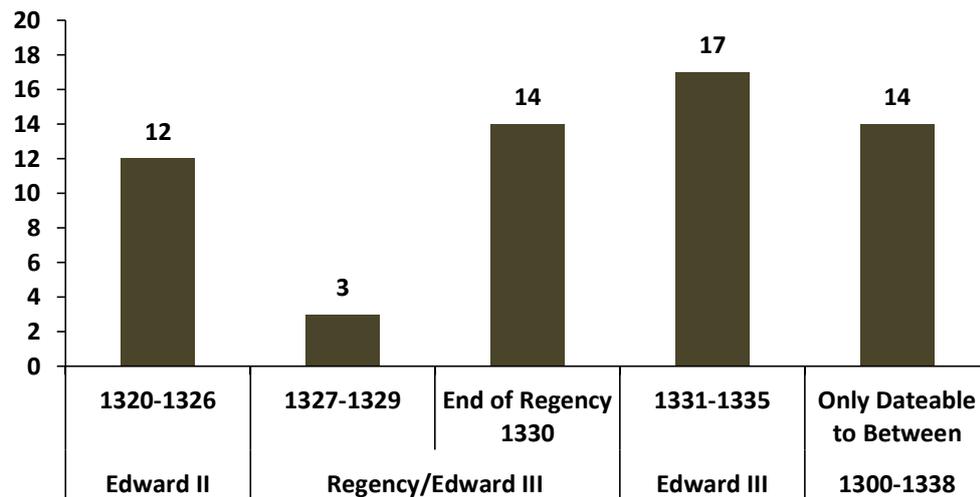
⁷³ *Galfridi*, pp. 45-46.

⁷⁴ Bothwell, 'The More Things Change', p. 75.

⁷⁵ SC 8/181/9019; Connolly 'Irish Material in the Class of Ancient Petitions', p. 60.

⁷⁶ Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II*, p. 207. The importance of wearing livery, according to Saul, was its 'visible expression [of] the bond between lord [in this case Edward III] and man [Mortimer]': N. Saul, 'The Commons and the Abolition of Badges', *Parliamentary History* (1990), 11, 302-315, pp. 306-307; F. Lachaud, 'Liveries and Robes in England, c.1200-c.1330', *EHR* (1996), 111, 441 pp. 279-298.

appointed to rule during Edward III's regency. But Mortimer, Fryde concluded, ruled from behind the scenes.⁷⁷



Graph 3.3: The Distribution of Petitions relating to Roger Mortimer c.1320-c.1335.

However, if his *political* role remained in the background, Mortimer's ill-considered actions led to his very public self-aggrandisement. Typical of this was a tournament held by Mortimer in 1329. Carried out in the manner of the Round Table, it saw Mortimer taking the part of King Arthur with Isabella as his Guinevere, psychologically side-lining the true king, Edward III.⁷⁸ That Mortimer saw himself as 'a king but not actually a king' is contemporaneously portrayed as having caused general censure.⁷⁹ The chronicler Thomas Burton gave a typical example of Mortimer's pride when he noted that he 'remained in his own magnificence' (*rogerus autem de Mortuo Mari adhuc in sua magnificentia perduravit*).⁸⁰ Other sources described how, within royal circles, Mortimer's self-importance had caused him to '*bicome po prout*'.⁸¹

This arrogance culminated in the desertion of Edward III's uncles, the earls of Kent and Norfolk, to Henry of Lancaster's side.⁸² In November 1328, Lancaster's forces had waylaid the royal party outside Windsor, but withdrew without combat. In the next few weeks war became unavoidable between the

⁷⁷ Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II*, p. 207; Davies 'Roger Mortimer' *ODNB*.

⁷⁸ Mortimer, *The Greatest Traitor*, pp. 219, 226.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 219, 226.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 219-227; *Thomas de Burton*, p. 359.

⁸¹ *Brut*, p. 268.

⁸² Waugh, 'Edmund, First Earl of Kent', *ODNB*.

Lancastrians and the royal party. However, the irresolute royal earls once again changed allegiances, returning to the king's, and therefore Isabella and Mortimer's, side, forcing the Lancastrian cause to collapse.⁸³ At this point Isabella and Mortimer's position must have appeared to be unassailable, as the defeat of their most powerful enemy was coupled with their continuing domination of the young king. Ormrod saw the period from the defeat of Lancaster in 1328 to the end of the regency, as being a time of personal humiliation for Edward III, with the young king's attempts to gain control of the Crown being thwarted on every side by Isabella and Mortimer.⁸⁴

On the international scene, what has been seen as a degrading truce between England and France had been brokered in 1325, and in 1328 with the death of Charles IV of France, Isabella and Mortimer were likely to have been influential in the decision not to take advantage of Edward III's convincing claim to the French throne.⁸⁵ At home, England's relationship with Scotland remained strained.⁸⁶ The Scottish victory over the English in 1327 at Stanhope Park in County Durham had been a humiliating military and financial fiasco for the new king who, accompanied by Mortimer, had led the English forces.⁸⁷ As G. W. S. Barrow rightly stated 'an English king had been put to shame in his own land'.⁸⁸ In the aftermath of the failed Scottish campaign, Isabella and Mortimer were left with no option but to sue for peace. Brokered in Edinburgh and formalised in parliament through the Treaty of Northampton, on May 4, 1328, this peace treaty recognized Robert Bruce as the independent king of

⁸³ Henry of Lancaster was later fined £11,000 and his lands forfeited: Waugh, 'Henry of Lancaster', *ODNB*; V. B. Redstone, 'Some Mercenaries of Henry of Lancaster, 1327-1330', *TRHS* (1913), 7, 3rd series, 151-166, *passim*.

⁸⁴ Ormrod, *Edward III* (2005), p. 18.

⁸⁵ The Lanercost chronicle described the 'pestilent advice' received by Edward III on this matter from Isabella and Mortimer: *Lanercost*, p. 259.

⁸⁶ Haines, *King Edward II*, p. 277; Ormrod, *Edward III* (2005), p. 17; *Froissart*, p. 46; *Lanercost*, p. 258.

⁸⁷ The Scottish forces raided and effectively defeated Edward III and Mortimer's armies the night before the battle: *Anonimale*, pp. 137-141; G. W. S. Barrow, *Robert Bruce and the Community of the Realm of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1988), pp. 252-261; Ormrod, *Edward III* (2005), p. 16. For an approximation of the size of the supposedly 'superior' English force see: A. E. Prince, 'The Importance of the Campaign of 1327' *EHR* (1935), 50, 299-302; R. G. Nicholson, *Edward III and the Scots: The Formative Years of a Military Career 1327-1335* (London, 1965), pp. 32-37; *Froissart*, pp. 48-53. For a discussion of Robert Bruce see: G. W. S. Barrow, *Robert Bruce* (London, 1965).

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 359.

Scotland, who was to owe no feudal suzerainty to the English Crown.⁸⁹ The pact was further endorsed by the marriage of Edward III's sister Joan 'of the Tower' and Bruce's son, David.⁹⁰ The marriage was later listed in the charges against Mortimer as being a 'worthless marriage' (*vile matrimonium*) probably due to both David Bruce and Joan being young children. However, Benz St John noted that Isabella [and by association, Mortimer], had 'act[ed] exactly as any king who needed to stabilize his rule'.⁹¹ The treaty was a complete *volte-face* from the time of Edward I, that 'Hammer of the Scots', and it must have appeared an act of outright capitulation to the English nobles. It was considered so demeaning that it became known as the '*turpis pax*' the 'shameful peace'.⁹² The ease of this submission caused 'rumours ... [to be] ... rife' that Isabella and Mortimer had achieved an accord with the Scots while they were still in exile.⁹³ This was taken a step further by Doherty, who argued that the whole campaign was merely a charade, the new regents being unwilling to commit to further Scottish wars.⁹⁴

⁸⁹ Notably without the assent of Henry of Lancaster, as there already been an 'internal rift' between Lancaster and Mortimer: Haines, *King Edward II*, p. 279; Davies, 'Roger Mortimer', *ODNB*; Ormrod, *Edward III* (2005), pp. 16-17. It is interesting to note that the Lanercost chronicler, writing with the hindsight and agendas of the 1340's, claimed that Edward II had also tried to form an alliance with the Scots in 1326 when invasion from Isabella and Mortimer was imminent. The chronicler noted that through evil council (*consilio suo malo*) the king was willing not only to grant the Scots their independence, but also (which was worse) large parts of the north of England (...*et concesserat eis libere terram et scotiae ne tenerent eam de aliquo rege angliae, et (quod pejus est) adjunxerat eis cum scotia magnam partum terrarum angliae quae vicinis eis jacent*): Lanercost, pp. 256-257.

⁹⁰ Barrow, *Robert Bruce and the Community of the Realm*, p. 255; Haines, *King Edward II*, pp. 216, 279; Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II*, pp. 216-217.

⁹¹ Lanercost, p. 260; Galfridi, p. 40; Benz St John, *Three Medieval Queens*, p. 126.

⁹² M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record, England 1066-1307* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 152-153; Haines, *King Edward II*, pp. 277-282; Davies, 'Roger Mortimer', *ODNB*.

⁹³ This perhaps referred to the so-called 'auld alliance' between France and Scotland of 1295, made to guard against the ambitions of the expansionist Edward I: E. Bonner, 'Scotland's 'Auld Alliance' with France, 1295-1560' *History* (1999), 84, 5-30. For a table of Franco-Scottish alliances, treaties and grants from 1295 to 1661, see E. Bonner, 'French Naturalization of the Scots in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries', *The Historical Journal* (1997), 40, 1085-1115, pp. 1102-1103; Davies, 'Roger Mortimer', *ODNB*.

⁹⁴ P. C. Doherty, *Isabella, Queen of England*, D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 1977, pp. 212-220, quoted in Dryburgh, *The Career of Roger Mortimer*, p. 120.

A petition brought by unspecified petitioners dated to 1328, illustrates the extent of the northern magnates' displeasure with the new Scottish treaty.⁹⁵ After stating that the Scots were known to act treacherously, the petitioner/s went on to instruct the young king that, as in the time of Edward I, 'the proctors of your said subjects' had obtained absolution from the pope for the sin of waging war against the Scots. This intimated that any continuation of a Scottish campaign would have similarly been pardoned by the Church. A telling rider added to this point stated that this forgiveness was especially true for the clergy, perhaps indicative of some of the petitioner/s having been members of the Church. The petition went on to state that the earlier defeat of the Scottish king John de Balliol, and the subsequent confiscations by Edward I, was just and lawful. This latter comment supported the fourth point made in the petition, which clearly stated that they wanted Edward III's assurance that all warranties for lands in Scotland previously awarded to the 'earls, barons and others of his realm' should be upheld. This provides another indicator of the identities of members of the group of petitioners, it also implies that Edward III was aware of their identity, as the petition suggested that the king would have the support of the unknown petitioner/s in any future Scottish campaign, perhaps signifying that they were the same barons and earls. The petitioner/s went on to single out Robert Bruce, accusing him of committing felonies and crimes against the king's grandfather, Edward I (*Robert de Bruis...des felonies...enblemisement de la roiale magesté vostre dit Aiel*), thus reminding Edward III of Bruce's long held position as an enemy of the English. The content of the various points also suggest that the unknown author/s were aware of the details of the on-going negotiations between Edward III, Mortimer and the Scots. It also shows that the petitioner/s had in-depth knowledge of the actions leading up to the earlier defeat in 1296 of the king of Scotland and the manner of the subsequent distribution of seized Scottish lands and goods.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ SC 8/269/13425; although the first part of the petition is faded and difficult to read, from its content it is datable to the early reign of Edward III, but before the death of Robert Bruce in 1329: G. W. S. Barrow, 'Robert I, King of Scotland (1274–1329)' *ODNB*; Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II*, pp. 217; Haines, *King Edward II*, p. 281.

⁹⁶ Raban, *England Under Edward I and Edward II*, pp. 139-140.

Why did the anonymous petitioner/s choose the petitioning process to put forward these seven points? One explanation, if one accepts that the petitioners were the same noblemen and Churchmen spoken of in the petition, supports the idea that Isabella and Mortimer were guilty of denying the counsel of the nobles to Edward III, forcing them to commit their advice and requests through the petitioning process. However, this idea is undermined by Isabella and Mortimer's undoubted access and ability to block any petitions brought before the king. The panels of triers responsible for dealing with the majority of complaints were employed to pick out those petitions which merited the king's attention, and it is therefore likely that, during the regency, they would have been influenced by Isabella and Mortimer. A more likely and simple explanation is that the petitioner/s were simply showing their displeasure at this 'shameful peace', and wished to affirm their position as loyal subjects of the king, at the same time as re-asserting their rights to lands and goods granted after John Balliol's defeat, it acting as an *aide-mémoire* to those securing an agreement with the Scots. There is no indication of the response to this petition, and it is somewhat enigmatically endorsed with the words *de baiona*.⁹⁷

After the 'shameful peace' with Scotland, Mortimer was once again able to devote his attention to his Irish lands, inherited through his link by marriage to Geoffrey de Geneville's heir, Joan.⁹⁸ One Irish petition could be taken as being illustrative of a transformation of Mortimer's reputation in Ireland. The petition presented by an unnamed petitioner, gave Mortimer the title of Earl of March and must therefore date to after the Salisbury parliament of October 1328 when he was granted this title.⁹⁹ It openly implicated Mortimer in the misdeeds and irregularities of Alexander Bicknor, archbishop of Dublin, during the final years of the reign of Edward II.¹⁰⁰ Bicknor, who had been inaugurated as archbishop of Dublin in 1317, had as early as 1319 been ordered to account for fraudulent practices as Treasurer of Ireland. Even

⁹⁷ Although clearly written as '*de baiona*' this could actually be '*de baron*' (of the barons) which would agree with the content of the petition.

⁹⁸ Mortimer, *The Greatest Traitor*, p. 14; M. Prestwich 'Geoffrey de Geneville, First Lord Geneville (1225/33–1314)' *ODNB*; Davies, 'Roger Mortimer', *ODNB*.

⁹⁹ SC 8/181/9019.

¹⁰⁰ J. R. S. Phillips, 'Alexander Bicknor (d. 1349)', *ODNB*.

though he went on to join the forces of Isabella and Mortimer in 1326 and was present during the establishment of Edward III as guardian of the realm, he was never pardoned for his crimes in Ireland.¹⁰¹ The petitioner described how Mortimer had helped the archbishop to gain pardons (*procurement le counte de la Marche de faire a luy de pardoun*) for various offenses relating to financial discrepancies during Bicknor's time as Treasurer of Ireland and for his alleged irregularities as Justiciar of Ireland in 1318-1319.¹⁰² This suggests that at the time of this petition Mortimer was linked to anti-royal actions intended to aid his ambitions and consolidate his personal power. This petition was dated by Sayles to 1328, due to several entries in the records of the Close Rolls concerning Bicknor and his crimes.¹⁰³ However, it might seem unlikely that the unspecified petitioner would accuse Mortimer of criminal actions (even in the past) when he was at the pinnacle of his power.¹⁰⁴ But the petition does not mention Mortimer in the past tense, or give any other indicator of his death, suggesting a date before the end of the regency. However, this single petition, taken alone, cannot confirm any major change in Mortimer's reputation in Ireland at this time. But a search of the SC 8 series produced only eight other petitions which referred to both Mortimer and Ireland in the period 1326-1335, suggesting that Mortimer's reputation had remained unchanged in Ireland, or that he was not guilty of actions needing redress through the petitioning process.¹⁰⁵

In 1328 a rumour had circulated that Edward II was still alive.¹⁰⁶ Although there is no evidence that Isabella and Mortimer allowed these rumours to flourish, it is perhaps no great speculation to suggest that they would have considered them convenient, in order to further implicate, and ultimately remove, the irresolute earl of Kent (who had once again deserted the

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid*; Haines, *Edward II*, p. 200.

¹⁰³ *CCR, 1327-1330*, pp. 144-145, 149, 266, 430.

¹⁰⁴ G. O. Sayles (ed.), *Documents on the Affairs of Ireland Before the King's Council* (Dublin, 1979), pp. 131-132.

¹⁰⁵ This search used the parameters [Ireland AND Mortimer] and [Irish AND Mortimer]. The eight petitions were compiled from the results of the two searches.

¹⁰⁶ I. Mortimer, *Medieval Intrigue: Royal Murder and Regnal Legitimacy* (London, 2010), pp. 153-173.

new king in order to free his deposed brother).¹⁰⁷ Ian Mortimer emotively described how he was captured, probably tortured, and finally executed, accused of the crime ‘of trying to rescue a supposedly dead man’.¹⁰⁸ The petitions record the pleas of those accused and imprisoned for supporting the earl, with the petition of Bennett de Braham being a typical example.¹⁰⁹ Presented in 1330, Braham complained of having been taken and arraigned before John de Cauntebrigg for being an adherent of the earl.¹¹⁰ Ian Mortimer also named Braham as one of those indicted for his part in the plot but stated that he, along with many others, was never named by the earl of Kent. Rather, Ian Mortimer asserted that this was perhaps an example of Isabella and Mortimer having acted to round up those who opposed them, irrespective of their guilt.¹¹¹ Edward III’s affection for his uncle, and his inability to prevent his execution, may have been the watershed moment that was to culminate in his final *coup d’état* against Mortimer in October of the same year.¹¹²

It must be considered, however, that Edward III’s final move against Mortimer was the culmination of a long-term plan to assert his majority rule. This is supported by the evidence of the *pater sancte* or ‘holy father’ letter, written in 1329 in response to the request of Pope John XXII that all correspondence from Edward III contain a code denoting that any letters were from the king (presumably to separate them from those sponsored by Isabella and Mortimer in the king’s name).¹¹³ This subterfuge supports the idea that

¹⁰⁷ Bothwell, *Falling From Grace*, p. 24; R. M. Haines, ‘Sumptuous Apparel for a Royal Prisoner: Archbishop Melton’s Letter, 14 January 1330’, *EHR* (2009), 124, pp. 885-894; G. P. Cuttino and T. W. Lyman, ‘Where is Edward II?’ *Speculum* (1978), 53, 522-544.

¹⁰⁸ Mortimer, *Medieval Intrigue*, p. 169.

¹⁰⁹ SC 8/92/4566.

¹¹⁰ This is supported by a lengthy list of those whose lands were to be forfeit and who were to be taken into custody for their part in the actions of the earl of Kent: *CFR, 1327-1337*, pp. 168-170. It is interesting to note that just above these orders there is a note that Mortimer (described as the king’s kinsman) was to be granted certain lands on the death of Queen Isabella: *Ibid.*, pp. 147-148, 168.

¹¹¹ For a full list of those implicated in the plot see: Mortimer, *Medieval Intrigue*, pp. 163-165.

¹¹² Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II*, p. 225.

¹¹³ The dating of this letter is circumstantial, but the contents point to it being before the coup of 1330, with William de Monte Acuto (Montagu) being granted letters of protection whilst abroad on the king’s business in September 1329. This was likely to have included secret negotiations between Edward III and the pope, resulting in the request for the *pater sancte* letter: G. Crump, ‘The Arrest of Roger Mortimer and

Edward III's plans to end the regency predated the death of the earl of Kent. By 1330 the growing tension between the king and Mortimer manifested itself in what would be a final humiliation for Edward III. In October 1330, Mortimer, suspicious of the young king's attempts to assert his authority, interrogated members of Edward's party before the great council in Nottingham.¹¹⁴ This was a fatal error of judgement; Edward III finally struck against Mortimer. On the night of October 19, 1330 a group of Edward III's loyal followers entered Mortimer's chambers in Nottingham castle, arrested him and returned with their captive to London.¹¹⁵ The next day, Edward III announced Mortimer's arrest, denounced the acts of Isabella and Mortimer made in his name, confiscated Mortimer's not inconsiderable lands, and proclaimed his determination to reign in his own name with 'justice and reason'.¹¹⁶

A parliament was announced on October 23, only days after Mortimer's arrest, to be held at Westminster in November of 1330, and Mortimer's guilt was proclaimed throughout the land.¹¹⁷ The agenda of this parliament can have been in little doubt.¹¹⁸ Roger Mortimer was brought to trial on November 29, 1330, echoing the fates of both Lancaster and Despensers the younger, he was denied the opportunity to defend himself.¹¹⁹ A lengthy indictment was made against him, including the usual charges levelled against all 'wicked advisors', that he had denied the authority of the natural counsellors of the Crown and usurped royal power, along with 'many other causes which [had not been] set out' at the time (*autres causes qe ne sont pas*

Queen Isabella', *EHR* (1911), 26, 331-332; *Rymer's Foedera*, p. 772; Mortimer, *Medieval Intrigue*, p. 160; Ormrod, *Edward III* (2005), p. 18.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 18; Mortimer, *The Greatest Traitor*, pp. 228, 237.

¹¹⁵ Phillips, *Edward II*, pp. 571-573; Ormrod, *Edward III* (2005), p. 18.

¹¹⁶ *CCR, 1330-1333*, pp. 158-159; Ormrod, *Edward III* (2005), p. 19; Mortimer, *The Greatest Traitor*, pp. 237-239; Butt, *A History of Parliament*, pp. 237-239.

¹¹⁷ *PROME*, 'Introduction' to the Parliament of November 1330; *CCR, 1330-1333*, pp. 158-159; *Rymer's Foedera*, pp. 799-800; Ormrod, *Edward III* (2005), p. 19.

¹¹⁸ As the writs stated that 'business touching the king and the state of the realm ... to the king's loss and to the disgrace and impoverishment of his people, and desiring with all his heart to restore the tranquillity and peace of the Holy Church and of the people of the realm, the king had decided, with the counsel and assent of the prelates and magnates who were with him, to hold a parliament at Westminster on 26 November': *PROME*, 'Introduction' to the Parliament of November 1330.

¹¹⁹ For a discussion of this see Bothwell, *Falling From Grace*, pp. 40-41.

touz a monstret a ore).¹²⁰ This indictment at once exonerated the king from any blame attached to the regency's term of office and re-established the rights of his barons. Queen Isabella as Edward III's mother, perhaps not surprisingly, was treated much more leniently, being allowed to go into semi-retirement. Significantly there was no charge made against Mortimer over their alleged adulterous relationship, other than that he had 'sown discord' between Edward II and his wife.¹²¹

Although Mortimer's fate was perhaps a foregone conclusion, unlike the decision to depose Edward II, the removal of Mortimer and Isabella from their positions as regents can be shown to have been carried out both *in* and *by* parliament.¹²² Edward III was forced to obtain parliament's agreement to Mortimer's execution, perhaps as a result of those other 'half-hearted trials, judicial murders and mob justice...[that had taken place] with varying degrees of brutality' in the period up to 1330.¹²³ However, in a precedent set at the 1322 trial of Thomas of Lancaster, Edward III merely recorded his knowledge of Mortimer's crimes, his guilt apparently being so self-evident that there appeared to be no need for him to speak for himself, and the parliament 'being too rapid to admit of a solemn trial'.¹²⁴ Mortimer was hanged on the common gallows, a most ignoble end for the 'Kynge of Folye'.¹²⁵

During this parliament, which provided an example of what Fryde described as one of the exceptional successes of his reign, Edward III restored good relations with his magnates.¹²⁶ He pardoned Henry of Lancaster, declaring that his absence from the Salisbury parliament of 1328 was a direct result of Mortimer's actions; he also instigated diplomatic moves to gain the canonisation of the 'martyred' Thomas of Lancaster.¹²⁷ There was even the beginning of a rapprochement made by Edward III to the family of his father's

¹²⁰ *PROME*, C 65/2, mm.7-5 '*Judicium Rogeri de Mortuomari*' text and translation; Mortimer, *The Greatest Traitor*, p. 240.

¹²¹ Butt, *A History of Parliament*, p. 239.

¹²² *PROME* 'Introduction to the Parliament of November 1330'.

¹²³ Bothwell, *Falling From Grace*, pp. 40-41; P. Bradford, 'A Silent Presence: The English King in Parliament in the Fourteenth-Century', *Historical Research* (2011), 84, 189-211, p. 208.

¹²⁴ Butt, *A History of Parliaments*, p. 239; *RTDP*, pp. 298-299.

¹²⁵ *Murimuth*, p. 62, n. 11; *Anonimalle*, pp. 143-5; *Brut*, p. 271.

¹²⁶ Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II*, p. 225.

¹²⁷ Theilman, 'Political Canonization and Political Symbolism', p. 251.

own 'wicked advisors', the two Despensers. Edward III pardoned the son of Hugh Despenser the younger and allowed his father's bones finally to be gathered together for burial.¹²⁸ This petition reveals that the obvious brutality and malice that Isabella and Mortimer had visited on the remains of Despenser the younger was in direct contrast to the attitude of Edward III to the remains of Mortimer.¹²⁹

Mortimer's body was collected by local Franciscan friars, and later transferred to Coventry.¹³⁰ On November 7, 1331 Edward III ordered that the friars release the body to his widow for burial at Wigmore.¹³¹ A petition illustrates that this order was not carried out as, in September 1332, Joan, Mortimer's widow petitioned the king for delivery of Mortimer's remains so that he could be buried 'amongst his ancestors at Wigmore'.¹³² At this time, however, the king seems to have lost patience and refused, commenting that Mortimer 'should remain in peace'.¹³³ Why did Edward III deny this request? One argument, put forward by Dryburgh, centred on the fact that Queen Isabella had acquired the reversion of part of Coventry in a settlement of 1327 which had been completed in 1330.¹³⁴ Therefore, Isabella's influence in the town made it possible for her to have her lover's body 'where she could give it greater devotion'.¹³⁵ However unlikely it may seem that Edward III would condone his mother's continued public link with the hated Mortimer in the

¹²⁸ Rosenthal, 'The King's "Wicked Advisers"' pp. 595-618. In December 1330 Eleanor de Clare received royal permission to collect her husband's bones and inter them in Tewkesbury Abbey: Hamilton, 'Hugh Despenser, the Younger', *ODNB*. An interesting archaeological find may concern the bones of Despenser the younger: M. E. Lewis, 'A Traitor's Death? The Identity of a Drawn, Hanged and Quartered Man from Hulton Abbey, Staffordshire', *Antiquity* (2008), 82, 113-124.

¹²⁹ Bothwell, *Falling From Grace*, pp. 75-76, 186, 197; *CCR, 1330-1333*, p. 403. Whether this considerate act was due to Edward III's, or his mother's, sensibilities remains unclear. It could be argued that he wished to spare his mother the horror of seeing Mortimer's body publically displayed. Equally it could have been an attempt to remove the final evidence of his mother's adultery, by returning Mortimer's body to his wife.

¹³⁰ *'Fratribus Minoribus corpus ejus conceditur et honorifice sepelitur': Walsingham*, p. 193.

¹³¹ *CCR, 1330-1333*, p. 403; *CPR, 1330-1334*, p. 213.

¹³² SC 8/61/3027.

¹³³ Rees, *Petitions Relating to Wales*, p. 89; Mortimer, *The Greatest Traitor*, p. 242.

¹³⁴ Dryburgh, *The Career of Roger Mortimer*, p. 206; *CPR, 1327-1330*, p. 96; *CIPM*, vii, pp. 335-336; Benz St John, *Three Medieval Queens*, p. 93.

¹³⁵ Dryburgh, *The Career of Roger Mortimer*, p. 206.

wake of his disgrace and execution, Dryburgh believed that by 1332 ‘a more confident’ king may have been prepared to allow this.¹³⁶

Mortimer’s portrayal in the petitions continued to undergo small, negative, changes after his downfall. An example of this is a curious petition, brought by an unspecified complainant, dating to 1330.¹³⁷ The petitioner protested against not only the actions of Mortimer but also the Earl of Kent and an undefined Despenser (almost certainly the younger), invoking the names of all three to justify accusations against the actions of ‘John Haltbe de Gyppewyz’ (Ipswich).¹³⁸ This petition detailed a conspiracy by Haltbe through ‘the power of Mortimer and with the assent of the Earl of Kent’ (*poer...Roger Mortimer del assent le Counte de Kent*) against, amongst others, William and John de Cleydone and Thomas la Rente, who it also names as being previously pursued by Haltbe through ‘the power of Despenser whose ally [Haltbe] was’ (*pover mounsire Hugh le Despenser qui alie*). Unlike many of the people named in the petitions, Thomas la Rente and John Haltbe are relatively easy to trace as they both played important roles in the politics of Ipswich. According to Alsford, in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, la Rente had dominated the borough administration of Ipswich until his death in 1323.¹³⁹ Although Haltbe, the self-styled maverick ‘king of Ipswich’ (*est appele roi de Gyppewyz parmy le pays*), was initially a compatriot of la Rente, he can be shown to have profited from a change of allegiance to Despenser, leading to him being the chief beneficiary of a raid on

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 206. The request for the return of Mortimer's remains was only one of four requests made in this petition, the other three were related to the return of Mortimer lands forfeited in Ireland and the release of Edmund Mortimer, who *TNA* noted rather contentiously as Mortimer's heir. Although Edmund would have inherited the Irish estates from his younger brothers Roger and John, he had died in 1331, aged approximately thirty: Mortimer, *The Greatest Traitor*, pp. 319-324. However, Mortimer's grandson (also Roger, born in 1328) was to become the next earl of March, and this agrees with the petitions assertion that he was a minor: Davies, ‘Mortimer, Roger’, *ODNB*; Dryburgh, *The Career of Roger Mortimer*, p. 208.

¹³⁷ SC 8/50/2485.

¹³⁸ That this ‘Despenser’ was the younger is indicated by the accused, John Haltbe, being named as his retainer: *CCR, 1323-1327*, p. 357.

¹³⁹ *CFR, 1319-1327*, p. 251; S. Alsford, ‘Thomas la Rente: A Medieval Town Ruler’, *Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and History* (1982), 35, 2, 105-115.

la Rente's holdings in 1321.¹⁴⁰ The nameless petitioner/s, who may well have been the two Claydones and/or la Rente, were clearly aware of current political events, including the fall and execution of both Edmund, earl of Kent and Roger Mortimer. Their use of the disgraced Despenser name was the final *coup de grâce* to add to Haltbe's guilt and therefore bolster their cause. This petition spoke openly of Haltbe's allegiance to Mortimer, and a further petition, also dated to 1330, from William de Melton, archbishop of York, confirmed this adherence.¹⁴¹ The archbishop named Haltbe as one of those who had indicted him for conspiring with the Earl of Kent to free Edward II in 1328 (*a deliverer le Roi Edward, pere nostre dit seigneur le Roi*).

Even though there had been a dramatic rise in petitioning with the end of the regency (see Graph 3.3), there were relatively few petitions that named Mortimer openly, even though, as a convicted and executed traitor, he would perhaps have been a tempting target for petitioners to exploit in their search for redress. One such petition, from William de Den in 1330, is illustrative of an attempt to gain redress for a complaint against Mortimer's servants dating from the period when the queen and Edward III were still in France.¹⁴² Stating that he had been responsible for having delivered a letter from Edward II to the queen, her son and the king of France, Den then accused Mortimer of having him imprisoned and his manors destroyed. The date of this petition suggests that Den was either afraid or unable to bring his petition whilst Mortimer was still in power. This complaint could be considered illustrative of Mortimer having followed an agenda of vengeance against those he perceived as working against him; but equally, it may be that Den was attempting to profit from Mortimer's downfall. Den's petition was endorsed by a grant of oyer and terminer to investigate the complaint, suggesting that such accusations against

¹⁴⁰ The petition dealing with Thomas la Rente's complaint about this raid was perhaps erroneously dated to 1330 due to its apparent link to SC 8/50/2485 discussed above, and SC 8/172/8555, brought in the aftermath of the execution of the earl of Kent. However, it must date to before 1323, and probably not long after Haltbe's raid in 1321, due to evidence of la Rente's death in 1323: SC 8/233/11637; Alsford, 'Thomas la Rente: A Medieval Town Ruler', p. 110; further support for this revised date is found in the record of a commission of oyer and terminer issued in 1321 against Haltbe and others 'charged with rioting in the town of Ipswich, co. Suffolk, [and] resisting Thomas de la Rente, ...the king's bailiff' on March 1, 1321: *CPR, 1317-1321*, p. 605; Haines, 'Sumptuous Apparel for a Royal Prisoner', pp. 890-891.

¹⁴¹ SC 8/172/8555.

¹⁴² SC 8/106/5258.

Mortimer were not considered unwarranted. Another petition, brought by Alexander de Babeham in 1330-1331, perhaps illustrated Mortimer's power during the regency, when he suggested that an allegation was made 'to the king and Mortimer' against Babeham (*suggestion faite a notre seigneur le roi et a sire Roger Mortimer*).¹⁴³

Other petitions brought in the wake of Mortimer's execution were related to debts owed from the period of the regency. One such example is that of the Burgesses and Commons of Leicester who requested payment of a debt from when Mortimer had visited the town with the royal party.¹⁴⁴ The wording of this petition is significant as it actively separated the actions of Mortimer from those of the royal household. By naming the two separately, the petitioners made their accusation directly against Mortimer, distancing the complaint from the queen. The petition was obviously composed when Mortimer's co-accused were still living, as the endorsement commented, rather chillingly, that they should have a writ against those who still survived (*a ceux qui... en vie*). This places the hearing of the petition to after the November parliament of 1330 during which Mortimer was tried and executed.

Another example of debts accrued by Mortimer during the regency is that of Agnes de Dunlegh who complained in 1330 that Edward II had rented lands from her along the banks of the Thames in Surrey and made good any repairs to the walls of 'the [unspecified] tower' which, she stated, had not been carried out since his death.¹⁴⁵ The petition was endorsed with the instruction that repairs be made forthwith. Thomas Hauteyn, a pepper-merchant from London also petitioned in 1330 for payment of a debt of £15 10s for sugar taken for the king's use, owed since 1328.¹⁴⁶ His petition was also successful, with payment being duly made.¹⁴⁷ An example of a petition which not only shows the need for the new regime to raise monies for the continuing Scottish wars at the beginning of the regency, but also illustrates the reportedly avaricious nature of Isabella and Mortimer's actions, was presented by Aluin

¹⁴³ SC 8/14/683; Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II*, p. 207.

¹⁴⁴ SC 8/123/6129.

¹⁴⁵ SC 8/11/513; *Rot. Parl.* (no.29), pp. 36b-37a.

¹⁴⁶ SC 8/165/8206.

¹⁴⁷ *CCR, 1330-1333*, p. 98.

de Revele Noir, a German merchant, in 1330.¹⁴⁸ Revel Noir described how he had loaned 37 marks 11s. 4d. to Edward III, and therefore Isabella and Mortimer, ‘under the cocket seal’, in 1327.¹⁴⁹ Revele Noir’s petition described a debt owed as part of a forced ‘loan’ imposed on all merchants involved in foreign trade.¹⁵⁰ This and other similar petitions from various English, Irish and foreign merchants not only illustrate one of the common ways in which the Crown could raise monies without calling for payment of a tax, but how these ‘loans’ were then reneged on by Isabella and Mortimer.¹⁵¹ This is illustrated by Revele Noir’s assertion that he had ‘in diverse parliaments by diverse petitions’, attempted to gain, and failed to get, recompense during the regency. All the petitions found in a search for records of such debts after the end of the regency were successful and received payment in full.¹⁵² This can be interpreted as either indicative of an acknowledgement by Edward III of the wrongs done by Isabella and Mortimer, or as a deliberate act to establish the young king’s magnanimity to these influential foreign and English merchants.

The next section considers what the petitions reveal about the attitude of the petitioners to Queen Isabella, asking whether she was in fact viewed as the she-wolf described in certain histories or merely a rejected wife, manipulated by the ambitious and unscrupulous Roger Mortimer.

3.3 Queen Isabella

‘Jezebel’, ‘She-Wolf’ or ‘Fairy-Tale Princess’?¹⁵³

Isabella, Queen of England has been most commonly associated with her sobriquet the ‘she-wolf of France’ earned for her part in the deposition and murder of her husband and king, Edward II. Davies commented that she had

¹⁴⁸ SC 8/165/8207.

¹⁴⁹ The cocket seal was a customhouse seal or a certified document given to a shipper as a warrant that his goods have been duly entered and had paid duty: F. R. Barnes, ‘The Taxation of Wool, 1327-1348’ in *Finance and Trade Under Edward III: The London Lay Subsidy of 1332* (Manchester, 1918), p. 140.

¹⁵⁰ Ormrod, *Edward III* (2005), pp. 221-222. This type of loan was used twice during the regency (notably in 1327 and 1328): *CPR, 1327-1330*, pp. 137, 421.

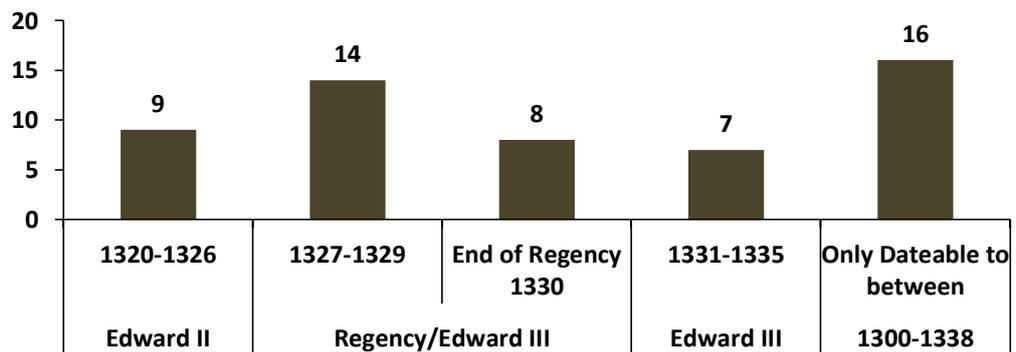
¹⁵¹ Barnes, ‘The taxation of wool, 1327-1348’.

¹⁵² There are several petitions relating to debts owed ‘under the cocket seal’, for example: SC 8/259/12934, SC 8/77/3827.

¹⁵³ Doherty, *Isabella and the Strange Death of Edward II*, pp. 1, 22, 49.

been ‘neglected until the last crisis of the reign’ because of ‘the minor position she occupied’.¹⁵⁴ Until recently, therefore, Isabella’s reputation had been viewed through the brief period of the brutal removal of Edward II, whilst neglecting the impact of the nineteen years she had spent as Queen consort before the deposition or her life after Edward III’s coup at Nottingham in 1330.¹⁵⁵ Remediating this in 2012 the monograph by Benz St John considered Isabella along with the lives of her mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, the wives of Edward I and III.¹⁵⁶ Benz St John not only discussed the expected role of the medieval queen but also the different ways in which the three women interpreted that role. This thesis adds to our understanding of Isabella’s role as queen and the ‘different path’ she chose to take in order to establish her changing reputation through the content of the petitions.¹⁵⁷

Graph 3.4 shows the distribution of the petitions relating to Isabella in the period 1320 to c.1335. Like those relating to the other characters, these include petitions that relate directly to Isabella’s actions in her role as a significant land owner and those that indirectly used her name to complain about others’ actions. But, unlike the other characters, these petitions also include four very unusual petitions presented up to 1330 which were addressed to her in her own right or as joint addressee, and are discussed below.



Graph 3.4: The Distribution of petitions directly relating to Queen Isabella, c.1320-c.1335.

¹⁵⁴ Davies, *The Baronial Opposition to Edward II*, p. 105; H. Johnstone, ‘Isabella, the She-Wolf of France’, *History* (1936), 21, 208-215, p. 208; McKisack, ‘Edward III and the Historians’, pp. 1-15.

¹⁵⁵ M. Bennett, ‘Isabelle of France, Anglo-French Diplomacy and Cultural Exchange in the Late 1350’s’, in J. S. Bothwell (ed.), *The Age of Edward III* (York, 2001), pp. 215-216.

¹⁵⁶ Margaret of France and Philippa of Hainault: Benz St John, *Three Medieval Queens*.

¹⁵⁷ Leyser, *Medieval Women*, p. 84.

Isabella, the twelve year old daughter of Philippe IV of France, had married Edward II in Boulogne on January 25, 1308.¹⁵⁸ The newlyweds left France for England early in February, in time for their coronation on February 25, 1308.¹⁵⁹ It had been a political match; Isabella was a ‘matrimonial ambassador’, a ‘peace-weaver’, the second part of a two part marriage pact between England and France to seal an Anglo-French truce over the disputed duchy of Aquitaine.¹⁶⁰ The day of the marriage was the first actual meeting between Isabella and her new husband, although their betrothal had first been brokered in 1299 when Isabella was just three years old. The betrothal was formalised in 1303 and again in 1305 and 1307, underlining its political importance to both the French and English.¹⁶¹ Isabella could therefore be described as having been associated with England virtually her entire life; but what do the petitions reveal about how Isabella was perceived on her arrival in England and her coronation as queen?

If one considers the twelve year period from her marriage in 1307 until 1319, there are twenty-four petitions that can be shown to directly relate to the actions or personal concerns of Isabella. Of these, ten cover the period from c.1307 to c.1314, four of which cannot be dated any more accurately than the years between c.1300 and c.1327. As there was no use of her personal name in these ten petitions, merely referring to her as the queen, there must be some hesitation in stating that the petitions related to Isabella at this time or to the later part of Edward II’s reign; equally it could be argued that they could also have referred to her predecessor, Margaret of France.¹⁶² This is a clear indicator that, in the early part of her reign, the insertion of her personal name did not have any political draw for those who wished to gain redress.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁸ *Flores Historiarum*, p. 141; *Annales Paulini*, p. 258; Parsons ‘Isabella (1295–1358)’, *ODNB*; Haines, *King Edward II*, p. 52.

¹⁵⁹ Parsons ‘Isabella (1295–1358)’, *ODNB*.

¹⁶⁰ Edward I had married Margaret of France, Philippe IV’s sister, in September 1299: Benz St John, *Three Medieval Queens*, p. 1; J. C. Parsons, ‘Margaret of France (1279?–1318)’, *ODNB*; J. C. Parsons, ‘Mothers, Daughters, Marriage, Power: Some Plantagenet Evidence, 1150-1500, in J. C. Parsons (ed.), *Medieval Queenship* (London, 1998), p. 69.

¹⁶¹ Phillips, *Edward II*, p. 132; Parsons ‘Isabella (1295–1358)’, *ODNB*.

¹⁶² SC 8/339/15960; SC 8/155/7726; SC 8/40/2000571.

¹⁶³ In direct contrast to both Despensers and Thomas of Lancaster, whose names were often used irrespective of their true involvement in the case.

It is perhaps not surprising that at the beginning of her life in England, at such a young age, there were relatively few petitions relating to Isabella personally. However, equally, there are few petitions that mention Isabella in her separate and ‘age-free’ capacity as queen.¹⁶⁴ The petitions presented up to 1314 refer to Isabella as queen, but only indirectly through association with Edward II, with only a single petition relating to her directly in her capacity as queen.¹⁶⁵ For example, the petition of the prior and convent of the hospital of Our Lady without Bishopsgate, dated to 1308, requested payment of debts owed by ‘the king, his queen’ and ‘the king’s father’.¹⁶⁶ Another example is the petition, dated to 1312, presented by Aleaume le Normant, burgess of Abbeville, and mentions a letter from the ‘king and queen’ sent in a failed attempt to gain redress from the King of Spain.¹⁶⁷ This king was probably Ferdinand the IV of Castile, due to the petition citing the northern Spanish ports of Santander, Castro-Urdiales and Laredo.¹⁶⁸ Neither of these petitions has any recorded endorsement. The only petition that can be shown to be directly related to Isabella personally before 1315 is that brought by Edmund Maubaunk, acting as bailiff for the queen in the Honour of Eagle in Surrey, and is dated to 1314.¹⁶⁹ Isabella is named formally throughout the petition as ‘madam the queen’ (*madame la reygne*). Maubank requested that the Sheriff of Surrey desist from interfering in the rights of the queen to collect scutage in the manor of Westcott, which made up part of the lands of John de Bohun, which had been granted to Isabella as part of his wardship in 1314.¹⁷⁰ The

¹⁶⁴ In comparison, a similar search of the brief seven year reign of Isabella's immediate predecessor, Margaret of France, who reigned from 1299-1307, results in nineteen petitions directly related to her.

¹⁶⁵ SC 8/60/2995.

¹⁶⁶ SC 8/318/E328.

¹⁶⁷ SC 8/327/E807.

¹⁶⁸ The letter from Edward II and Isabella to the King of Spain requesting restitution for Normant for goods stolen from a ship in Spain: SC 8/327/E805. Safe-conduct for Spanish merchants to come to England upon security that they did right to Normant and others: *CPR, 1313-1317*, p. 34. W. D. Phillips jnr, C. Rahn-Phillips, *A Concise History of Spain* (Cambridge, 2010), p. 306. The order to the seneschal of Ponthieu concerning a ship seized for Normant: *CCR, 1313-1318*, pp. 301-302.

¹⁶⁹ SC 8/60/2995.

¹⁷⁰ The sheriff being at this point either William de Mere or Peter de Vienne: ‘Lists of Sheriffs for England and Wales’. This is clearly not the same John Bohun as the future earl of Hereford (1306-1336), being some four years older than this namesake. However, it is certain that he *was* a member of this prestigious family, for the grant to Isabella of the custody of the lands and marriage of James Bohun’s heir: *CPR, 1313-*

endorsement gave instruction that the sheriff should allow ‘madam the queen and her bailiffs’ to carry out their rightful duties. There is no further evidence of petitions related to Isabella in this period.

This lack of petitions may be accounted for in the first few years after her arrival in England by her youth. However, added to this was her status as a foreigner; specifically as the daughter of the King of France. That the French king’s collaboration with the Scots had an effect on the petitioning rate is reflected in the number of petitions relating to the impact of the continuing conflicts with the Scots and the Gascon wars of the 1290s. Between 1300 and 1307 there had been one-hundred and forty-seven petitions relating to Scottish incursions, sixty-four relating to the Gascon wars, and twenty-one which mentioned both. There had obviously been much hardship created by these hostilities, therefore it is likely that Isabella may have been met with mistrust, if not open hostility on her arrival in England.¹⁷¹ But if the king’s subjects were perhaps wary of his new queen’s lineage then this was not reflected in the actions of Edward II who, having married Isabella with ‘great joy and great honour’ (*et esposa dame Isabelle la fille le roi de Fraunce a ... ove joie et od grand honur*), regularly granted lands, money and offices at his new wife’s request in the early years of their marriage.¹⁷² However, there does not appear to be any evidence in the petitions of Isabella having personally been involved in the running of these gifts.

Although the function of the queen had traditionally included that of intercedent and a figure of mercy, being linked both ritualistically and practically to the ‘Queen of Heaven’, the institutions of the monarchy did not provide any formal role for the queen.¹⁷³ Even though Musson has stated that many petitions portrayed ‘the workaday, business-like role of queenly

1317, p. 81; proof of age on his attaining his majority: *CIPM*, vol. 6, Edward II (London, 1910), no. 433, p. 263; Given-Wilson, *The English Nobility in the Late Middle Ages*, p. 34.

¹⁷¹ Leyser, *Medieval Women*, p. 84.

¹⁷² *Anonimalle*, p. 83; Parsons ‘Isabella (1295–1358)’ *ODNB*.

¹⁷³ J. C. Parsons, ‘Introduction: Family, Sex and Power: The Rhythms of Medieval Queenship’ in Parsons, *Medieval Queenship*, p. 8. For example, the people of St. Albans had appealed to Eleanor of Castile to intercede with Edward I on their behalf in 1275 stating that they placed their hope in her as they did the ‘Queen of Heaven’: Leyser, *Medieval Women*, p. 84.

mediation', it is not evidenced in the petitions relating to Isabella.¹⁷⁴ However, what the petitions do show is that Isabella was the focus of petitions that requested justice from her directly.¹⁷⁵ The first petition to be actively addressed to Isabella as queen, appealed to her to intercede with the king, and was presented in 1320. The petitioner, Hugh de Snyterby, of Kirton Lindsey, described himself as a tenant of the queen and appealed to Isabella to plead on his behalf to the king in order to obtain an order of oyer and terminer for an assault against him committed while he served as a constable of the peace.¹⁷⁶ However, Snyterby may have been aware that it was not necessarily a forgone conclusion that appealing through the offices of the queen was likely to receive a favourable response, as he presented another, very similar petition, almost certainly simultaneously, addressed directly to the king.¹⁷⁷ That the two petitions were brought at the same time is clear from their enrolment in the records of the Michaelmas parliament of 1320 and the fact that there is evidence of Snyterby having been granted the oyer and terminer in October 1320.¹⁷⁸ However, even though the two petitions described the same complaint, when one compares them more closely, along with their endorsements, one becomes aware of differences between them. For example, in both petitions Snyterby accused John of Melton of having viciously attacked him, breaking his arms and legs (*bruiserent jambes et braces*), in revenge for him carrying out his duties as a constable of the peace. The difference between the two petitions is found in Snyterby's two descriptions of what had happened after the attack. In his plea to the king he baldly described the assault, but in the petition addressed to the queen he added the information that he had not dared to sue against John of Melton due to his having the 'aid of great lords' (*mayntenonce de grantz seignours*). What can explain this difference between the two petitions? One explanation may be that Snyterby could have been

¹⁷⁴ A. Musson, 'Queenship, Lordship and Petitioning in Late Medieval England', in Ormrod, Dodd and Musson, *Medieval Petitions: Grace and Grievance*, pp. 161, 164.

¹⁷⁵ The petitioner's willingness to seek the intercession of the queen may be seen as a guide to the quality of her relationship with the king: Benz St John, *Three Medieval Queens*, p. 43.

¹⁷⁶ SC 8/87/4327.

¹⁷⁷ SC 8/87/4326; Musson, 'Queenship, Lordship and Petitioning in Late Medieval England', p. 158.

¹⁷⁸ *Rot. Parl.* I, p. 380b (no.87); *CPR, 1317-1321*, p. 541.

unwilling to name a retainer of the said same ‘great lords’ if they were the favourites of the king (feasibly the Despensers). Assuming that her dislike of the Despensers was publically acknowledged, this would also explain why such an accusation in a plea to Isabella would have been seen as likely to have profited Snyderby’s cause. However, this theory assumes a separate hearing of petitions addressed to the king from those addressed to the queen, with the possible anti Despenser sentiment of Snyderby’s petition to the queen going unrecognised by the king. This idea is contradicted by Musson, who stated that the ‘lines between the administrative machinery of the two royal households’ would have necessarily been blurred.¹⁷⁹ The reason why Snyderby chose to appeal to the queen if there was such a blurring of the machinery of the royal households remains unclear. Snyderby’s request to the queen was for intervention with the king, and the endorsement noted that ‘Henry Beaufiz, Henry Baiocis, Gilbert de Toudeby,...[were] to hear and determine’. However, this endorsement was probably only a brief note of the king’s final judgement, with a grant of oyer and terminer being granted by the king, dated October 18, 1320.¹⁸⁰

Unlike her role as addressee in the petitions, Isabella’s position as political intermediary began in 1318 when, acting together with Humphrey de Bohun, earl of Hereford, she mediated between Edward II and her uncle, Thomas of Lancaster, which ultimately led to the Treaty of Leake.¹⁸¹ She also acted as arbitrator between her brother, Philip V of France and her husband in 1320, when Edward II did homage to the French king for Ponthieu.¹⁸² The following year she was instrumental in brokering peace between the king and the barons, going down on her knees to beg the king to treat with his barons and not plunge the country into civil war. This enabled him to be seen to accede to her wishes and that of his people without compromising his royal

¹⁷⁹ Musson, ‘Queenship, Lordship and Petitioning in Late Medieval England’ in Dodd and Musson, *Medieval Petitions: Grace and Grievance*, p. 166.

¹⁸⁰ *CPR 1317-1321* p. 541.

¹⁸¹ Thomas of Lancaster was the half-brother of Isabella's mother: Parsons, ‘Isabella (1295–1358)’, *ODNB*; Menache, ‘Isabelle of France, Queen of England – A Reconsideration’, p. 108; B. Wilkinson, ‘Negotiations Preceding the Treaty of Leake, August 1318’ in W. A. Pantin, R. W. Southern and R. W. Hunt (eds) *Studies in Medieval History Presented to Frederick Maurice Powicke* (Oxford, 1969), pp. 333-353.

¹⁸² Chaplais, *The War of Saint-Sardos*, p. ix; Parsons ‘Isabella (1295–1358)’, *ODNB*.

dignity.¹⁸³ But when war followed, she again interceded between her husband and his barons after the battle of Boroughbridge.¹⁸⁴ These actions, according to Parson, made her a popular figure of intercession with her husband's English subjects.¹⁸⁵ But this is not reflected in the number of incidences of those atypical petitions addressed directly to the queen before the deposition.¹⁸⁶ Of these, only one, dated to 1322, is an open plea to Isabella for direct intercession with the king. The petition brought by Joan de Knovill, pleaded for the release of her husband, Bogo (Bewes) de Knovill, from York castle for his part in the Lancastrian uprising.¹⁸⁷ This petition raises a number of interesting questions about Isabella's role in the mind of this petitioner. For example, why did Joan de Knovill choose to direct her petition to Queen Isabella rather than to the king; how did she think such a plea would benefit her husband's cause; and what does this tell us about Isabella's reputation in this period and how does it reflect her role as a woman and queen?

Joan de Knovill's petition, from its very beginning, was extraordinary. Whilst adhering to the basic petitioning format, Knovill nevertheless makes her petition distinctive by addressing Isabella in the same manner as that used for the king, naming her as 'our most high, very noble and very powerful lady' (*notre haute tres noble et tres puissaunt dame*), suggesting that she considered Isabella to have the same rank and political power as the king.¹⁸⁸ After this unusual introduction, Joan de Knovill further enhanced the queen's personal image by repeatedly referring to her as *tres cher dame*. Clearly Joan de Knovill felt that, in 1322, Isabella had significant influence in both her roles as wife and queen, irrespective of her apparent side-lining by the increasingly powerful Despencers. This is also reflected in the tone of the petition, which was plainly intended to create the impression of a direct and personal plea, not only from one wife to another, but perhaps from one enemy of the Despencers to another.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ Castor, *She-Wolves*, p. 270. Interestingly Benz St John commented that Isabella's 'power or authority was expressed in the language of petitioning and intercession', but she does not carry this further by discussing petitions addressed too or by her: Benz St. John, *Three Medieval Queens*, pp. 35-46, 140.

¹⁸⁵ Parsons 'Isabella (1295–1358)' *ODNB*.

¹⁸⁶ SC 8/55/2731; SC 8/46/2256.

¹⁸⁷ SC 8/55/2731. The petition is briefly discussed in both: Benz St John, *Three Medieval Queens*, p. 48; Bothwell, *Falling From Grace*, p. 180.

¹⁸⁸ The format of a petition is described in: Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, p. 281.

The former idea is illustrated by Knovill's employment of personal and possessive terms when describing her husband, for example: '*my lord* who is imprisoned...' (*mon seigneur qui est enpirisoner...*) and again in the petition's final appeal which requested that Isabella show pity for both her husband and herself (*pite de nous*), again, the use of the possessive 'us' establishing the two Knovills as inseparable, emphasising that the outcome of the petition would therefore affect Joan as well as her husband.¹⁸⁹

The petition was endorsed by the command that the king himself would judge the case; which may be indicative of Isabella having intended to present the case to the king personally, and it is possible that Isabella would have been aware of this petition.¹⁹⁰ However, although it is clear that Knovill was eventually released (he was returned as a knight of the shire for Wiltshire in 1324), it appears that this may have had little to do with his wife's petition to Isabella, as it was part of the general annulment of fines and punishments made against those involved in the Lancaster uprising.¹⁹¹ There is also evidence that Knovill was still being pursued for the fine as late as 1325 when he petitioned twice to the king for permission to pay this fine by instalments. He was finally granted a pardon in 1326.¹⁹² It is interesting to note, however, when considering any lessening of the level of influence that Isabella had with her husband during the period immediately before her final departure to France, that Knovill was only able to finally gain full redress through the influence and intervention of Hugh Despenser the younger. The records of this judgement state that 'at the request of Hugh Despenser' Knovill was to be pardoned; an additional memorandum notes that the king had handed over the administration of Knovill's fine to Despenser personally.¹⁹³

One explanation for Isabella's role as a direct addressee in the years of the Despenser ascendancy could be indicative of the petitioners' attempts to

¹⁸⁹ The full petition reads (authors transcription): *A notre haute tres noble et tres puisaunt dame, madame Isabell par la grace dieux Reyne Dengleterre vous supplie pur dieu, et pur almoigne Jouan Knovill feme sire Bugas de Knovyl que le vous pleise tres cher dame prier au notre seigneur le Roi pur mon seigneur qe est enpirisoner en la chaustel Deverwyke par qay cher dame qe ieo puisse avoir deliveraunce de senn corps et pur dieu tres cher dame preigner vous pite de nous.*

¹⁹⁰ Musson, 'Queenship, Lordship and Petitioning in Late Medieval England', p. 161.

¹⁹¹ Cokayne, *The Complete Peerage*, pp. 348-349; *CFR, 1319-1327*, p. 154.

¹⁹² *SC 8/264/13152; SC 8/275/13705; CFR 1319-1327*, p. 371.

¹⁹³ *CPR, 1324-1327*, p. 333.

bypass the influence of the Despensers over the king.¹⁹⁴ The Despensers' position had been further consolidated when, in September 1324, with the worsening Anglo-French relations, Edward II had confiscated Isabella's English lands and property and, on November 18, when the king had ordered that her household was to be governed by the Exchequer.¹⁹⁵ The final affront for Isabella was the removal of their children from her care, the king placing them with Isabella de Hastings, a court favourite and, unforgivably, Despenser the younger's wife, Eleanor.¹⁹⁶ However, her value as international 'peace weaver' remained significant. Even as the Edward II was reducing her household and removing her children, Isabella was sent to France to act as intercessor between the king and her brother, Philip V of France.¹⁹⁷ Isabella had not returned to court by September 1325 when the future Edward III arrived in France to do homage as the newly created Duke of Aquitaine.¹⁹⁸

The 'She-Wolf' Returns

On September 24, 1326, Isabella, accompanied by her son Prince Edward, the duke of Aquitaine, John de Beaumont, the brother of the count of Hainault, Edward II's half-brother, the earl of Kent, and Roger Mortimer, landed in England and marched with some element of a triumphal procession through

¹⁹⁴ The rarity of petitions addressed to the queen is highlighted through a search of the archive which provides only eighteen petitions where the queen is the addressee or joint addressee.

¹⁹⁵ It must be noted that, in forfeiting her lands, Isabella was compensated by 2920 marks a year for her expenses, therefore it must be considered as a political and personal attack rather than a financial one: Menache, 'Isabelle of France, Queen of England', p. 110; Davis, *The Baronial Opposition to Edward II*, p. 107; Rymer's *Foedera*, vol. 4, p. 85; *CFR, 1319-1327*, pp. 300-301; *CCR, 1323-1327*, p. 223; Raban, 'England Under Edward I and Edward II 1259-1327', p. 150.

¹⁹⁶ Doherty, *Isabella and the Strange Death of Edward II*, p. 80; *Lanercost*, p. 249; *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, p. 135.

¹⁹⁷ Waugh, *England in the Reign of Edward III*, p. 12. Letters from Isabella to various nobles and 'our beloved king' (*roi a nos chers*) during her mission to France can be read in: Chaplais, *The War of Saint-Sardos (1323-1325)*, pp. 198-200.

¹⁹⁸ Phillips, *Edward II*, pp. 483-485; Chaplais, *The War of Saint-Sardos (1323-1325)*, pp. 199-201; W. M. Ormrod, 'Edward III (1312-1377)' *ODNB*; C. Lord, 'Queen Isabella at the Court of France' in C. Given-Wilson (ed.), *Fourteenth-Century England*, vol. 2 (Woodbridge, 2002). For an outline of Isabella's itinerary see: J. Hunter, 'Journal of the Mission of Queen Isabella to the Court of France', *Archaeologica* (1855), 36, 242-257.

England.¹⁹⁹ Isabella met with little or no resistance. The two Despensers were captured and duly executed and Edward II taken prisoner.

The first parliament after the invasion, instigated in the name of Edward III, was held in January 1327, but has been described as being ‘highly questionable’ and even ‘completely illegal’.²⁰⁰ However, contemporary accounts, keen to highlight the legitimacy of the newly established regime, recorded that it had been called with the consent of Edward II (*est parliamentum ... per consensum et voluntatem Regis*), and the *Flores Historiarum* noted how parliament had been quick to accept the legitimate heir as king (*ipsum juvenem edwardum in regem promptissime receperunt*).²⁰¹ The political revolution had been completed, Edward III’s ‘king’s peace’ was proclaimed throughout the land; Edward II’s removal being a confusing mixture of deposition and abdication.²⁰²

As the new king was not yet fifteen, it was decided that the reign was to be overseen by a regency.²⁰³ Although neither Isabella nor Mortimer was ever

¹⁹⁹ Isabella had brokered a marriage between her son and the count of Hainault’s daughter, Phillipa, in exchange for continuing military support: Bothwell, ‘The More Things Change’, in Beem, *Royal Minorities of Medieval and Early Modern England* (London, 2008), pp. 498-504.

²⁰⁰ The *Modus Tenendi Parliamentum* stated that the king must be present at parliament ‘unless hindered by corporal infirmity’ in order for it to be legal: *Modus Tenendi Parliamentum*, p. 34; Phillips, *Edward II*, p. 513, n. 355; *PROME* ‘Introduction’ to the Parliament of January 1327.

²⁰¹ *Bermundeseia*, p. 471; *Flores Historiarum*, vol. 3, 1265-1326, p. 235.

²⁰² Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II*, pp. 176-206; Valente, ‘The Deposition and Abdication of Edward II’, pp. 852-881; Sneddon, ‘Words and Realities’, p. 193; G. Dodd, ‘Parliament and Political Legitimacy in the Reign of Edward II’, in Dodd and Musson, *The Reign of Edward II*, p. 169; Haines, ‘The Episcopate during the Reign of Edward II’, p. 91; Haines, *King Edward II*, p. 194; Clarke, ‘Committees of Estates and the Deposition of Edward II’, p. 30; *Rymer's Foedera*, pp. 243-244; Ormrod, *Edward III* (2005), p. 9; M. Prestwich, *The Three Edwards: War and State in England, 1272-1377*, 2nd ed. (London, 2003), p. 87. The seventeenth-century writer J. Barnes, described one of several propaganda statements made at the time of the coronation of Edward III which depicted not only the new king’s attitude but also that of Queen Isabella and Roger Mortimer. It took the form of a medal struck for the coronation, which depicted the young king holding out his hands to catch a falling crown, it reportedly read ‘I did not take, I received’: from a description in: J. Barnes, *The History of that Most Victorious Monarch, Edward III* (Cambridge, 1688), in Mortimer, *The Greatest Traitor*, p. 171.

²⁰³ *Brut*, p. 254; Bothwell, ‘The More Things Change’, pp. 67-94. The age of attaining adulthood for a king was seemingly one of political expediency rather than any other social or physical attributes, for example, Richard II who ascended the throne at the age of 10 with no appointed regency: C. Fletcher, ‘Manhood and Politics in the Reign of Richard II’, *P&P* (2005), 189, 3-40, pp. 37-38.

part of this council, there is no doubt that they ruled, the *Brut* observed that the authority of the council was soon bypassed by ‘*þe kyngus moder, Dame Isabel, and by Sir’ Roger þe Mortimer*’.²⁰⁴ Although there was no precedent in English history for Isabella to become regent, in France the idea of a young king’s mother acting as regent was well established.²⁰⁵ This may also explain why Isabella felt she could choose this unusual course, its misinterpretation becoming one of the foundations on which her portrayal as a woman keen to establish and exploit her own power was based.

A petition, dating to c.1326-1327, illustrated the rapidity of this change in regime.²⁰⁶ The petition of Adam de Heseleye, vicar of Lincoln, demonstrating neither political forethought nor discretion, was drafted before the deposition and then hurriedly revised to reflect the change of monarch. This petition, requesting that the arrears be paid on a gift by Edward II of forty shillings to set up a chantry at Lincoln, stayed within the traditional format of the petition; it began with an appeal directly to the king ‘*a nostre Seigneur le roi*’, identified the petitioner, made a statement of grievance, and ended with an appeal for redress.²⁰⁷ However, in the statement of grievance, where it had originally named Edward II in the present tense, ‘the present king is...’ (*le roi qore est...*), it has been scored through and clumsily amended to read ‘the king of England, his father’ (*le roi de Engleterre son piere*). The insertion of the term ‘his father’ firmly placed the reign of Edward II, if not the man, in the past tense.²⁰⁸ This inelegant amendment could be explained in several ways, for example, it may indicate that the petitioning process was too expensive and/or too lengthy to warrant the petitioner paying for a revised draft; or

²⁰⁴ *Brut*, pp. 254-255; C. Shenton, ‘Edward III and the Coup of 1330’, in J. S. Bothwell, *The Age of Edward III* (York, 2001), p. 13; Mortimer was not a member of the initial council but it did include his retainer Oliver Ingham, a former lieutenant of Edward II and the Despencers, who had later given his loyalty to Mortimer: *CCh.R., 1327-1341*, pp. 2-5; M. Vale, ‘Oliver Ingham, Lord Ingham (c.1287–1344)’, *ODNB*; Ormrod, ‘Edward III (1312-1377)’, *ODNB*.

²⁰⁵ Musson, ‘Queenship, Lordship and Petitioning in Late Medieval England’, p. 165; Benz St. John, *Three Medieval Queens*, p.133.

²⁰⁶ SC 8/53/2607.

²⁰⁷ There are several variations to this address, for example: ‘to our lord the king and his council’ (*a nostre seigneur le Roi et a soen conseil*); for a discussion of the formulae behind the writing and presentation of the petitions, see: Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, pp. 279-316.

²⁰⁸ Sneddon, ‘Words and Realities’, p. 196.

conversely, that the scribe felt that this petition was easily amended, knowing that because the petition would be read to the court, the outcome would remain the same.²⁰⁹ If the latter is true then it indicates that the drafting of the petitions was not important to those, literally, hearing the petitions. This is supported by other petitions which showed a ‘business as usual’ attitude during the unstable period between Edward II’s capture and the coronation of Edward III. For example, the petition of John Corbet and Henry de la Pomeray, securely dated through its inclusion in the rolls of petitions presented to the transitional parliament of January 1327, was presented as part of an ongoing inheritance dispute.²¹⁰ Corbet and Pomeray felt no compunction in leaving their petition addressed to Edward II. This attitude is further highlighted by the petition of the prioress of Ankerwycke who complained of the actions of the elder Despenser which took place ‘in the time of the present king’ (*en le temps le roi qore est*), who is further defined as Edward II when she spoke of these wrongs continuing up to the time of his [Despenser’s] death (*et cel tort continua tainqe a sa mort*), clearly dating the petition to the short period between Despenser’s execution in November 1326 and the parliament which began in January 1327.²¹¹

But do these examples reflect the effect these momentous events had on the new king’s subjects? Ormrod posited that the provincial petitioner would not have understood or felt the effect of the deposition, nor its theoretical implications.²¹² This is underlined in the petitions heard at the parliament of January 1327, when there is evidence that the petitioners were aware of the changed axis of power, but that there was some confusion as to what new conventions were to be followed.²¹³ For example, a petition from

²⁰⁹ Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, p. 292.

²¹⁰ SC 8/18/875A.

²¹¹ SC 8/30/1496; Sneddon, ‘Words and Realities’, p. 197.

²¹² Ormrod, ‘*Edward III*’ (2005), pp. 9-10.

²¹³ The original call for parliament was made in October 1326, to meet in December 1326, but had been postponed: Phillips, *Edward II*, p. 513; Sneddon, ‘Words and Realities’, p. 193; Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II*, pp. 176-206; Valente, ‘The Deposition and Abdication of Edward II’ pp. 852-881. Petitioning in this parliament was at a much heightened level from previous sessions, which may well have been due to a gap between parliaments, the previous one being held over a year before in November 1325: PROME, ‘Introduction’ to the parliament of November 1325. Indeed the records of the warrant notes implies that there had been little petitioning business done since the assembly of February 1324. For a graph detailing

John de Beauchamp of Somerset, presented at the time of the deposition, although addressed to the ‘king and council’ (indicating Edward II) was an obvious appeal to Isabella and the ‘Lord Duke of Aquitaine’.²¹⁴ In designating Edward III as the Duke of Aquitaine, the person drafting Beauchamp’s petition clearly did not consider him to be king at this point, although he undoubtedly saw him as the focus of royal power.²¹⁵ That the petition named Edward III as the Duke of Aquitaine, is also significant as it shows that either Beauchamp or the person responsible for drafting his complaint, had a level of political and social sophistication which allowed him to address Edward III correctly. (Edward III had not been created Prince of Wales, a title conferred for the first time in 1301, nor had he inherited the earldom of Cornwall which was also customarily given to the king’s eldest son.)²¹⁶ Beauchamp’s petition described damages caused to his manor of Shepperton in Middlesex by Richard Broun, leader of the king’s forces in Middlesex against Isabella and ‘my lord duke and the estate of the realm’ (*mon seigneur le duc...et lestat du roialme*). As Sneddon stated, with Edward II still ostensibly the king, the content of this petition, which clearly stated that it was the *king’s* forces who were the enemies of the realm, was ‘strong stuff’.²¹⁷

That there was some confusion about who was in charge in this period is also illustrated in such petitions as that of Thomas de Everyngham who, in 1326, showed a clear reticence in declaring to whom he was actually appealing.²¹⁸ Covering all possibilities, he addressed his plea not only to the

Dodd’s research into the value of the evidence of the warranty notes: Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, p. 65; Sneddon, ‘Words and Realities’, p. 193.

²¹⁴ SC 8/32/1572; the dating of this petition is probably accurate due to the confusion in address and the obvious bias in the wording of the petition towards the new regime.

²¹⁵ Further suggesting that this petition can be dated to the parliament of January 1327 and before the deposition.

²¹⁶ Ormrod, ‘Edward III (1312–1377)’ *ODNB*.

²¹⁷ Sneddon, ‘Words and Realities’, p. 199. The endorsement, however, did not take the controversial nature of the petitioner’s claims into consideration, as it was answered by a statement that Beauchamp should have a writ of trespass, in effect sending it back to the common law process.

²¹⁸ SC 8/46/2256. As this petition was dated to 1326 it was clearly presented in the period after Isabella and Mortimer’s invasion but before the deposition of Edward II, indicating that it was presented outside of parliament. Not all petitions were presented formally through parliament, the opportunity to appeal directly to the king being exploited in the localities during royal visits. For a discussion of petitions submitted directly to the king: Dodd, ‘Patronage, Petitions and Grace’, in Dodd and Biggs, *The Reign of Henry IV*.

king but also to Queen Isabella, ‘Edward, Duke of Guyenne’ and ‘their council’.²¹⁹ However, the joint petition of Stephen de Malton and his wife Loretta, and a second, individual, petition from Loretta de Malton, both presented in 1327, and both addressed to ‘the king and council’, contained accusations of wrongdoing ‘by the power of the king, Hugh Despenser and Robert Baldock’.²²⁰ Loretta’s petition was endorsed by the instruction that she should have a writ of chancery, and the joint petition that they should sue at common law. That the petitions did not mention the ‘late king’ or ‘the king’s father’ indicates that at this point Edward II was not only still alive but remained on the throne. This created the unusual position of a petition that both appealed to, and *at the same time* brought an accusation *against*, Edward II.

But the power of the Crown was firmly in the hands of Isabella and Mortimer. Proof of this was underlined by the petition of Robert de Sencler of Stone in Buckinghamshire, dated to 1326-1327.²²¹ Again, although clearly addressing Edward II (Edward III being named as the Duke of Aquitaine), Sencler complained of robbery at the hands of ‘Hainaulters and Germans’ accompanying Isabella in pursuance of the enemies of the Crown (*al heure qe madame la reine et monseigneur le duc, ove les graunz Dengleterre et dautres terres estraunges pursueyent les enemys de la coroune*).²²² Sencler’s claim made it clear that it was Isabella who was upholding the rights of the Crown, and that the supporters of Edward II were its enemies; again ‘strong stuff’.

However, instances of petitions that were addressed directly to Isabella without a male co-addressee, even at the zenith of her power, appears to have been brief and the number few. Even at this time of political confusion and unrest, when the rightful king was still alive but no longer actively ruling, and later, when the regency had yet to be established, petitioners overwhelmingly directed their pleas to the king or to the king and council. There was only one petition that was addressed to Isabella individually during the period 1327-

²¹⁹ *CCR, 1323-1327*, p. 614; Everingham had been pardoned as an adherent of Thomas of Lancaster in 1318: *CPR, 1317-1321*, p. 232.

²²⁰ The ‘wrongdoing’ refers to the actions of Edward II’s messenger, John de Waltham, who the Maltons accused of beating and imprisoning Stephen de Malton: SC 8/30/1475; SC 8/60/2968.

²²¹ SC 8/74/3668.

²²² Translation in: Sneddon, ‘Words and Realities’, p. 202.

1330.²²³ However, this cannot be explained through the stringencies of diplomatic language, because, as has been discussed above, there had been petitions directed to Queen Isabella before the deposition. Neither can it be explained by it being more politic to address petitions to the king and/or the regency council before 1330, as there are no petitions addressed to such a body. Those petitions addressed to ‘the council’ or ‘the king and council’ during 1327-1330 were no more prolific than those before the deposition.²²⁴ This apparent reluctance to address petitions to persons other than the king perhaps reveals the wariness of the petitioners or their clerks as they attempted to avoid making a costly *faux pas*.

One petition, presented in 1327, which reveals the petitioner’s cautious approach in his address, is that of the Dean of St Buryan in Cornwall, who appealed to Isabella, Edward III *and* the council.²²⁵ The petition is one of a number of petitions found relating to the much contested rights to the free chapel of St. Buryan.²²⁶ That the Dean chose to address both Edward III and Isabella in the early part of Edward III’s reign indicates that he was anxious to be seen to acknowledge her role in the political situation in his on-going fight to find redress.²²⁷ The final petition dealing with the case, presented in 1329, had however, returned to the more usual address of ‘the king and council’, missing out Isabella completely, perhaps indicating that at this late stage in the Regency Isabella’s standing, along with that of Mortimer, had been reduced and, significantly, that the petitioner was aware of it. This petition seemingly

²²³ SC 8/41/2001.

²²⁴ A search of *TNA* database for petitions addressed to ‘the council’, not including letters or writs, achieves twenty-one results for the period 1327-1330. The same search for a similar three year period before the deposition (1322-1325) gave a very similar result of twenty two petitions.

²²⁵ SC 8/33/1629.

²²⁶ The petition is securely dated by its inclusion with a letter detailing her actions earlier in the reign: SC 8/33/1628. This dispute can be dated as having begun as early as 1308. For other petitions regarding this issue: SC 8/110/5464, SC 8/334/E1119, SC 8/205/10205, SC 8/169/8447, SC 8/92/4565, SC 8/318/E351, SC 8/91/4528, SC 8/8/361, SC 8/257/12814.

²²⁷ It is tempting to suggest, as this and other petitions mentioning Isabella were presented in parliament, that she could have perhaps been present to hear them, if so this would constitute a truly landmark moment in the history of women.

provided redress for the Dean, with his being granted a full investigation into the complaints, and there being no further petitions relating to it recorded.²²⁸

Another petition, addressed to ‘the king, council and the queen’ (*a nostre seigneur le roi et a soen conseil et nostre dame la roigne*), only datable to c.1327-1330, is that of Thomas de Canvyle, regarding the manor of Bockingfield.²²⁹ That this ‘queen’ was Isabella is confirmed by her having been granted the manor of ‘Bokynghfolde’ on February 1, 1327, a grant renewed April 3, 1330.²³⁰ Musson discussed this petition in his consideration of the role of queenship in petitioning, and commented that Isabella was seemingly added on to the end of this petition’s address as an afterthought.²³¹ However, this change in format may merely have reflected that Isabella was now the dowager queen, illustrating that the role of king’s mother was not only separate but subordinate to that of the reigning queen.

Although Edward III did not put Isabella on trial, or openly criticize her at the end of the regency, his attitude to her had certainly hardened. He confiscated her lands and placed her jewels and other belongings in the Tower of London.²³² It was not until the pope’s intervention in 1331 that Isabella’s dower lands were returned to her. Edward III’s displeasure towards his mother is illustrated in a petition from Isabella herself. Presented at some point between 1332 and 1344, she asked for the removal of taxes from her lands in Eltham in Kent, which were ‘now demanded from her...being levied by severe distrains’.²³³ There is no recorded endorsement for this petition; however, it is significant that she had to approach her son through the formal petitioning process to gain redress. However, the change in Edward III’s attitude to his mother would not have been known by the ordinary petitioner, and this is illustrated in the petition of the ‘men of Carlisle’.²³⁴ It was dated to 1331 and

²²⁸ There had been a commission of oyer and terminer granted to the Dean in response to his petition addressed to Isabella in 1327, and a further two in 1329: *CCR 1327-1330*, pp. 525-526, *CPR 1327-1330*, pp. 215, 425, 426.

²²⁹ SC 8/38/1877.

²³⁰ *CPR 1327-1330*, pp. 67, 519.

²³¹ Musson, ‘Queenship, Lordship and Petitioning in Late Medieval England’, p. 166, *n.* 60.

²³² Benz St John, *Three Medieval Queens*, p. 127.

²³³ SC 8/297/14837. This was not the only instance as there are several other examples of petitions relating to problems with the control of her lands post-1330.

²³⁴ SC 8/279/13921.

addressed to the ‘Council of the king and of the very noble Isabella, queen of England’ (*counsel seignior le roi et de la tres noble dame Isabell regine d’Angeltre*).²³⁵ However, this obsequious address, rather than being indicative of any residual power held by Isabella, was perhaps more to do with the petitioners’ eagerness to gain time to pay an allowance owed to the dowager queen.

By 1334 Isabella became involved in court life once more, and in the same year she was restored to her French lands of Ponthieu and Montreuil.²³⁶ However, it must not be assumed that this was a show of filial devotion by Edward III. It was, he stated, ‘in remembrance of the divine respect that sons should revere their parents’ and that she should be seen to have regained ‘such increase of honour as becomes her estate’.²³⁷ In granting back her estates, Edward III appeased the pope and restored the integrity of the Crown of which Isabella, as dowager queen, was an essential part. In time she regained her position as a useful, if less prominent, member of the court, with her French lineage continuing to prove advantageous to Edward III.²³⁸ Isabella's career as a useful diplomat and international; ‘peace-weaver’ continued until her death in 1358.

3.4 Conclusion

How have the petitions added to our understanding of the careers and reputations of Queen Isabella and Roger Mortimer? Do they support the concept Mortimer having been the ‘greatest traitor’ or Queen Isabella the ‘new Jezebel’ or the ‘she-wolf’?²³⁹ The first and most obvious result of this study is that Isabella and Mortimer were never the focus, either jointly or individually,

²³⁵ This petition is dated on the guard to c.1331 and is in regard to: *CPR, 1330-1334*, pp. 226, 530.

²³⁶ W. H. Bliss *et al* (eds), *Calendar Entries in the Papal Registers Relating to Great Britain and Ireland: Papal Letters 1198-1404*, 14 vols (London, 1894-1903), vol. 2, p. 498; Benz St. John, *Three Medieval Queens*, pp. 127-128.

²³⁷ Bliss *et al*, *Calendar Entries in the Papal Registers Relating to Great Britain and Ireland*, p. 24.

²³⁸ For example, she was responsible for entertaining King John of France during his captivity in England in 1356: Bennett, ‘Isabelle of France, Anglo-French Diplomacy’ in Bothwell, *The Age of Edward III*, p. 222.

²³⁹ Doherty, *Isabella and the Strange Death of Edward II*, pp. 22, 49; Mortimer, *The Greatest Traitor*, *passim*.

of a surge in petitioning against their actions, either during the period of the regency or in its aftermath (see Graph 3.2). There were two key factors that may have influenced this. Although Isabella and Mortimer are rightly considered to have acted as the de-facto rulers of the country by modern historians, contemporaneously, at all times during their regency, Edward III was considered to be in absolute power.²⁴⁰ The focus of a semi-theocracy, his right to rule was God given, perhaps making the petitioners unwilling to comment on the actions of his mother or her associate who were perhaps seen as extensions of this theocracy.²⁴¹ Another factor perhaps restricting petitioning numbers was that the probability of the ordinary petitioner being aware of the internal discord between the king and his regents was small. In 1330, when Edward III asserted his majority rule, the only public display of royal disfavour was the execution of Roger Mortimer, making him the likely target for any strategic use of rhetorical spin in the content of the petitions. Queen Isabella remained alive and, as the king's mother and the dowager queen, she was both an important figure within the royal family and the institution of the Crown.

The contents of the petitions show that in the period up to 1335, after Edward III had gained full control of his crown, Isabella was named a further sixteen times in the petitions.²⁴² Of these, only one documented any negative comment regarding her actions, which was excused as having been through the intervention of a 'malicious council[lor]' (*par malveis conseil*), - a reappearance of the 'wicked advisor'.²⁴³ This petition, presented in 1330 by John de Leyburn, a former Contrariant, requested the return of the castle and manor of Odiham which, he stated, he had been awarded by Queen Eleanor of Castile in the first year of Edward I's reign. However, he had been ejected

²⁴⁰ This encapsulates the main problem of all minority reigns, 'the theoretical clash between...inherit[ed]... kingship and the exercise of the political, sacerdotal [*sic*], military, and juridical prerogatives attached to the office of king': C. Beem, 'Woe to thee, Oh land! The Introduction', in C. Beem (ed.), *Royal Minorities of Medieval and Early Modern England* (London, 2008), pp. 1-16.

²⁴¹ This concept of a monarchy based around a semi-theocracy is illustrated in the *Brut* who, when describing Lancaster's execution noted that he had pleaded for *God's* mercy because 'the *earthly king* [as opposed to the King of *Heaven*] has forsaken us' (*þe erþely kyng haþ us forsake*), my italics: *Brut*, p. 223.

²⁴² See Appendix A3.

²⁴³ SC 8/159/7914.

from the castle and lands by Isabella, on the advice of a malicious councillor.²⁴⁴ The identity of this ‘*malveis*’ councillor is not made clear, but the likelihood is that it was to be assumed to have been Mortimer. Both the petition and its endorsement illustrate that the blame for any wrongdoing during the years of the regency were to be placed on the shoulders of Mortimer. The petitioner accomplished this by isolating his accusation from Queen Isabella by the use of the ‘wicked advisor’ concept, and the endorsement established that Isabella had retained her political position as the dowager queen by naming her as ‘the queen, the mother’ (*la roigne, la mere*), giving her title but distinguishing her from Edward III’s queen, Philippa of Hainault.

If one then considers purely political motivations for the lack of exploitation of Mortimer’s name then Queen Isabella’s survival must have had some impact. To accuse Mortimer of wrongdoing was, by association, to also accuse Isabella, the king’s mother; something that the wary petitioner was unlikely to do, given that a complaint against Isabella could also be seen as one ultimately against the king. As the former king’s wife and the new king’s mother she held a unique status, having access to both the person of the king and the institution of the Crown.²⁴⁵ It is also significant that there are no petitions that openly linked Isabella and Mortimer. That Mortimer was ‘the lover of the queen and the master of the king’ (*amasius regine, magister Regis*), if true, was never mentioned in the extant petitions. Even after the end of the regency petitioners followed the official ‘line’ established during the trial and judgement of Mortimer, which did not mention Queen Isabella.²⁴⁶ This again illustrates the political astuteness of the petitioners, as they chose not to defame the moral reputation of the king’s mother, and thus call into question the legitimacy of Edward III’s reign.

The second, and perhaps simplest, explanation for the lack of petitions against Isabella and Mortimer, either together or separately, is that they were not considered to be guilty of acts of perceived tyranny. This becomes more

²⁴⁴ For a record of Leyburn’s pardon for his participation in the Lancastrian rebellion: *CPR, 1321-1324*, pp. 104-105.

²⁴⁵ Benz St John, *Three Medieval Queens*, p. 93.

²⁴⁶ *Galfridi*, pp. 45-46; Benz St. John. *Three Medieval Queens*, p. 127.

likely when one considers that with the execution of Lancaster, and later the two Despensers, the Crown had indicated that any complaint against such an enemy was likely to be met favourably, illustrated in the influx of petitions against them.²⁴⁷ But in comparison to Lancaster and the two Despensers, the petitions mentioning Mortimer were few (see Graph 3.2). This is particularly striking when one links this to Dodd's work on general petitioning trends based on the evidence of the warranty notes, as one can see that the general petitioning levels reached a peak in 1330 with approximately four hundred and forty warranty notes having been identified in the period.²⁴⁸ This illustrates a wide-ranging rush to gain redress with the removal of the regency. Although, as appears to have been customary, there had been no official announcement of the chance to petition the king at Edward III's first majority parliament, there is evidence of a large number of petitions that can be dated to this period.²⁴⁹ There are complaints relating to the oppressive actions of the Mortimer/Isabella regime, but there were many more relating to older grievances, perhaps indicating a lack of petitioning business done in the period between the deposition of Edward II and the removal of Isabella and Mortimer.²⁵⁰ One petition, from the Prior and convent of Eye in Suffolk, which perhaps reflected this lack of petitioning opportunity, noted that they had attempted to gain redress both through a petition to parliament and 'outside' parliament (*auxi bien en parlementz come hors de parlementz*), but with little success.²⁵¹ This flood of petitioning in 1330 may therefore be indicative of an accumulation of unheard petitions submitted both during and between parliaments during the regency. It may have taken a period of two months to clear the backlog of petitioning business, with some cases carrying on until well into the following spring.²⁵² There is evidence for this through those

²⁴⁷ For a discussion of the numbers and the level of redress found by these petitioners see: Harris, 'Taking Your Chances', in Ormrod, Dodd and Musson, *Medieval Petitions: Grace and Grievance*.

²⁴⁸ The next highest is 1327 with approximately four hundred warranty notes: Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, pp. 65, 115.

²⁴⁹ Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, p. 68-72, n. 55; these petitions are found in: C65/2 and E175/2.

²⁵⁰ Apart from the parliament of January 1327 there are no surviving parliamentary rolls during the regency: *PROME*, Parliaments of 1327-1330.

²⁵¹ SC 8/17/836; *Rot. Parl.* pp. 31, 414.

²⁵² Including a break over the New Year period: Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, pp. 62-63.

petitions whose recommendations were not granted until May 1331 that had already been heard in parliament. For example, the complaint of Richard de Bromlegh, executor of Gilbert de Bromlegh, presented in 1330, was not dealt with until the following May.²⁵³ Again this is open to interpretation. For example, it could indicate that during the regency there had been a break in the availability of access to the king's justice. However, it may also be explained by the king's subjects being unwilling to approach the king indirectly through the transitional regency of Isabella and Mortimer.

Mortimer's reputation as the 'greatest traitor' must be reconsidered in view of the evidence of the content of the petitions. In the years leading up to his arrest and ultimate escape to France in 1322 he was depicted as an able and loyal servant of the Crown. His successful military career was reflected in his term of office as Justiciar of Ireland and was notably enhanced by his defeat of the Scottish invasion of Ireland led by Edward Bruce. That his reputation underwent a change in the aftermath of his arrest in 1322 is in line with the concept of the petitioners exploiting the political implications of naming an enemy of the king in their complaints. Although there is evidence that Mortimer exploited his position to accumulate both land and wealth during the regency, there is no indication in the petitions that he acted with arbitrary aggression against his tenants. He has also been portrayed as the 'Kynge of Folye', growing vain in his power over Edward III, but again there is very little evidence within the petitions to support this image.²⁵⁴ Neither do the petitions support the idea of Mortimer having been the 'greatest traitor', although Mortimer was guilty of acting traitorously against Edward II, and if he did not act treasonously against Edward III, he was certainly guilty of *lèse-majesté*. In the reaction of the petitioners one sees an ability to recognise and consequently adapt their complaints to reflect the political situation of the time, moving from those petitions after 1322 which supported the idea of Mortimer as the king's

²⁵³ SC 8/36/1784; CCR, 1330-1333, p. 231; other examples are given in Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, p. 62, n. 40.

²⁵⁴ *Brut*, p. 262.

enemy, to those which recognised his position as regent, to his finally becoming the ‘wicked advisor’.²⁵⁵

Isabella’s reputation underwent a gradual, but uneventful, change in the period before 1327, changing from that of a foreign princess to that of a loyal wife and queen, who used her unique access to the king to maintain her position as political intercessor and ‘peace-weaver’. Even her apparently treasonous action of raising an invading army against her husband and rightful king, followed by his deposition and her (probable) involvement in his death, was not reflected in the content of the petitions. The petitioners remained steadfast in their loyalty to Isabella during her regency, and even after her ‘retirement’ continued to give her the recognition of her place as an important and influential member of the royal family.

Although neither Isabella nor Mortimer ever achieved the level of veneration of Lancaster or the demonization of the Despensers, they can be shown to have been eager to profit from their positions of power. But the content of the petitions does not illustrate that they acted arbitrarily or tyrannously against their tenants. This suggests that their being labelled as the ‘greatest traitor’ and ‘she-wolf’ have been fuelled by their contemporaneous enemies, who were keen to maintain their own positions which perhaps were under threat from Isabella and Mortimer’s actions as self-appointed regents; and by the socialisation of both Victorian and modern historians who have not been able to ‘fit’ Isabella into a social or political niche as she, along with Roger Mortimer, followed their ‘different path’.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁵ Rosenthal, ‘The King’s “Wicked Advisers”’, pp. 595-618.

²⁵⁶ Leyser, *Medieval Women*, p. 84.

CONCLUSION

Although the medieval parliament was never a ‘people’s parliament’ but one which served ‘first and foremost the interests and agenda of the king’, this thesis has concentrated on a vital aspect of parliament, the administration of justice to the ‘people’, notably the hearing of private petitions.¹ The meting out of justice remained, even in times of crisis, a vital part of the role of medieval kingship, with the petitioning process being a crucial element of that role.² This thesis, having revisited the periods of political crisis and upheaval between 1320 and 1335, has re-evaluated the evidence of the complaints found in the petitions. It has illustrated that this source has an untapped potential to widen our understanding of this period.

The examples discussed in Chapter One, even though only a small sample of the many petitions relating to Thomas, 2nd earl of Lancaster and the consequences of his rebellion and execution in 1322, have demonstrated that descriptions of his reputation in this source underwent a complete transformation. His portrayal as an autocrat, who openly subverted the king’s right to deliver justice underwent a dramatic change in those petitions presented in the first years after his execution, to its having been not only acceptable, but advantageous, to openly admit to Lancastrian allegiance in the period of the minority of Edward III (and even to name him as *seint Thomas de Lancastre*).³

It is easy to find examples in the petitions of the characteristics of Lancaster as described by his contemporaries such as his having been ‘avaricious’, ‘noble’, ‘piteous’ and ‘pious’.⁴ But these characteristics were possessed by many members of the nobility of this period (including the king). Rather, it is the conflicting descriptions of his being considered as both ‘loyal’ and ‘treacherous’ by both his contemporaries and modern historians that underlines the importance of the inclusion of the evidence of the petitions in

¹ Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, pp. 4-5; Dodd, *Crown, Magnates and Gentry*, pp. 267-268.

² *Ibid.*, p. 266; Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, p. 7.

³ For example, detailing the relationship between Leicester and its earl: SC 8/203/10147; SC 8/17/820.

⁴ *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, pp. 97-99, 126; *Lanercost*, pp. 234-235; *Brut*, pp. 219, 222; *Murimuth*, pp. 271-274.

our knowledge of the earl. They reveal that Edward II not only condoned, but cooperated, with the petitioners to exploit the ruin of Lancaster's reputation to both legitimise the first execution for treason of a member of the royal family and excuse his and Despenser the younger's exploitation of the extensive confiscations following the failure of the rebellion. This leads one to the obvious conjecture that after the deposition of Edward II, Queen Isabella and Roger Mortimer had endorsed the *rehabilitation* of Lancaster's reputation to help establish the moral legitimacy of the regency. This in turn points to further questions regarding the veracity of the accusations contained within the petitions and the impartiality of the panels of triers responsible for dealing with them. For example, if the allegations made against Lancaster in the petitions in the period after his death were *false* why did the committees of triers seemingly not only accept them, but encourage them through positive endorsements? Conversely, if the accusations were *true* how was his 'guilt' apparently cancelled out in the period after the deposition, when his reputation can be shown in the petitions to have been not only rehabilitated but enhanced by claims of his sainthood? A consideration of the changing personnel of these panels of triers would have been invaluable in further confirming or negating the assumption of their political partiality. However, as discussed above, there is little extant evidence available to establish the identities of these individuals.⁵ Therefore the endorsements of the petitions stand alone as evidence of the changing official stance on the reputation of Thomas of Lancaster.⁶

Chapter Two illustrated how the petitions contain a valuable source of evidence to further assess the alleged culpability of Hugh Despenser the younger and his father, in the supposed 'tyranny' of the final years of Edward II's reign. For example, the severity of the accusations made against the two Despensers could be interpreted as supporting the image of them as the tyrannous oligarchs depicted in both academic and popular histories. There are many allegations in the petitions of the two Despensers' aggressive land acquisitions and incidences when they appear to have acted with greed,

⁵ See Appendix B.

⁶ See the discussion on receivers, triers and the parliamentary rolls in Chapter 2.1 of this thesis.

violence and a total disregard for those that came within their sphere of influence. Despenser the younger has been shown to have been particularly eager to increase his landholdings, as his abuses of the Lashley family's rights to gain ownership of their estates, discussed above, have shown. Modern historians, such as Davies, described this as a 'shameless proceeding'.⁷ But this must be seen as a modern interpretation of a case probably used contemporaneously as an accusation to further incriminate Despenser in the charges against him to force his exile in 1321. Although there seems to have often been a real basis to some of these complaints, there is also evidence that those presenting petitions in the first year of Edward III's reign were willing to use the notoriety that the two Despensers had garnered to further their own complaints.⁸ This evidence can be used to gauge the extent to which the petitioners exploited Queen Isabella and Roger Mortimer's hatred of the two men, and to assess for how long these complaints held the potential for profit for the petitioners.

However, the evidence is not as straightforward as one might expect. The overall trends of petitioning throughout the period do not necessarily support the tyrannous reputations of the two Despensers. For example, in a comparison between the numbers of those petitions complaining of the actions of Thomas of Lancaster with those against the two Despensers in the periods of their downfall it can be clearly demonstrated that the more notorious Despensers, in 1326/7, were the focus of far less petitions individually than Lancaster in the period following his execution in 1322.⁹ This may be explained through a comparison of the landholdings and royal lineage of the Earl of Lancaster compared with that of the two Despensers. Lancaster was not only a member of the royal families of England and France, he was also the most influential and land rich magnate in England next to the king.¹⁰ Although the two Despensers were undoubtedly keen to increase their land acquisitions,

⁷ Davies, *The Baronial Opposition to Edward II*, p. 97.

⁸ Rosenthal, 'The King's "Wicked Advisers"', p. 598.

⁹ Graphs 1.1, 2.3 and 2.4 illustrate that there were ninety petitions relating to Lancaster in 1322 with only fifty-nine relating to Despenser the elder and seventy-two naming Despenser the younger in 1326-1327.

¹⁰ Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster, 1307-1322*, pp. 9-39; Prestwich, *Plantagenet England*, p. 364; Walker, *The Lancastrian Affinity*; Whitaker, *History of Whalley*, p. 218.

wealth and status, with Seymour Phillips describing their landholdings as ‘vast’, their estates were small in comparison to Lancaster’s.¹¹ Therefore the difference in the number of petitions presented against Lancaster and the two Despensers can perhaps be better explained by the extent of their respective landholdings and the numbers of individuals under their influence. It is rather the severity of the complaints contained in the petitions relating to the two Despensers which reveal the most about their individual reputations and are therefore more significant than the evidence of their numbers.

Another factor which must be considered for the sudden rise in levels of petitioning relating to Lancaster and the Despensers in 1322 and 1326/7 is the receptivity of the king to complaints against them. Both Edward II and Edward III were influenced by their closest advisors. In the reign of Edward II, after the removal of Lancaster, their bitterest enemy and critic, the Despensers, would have been eager for the king to support any justification for his removal. This study also re-evaluated the popular and non-specific term ‘the Despensers’ which is based around the similarity of the two men’s given name. This revealed that in the petitions where both father and son were mentioned they were always individually identified. Therefore, the study of the content of the petitions has shown that the term ‘the Despensers’ does not reflect the contemporary perception of the two men, and that the regular use of these terms has led to a compromised view of the levels of their individual influence and actions.

Chapter Three discussed whether the petitions could be used to either confirm or negate the popular modern portrayal of Queen Isabella as a ‘she-wolf’ or ‘Jezebel’.¹² The modern depiction of Queen Isabella as a new Jezebel was almost certainly based on her infidelity and her decision not to return to her husband; the label of ‘she-wolf’ being attributable to her ability not only to raise, but to lead, an invading army and force the deposition of a king.¹³ This has left us with a subjective and problematic image of a woman who, because she did not conform to the accepted role of medieval womanly or queenly behaviour, has been the subject of many lurid and sensationalist claims, leaving

¹¹ Phillips, *Edward II*, pp. 416-419.

¹² Doherty, *Isabella and the Strange Death of Edward II*, pp. 22, 49.

¹³ Leyser, *Medieval Women*, p. 84.

her with 'one of the worst [characters or reputations] in history'.¹⁴ However, the petitions do not support either depiction. She was never described as behaving in any way unbecoming as a queen or woman. Even after her removal as regent in 1330, unlike the other individuals discussed in this study, there is no evidence that her name was ever exploited in the petitions. This, coupled with the complete absence of any petitions that refer to her relationship with Roger Mortimer, may also call into doubt the popular image of her inspiring any sexually derogative sobriquets such as the 'new Jezebel'. However, the absence of accusations of moral wrongdoing against Isabella in the petitions cannot necessarily be taken as evidence of her innocence, as there would have been a disinclination to criticise the king's wife before Edward II's deposition and to complain against her during the regency.

The continued lack of petitions which mentioned Queen Isabella in the period after 1330, when her position had become vulnerable is perhaps also illustrative of a similar disinclination to criticise the actions of the king's mother. Instead of supporting an image of Queen Isabella as the sexually dominant and politically proactive figure depicted by modern historians, the content of the petitions suggest that she inhabited a more traditionally accepted role of a medieval queen. They leave us with an impression of Isabella as one who had occupied the shadows of political life, but who had been boosted into a position of power, which nevertheless had not caused her to become a subject of complaint. The few petitions that addressed her directly in her role as queen being explained as aberrations brought about by the abnormal situation of a minority kingship.

A similar study of her partner, Roger Mortimer, revealed that before his defection to the Lancastrian cause in 1321, he had been a trusted royal administrator, which, along with his successful military career, were considered to be exemplary. It was the betrayal of his allegiance to the king in 1321 which had originally qualified him for accusations of having been a traitor. His subsequent alleged seduction of the queen, his role in the deposition of Edward II and the subjection of Edward III during the regency, has perhaps

¹⁴ Davis, *The Baronial Opposition to Edward II*, p. 107.

further qualified him as Ian Mortimer's '*Greatest Traitor*'.¹⁵ But, similarly to Queen Isabella, this study has shown that this image is not supported by the content of the petitions. Even after the Lancastrian rebellion, during the period of his imprisonment, when his name would have been susceptible to exploitation by any petitioner wishing to add weight to their complaints, there are surprisingly few examples of petitions directly related to him. His reputation as a successful soldier and administrator in the period before his arrest and escape in 1322 only became tarnished in the content of the petitions presented during the lead-up to the deposition. For example, his reputation in Ireland, where he continued to be held in high regard for his role in the defeat of the invasion of Edward Bruce, remained virtually unchanged during the regency and in the first years of the majority of Edward III, with the only examples of any negative references being presented during the period after his initial downfall in 1322.¹⁶

In the aftermath of his execution in 1330, a period when there may have been an expectation for the petitioners to exploit Edward III's continued hatred of him there were, again, few who accused him of wrongdoing. This could have several explanations. For example, it could be interpreted as indicating that the authors of the petitions, having weighed up the benefits of accusing Mortimer outright against those of implicating, if only by association, the king's mother, decided against naming him. However, this leaves one with an image of a swath of potential petitioners who dared not appeal to the king for justice for fear of implicating Queen Isabella. A more likely scenario is that the number of petitions which accused Mortimer of wrongdoing remained few due to his relative innocence compared to either Lancaster or the two Despensers. Another factor perhaps influencing the level of petitioning against Mortimer was that the assertion of Edward III's majority rule would have been immediate; there would have been no public political crisis such as was evident after the rebellion and death of Lancaster in 1322, or following the deposition of Edward II in 1326/7. The only public demonstration of any crisis would have been the execution of Mortimer. Therefore the downturn in his reputation after his death at the hands of the king may have been expected to prompt those

¹⁵ Mortimer, *The Greatest Traitor*, *passim*.

¹⁶ For a discussion of this petition, see section 3.2 of this study: SC 8/104/5179.

petitioning to make use of this downfall, as has been shown with the other individuals in the study. That this did not happen indicates that there were relatively few complaints to be brought against him.

Therefore this study of the contents of the petitions has led to a new understanding of Queen Isabella and Roger Mortimer. Their actions after their invasion, although certainly self-serving, cannot be shown to have been achieved by tyrannous actions against their tenants. A more unusual finding was that neither their act of heading an invading force nor their having deposed the rightful king was portrayed in the petitions as being treasonous. The rarity of petitions addressed directly to Isabella, as well as illustrating the role of queens at this time, also indicates that she was never regarded as anything other than the representative of the king, either as his wife or mother. Rather, she moved seamlessly from queen to dowager queen in the rhetoric of the petitions. Even more striking is the total lack of petitions addressed to Roger Mortimer, supporting the commonly held assertion that he had ruled from the behind the scenes of the regency.¹⁷ Even after his execution there were no petitions that criticised him for his apparent suppression of the royal Grace, or the concept of his becoming 'king in all but name'. This indicates that these accusations may either have not been generally known, or were added to the various chronicles and histories with political hindsight.

This study has also demonstrated that the petitioners not only relied on but expected to achieve redress from the king for all manner of grievances. This was in direct contrast with the accepted ethos of the petitioning process, which stated that access to the king's justice was for those requests that lay beyond the remit of the law courts.¹⁸ In reality the petitions can be shown to have encompassed many requests from those whose complaint did not fall within the remit of the king. The endorsements of these petitions show that they were regularly sent back to common law, perhaps indicating that this was seen by the petitioners as yet another form of royal redress. That the king's subjects continued to use this opportunity to access the king for redress for these complaints suggests that this relationship was considered as a right and

¹⁷ Haines, 'The Episcopate During the Reign of Edward II', p. 690; Benz St. John, *Three Medieval Queens*, p. 140.

¹⁸ Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, p. 2.

that there was an expectation of, and dependency on, the justice of the king. That the petitions were sometimes presented outside of parliament further illustrates that the king's justice was held to be available at all times and was therefore above that of the existing legal system.

Does this use of the petitioning system for complaints perhaps more usually dealt with through the common law courts reflect an inadequacy in the legal system? Not necessarily, rather it is indicative of a readily accepted freedom to petition the king. This has implications for our knowledge of how the king was viewed by his subjects. The petitions reveal a king that was not considered as a distant figure, remote to the lower echelons of society, but rather that the institution of the Monarchy had an obvious relevance for these petitioners. The king also benefited from this type of interaction, notably through an opportunity to project royal power at a local level through the personal invitation of the petitioner, allowing the Crown to scrutinise and intervene in the actions of the gentry and provincial government.¹⁹ The petitions underline the importance of this relationship, which saw the concerns of the king's subjects being made known to him, and royal intercession available to all but the poorest of his subjects.

The petitioning process remained active throughout this period, and royal authority and jurisprudence remained available regardless of the state of affairs between the king and his nobles. Even in the final years of the reign of Edward II, 'a period when the Crown [was] considered to have ridden roughshod' over the rights of its subjects, the level of petitioning business remained strong, with the petitioners still expecting to be able to access and receive justice from the king.²⁰ As Dodd commented, the petitions reveal a need for 'strong and decisive application of royal authority' and the 'reciprocity upon which medieval government was founded.'²¹

To sum up, this thesis has illustrated a widespread political knowledge of those creating the petitions. This is indicative of an extensive dissemination

¹⁹ Hyams, 'What Did Edwardian Villagers Understand by 'Law'?', p. 87; Dodd, 'Crown, Magnates and Gentry'; Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, pp. 319, 322.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 319.

and understanding of current political and royal events in provincial society.²² The changing depiction in the petitions of the characters studied in this thesis has also shown that the reputations of the main *dramatis personae* of the period remained fluid, and were at the mercy of political, social and regime change. The more usual route of considering the changes in the number of petitions presented during this period has been shown to be less illustrative of the perceived guilt of these five main individuals than the actual complaints of the petitioners themselves. This study has also suggested that the importance of the notion of a reciprocal king/subject relationship remained intact, and the demand for the king's justice continued to be high, even during periods when the king was considered weak or when the Crown was under threat.

An analysis of the petitioners has revealed few petitions from either women or poor and lower ranking peasants. This can be explained by the majority of the grievances of the poor falling within the scope of that 'quintessential forum' for minor local disagreements, the seigniorial and communal courts of the county, hundred, borough and vill.²³ But Hyams believed that it was not unheard of for the 'peasant of ambition' to go to 'some appropriate forum beyond his home manor' (conceivably the petitioning process).²⁴ This has been illustrated by the few instances of petitions from those of poorer social groups in this study. For example Robert Freeman complained between 1333 and 1334 that he could not pay a fine handed to him in the common law courts, it was endorsed with the instruction that he was to be pardoned due to his poverty.²⁵ Nevertheless it remains clear that the poor did not use the petitioning process in any great numbers. This may well illustrate 'the most obvious' explanation, that the scope of the jurisdiction of the petitioning process was, first and foremost, to consider 'the exercise or malfunction of the *king's* law' (whose remit Freeman's complaint fell within), rather than those complaints subject to the jurisdiction of the customary

²² Maddicott, 'The County Community and the Making of Public Opinion', pp. 27-43.

²³ Hyams, 'What Did Edwardian Villagers Understand by 'Law'?', p. 72.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 74-75.

²⁵ SC 8/47/2348.

courts.²⁶ The lack of petitions from married women may be considered as mirroring the customs of the common law courts. To allow these women the right to instigate legal actions, particularly over land and properties which were considered as belonging to their husband, would have at best caused legal confusion, and at worst had the potential to destabilise both the common law and the gender customs of medieval society regarding women.²⁷ This is an important point. Although the petitioning process was considered to be above that of the ordinary judicial system, it was nevertheless forced to implement decisions that were compatible with the process of the king's ordinary courts.²⁸

However, when considering these petitions one must question how far they reflect the experiences and demands of the wider community, and if those with power within these communities used this platform to further their own agendas. Historians such as Maddicott and Carpenter have disagreed over the role and importance of the community sponsored petition. Maddicott who focused on the evolution and power of the county court, saw the community petition as a way to establish contact between the provinces and the Crown.²⁹ Carpenter dismissed the significance of the county petition, citing the ineffectiveness of the county court, stating that the community petition was a product of an 'environment created by the Crown'.³⁰ Dodd counterbalanced these arguments when he stated that it must not be assumed that the county court was the only venue in which county petitions could be drafted.³¹ This study has moved away from this typical example of focusing on the administrative evolution of local and central government and has shown that this type of petition, having an anonymous group nominator, was often used as a platform for the grievances of discreet members of the 'middling sort' of the counties, who may or may not have had the wider interests of their communities at heart.

²⁶ For a discussion of these courts see: Hyams, 'What Did Edwardian Villagers Understand by 'Law'?', *passim*.

²⁷ Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, pp. 214-215.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 214-215.

²⁹ Maddicott, 'The County Community and the Making of Public Opinion', pp. 27-43.

³⁰ Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, p. 256; Carpenter, 'Gentry and Community in Medieval England', pp. 347-348, 375-378.

³¹ Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, p. 256.

This study has shown that the records of the private petitions hold a valuable, if underexplored, level of evidence for the social and political responses to periods of perceived tyranny and crisis, as well as having the potential to reveal evidence of the more mundane and practical issues of everyday life and commerce. Through a detailed consideration of the evidence of the contents of the petitions in the period c.1320-c.1335 it has been shown that, ‘personalities mattered ...more than [the] abstract principles of reform’ which have been the focus of so much historiography.³²

³² Prestwich, *The Three Edwards*, p. 100.

APPENDIX A

Petitions Used in the Study

Introduction

This appendix is intended to give the reader a convenient way to access basic information from the petitions used throughout this thesis. The appendix is split into three sections arranged by chapter. If a petition appears in more than one chapter it will be identified for each appearance. If a petition is noted ^{NG} this indicates that the petition was not included in the graphical representations used in this chapter.

Dates: As recorded by the National Archives.

Name:

EL: Thomas 2nd earl of Lancaster

DE: Hugh Despenser the elder

DY: Hugh Despenser the younger

UD: Unidentified Despenser

Although the study considers the evidence for the identities of those petitions were a single unidentified Despenser is named, this appendix illustrates the identities as recorded in the petitions.

I: Queen Isabella

I/Q: Queen Isabella as addressee

M: Roger Mortimer of Wigmore

O: Other

These petitions do not name the five main characters under discussion, but were included in the study as supporting evidence

Categories of petition: Each entry is allocated a category for the type of complaint or request described in the petition. Where more than one category is used in a single entry then it refers to separate subjects found in the same petition.

Petition Categories

L = Land

D= Debt

J = Justice

R = Rights/Grace

M = Miscellaneous

Endorsement Type: The recorded answers, or endorsements, to the petitions varied enormously, from those petitions that had no recorded answer through to complicated instructions for the king's ministers and officials. These have been given the following categories:

Further Investigation: Petitions were often accompanied by the instruction for further investigation. This was often done through the main government departments. These have been designated:

Ch = Chancery

T = Treasurer

Ex = Exchequer

Denied/Granted: Petitions that were immediately granted or denied.

Returned to the legal system: The many petitions that were referred back to the common law process are designated:

CL = Common law,

KB = King's Bench

WT = Writ of trespass

OT = Oyer and terminer

S = Statute (Referring to the legal response to the aftermath of the rebellion of Thomas of Lancaster and the two Despencers).

To Wait: Petitions for which redress was postponed.

Heard by the King: Petitions designated as having been heard before the king (*coram rege*), before the king himself (*coram ipso rege*), or before the king and the Great Council (*coram rege et magno consilio*). Other petitions not recorded as having been heard *coram rege*, or any of its variations, but have sufficient evidence to indicate that they had been heard by the king, have also been included in this class.

Appendix A1: Chapter 1: Thomas of Lancaster

Petition Reference	Date	Name	Complaint Type	Further Investigation	ENDORSEMENT TYPE					
					Returned to Legal System	Immediately Granted ✓ or Denied ×	No recorded response	To Wait	Heard by the King	Damaged or Illegible
SC 8/100/4952	1322-1327	EL	L				✓		✓	
SC 8/103/5118	1322	EL	J		CL				✓	
SC 8/103/5124	1322-1327	EL	J/L	✓					✓	
SC 8/106/5276	1322	EL	Dt	Ch						
SC 8/108/5398 ^{NG}	1324	O	Dt/R/L	✓					✓	
SC 8/111/5546	1322	EL	J	✓					✓	
SC 8/111/5549	1322- 1326	EL	L			✓				
SC 8/116/5791	1322-1326	EL	L	Ch						
SC 8/116/5794	1322-1327	EL	M			✓			✓	
SC 8/117/5806	1328-1329	EL, I	L	Ch						
SC 8/117/5810	1322-1327	EL	L			✓				
SC 8/117/5812	1322	EL	R/L	✓						
SC 8/117/5815	1322-1327	EL	J		WT					
SC 8/123/6103	1324	EL	L							
SC 8/123/6108	1322-1327	EL, DY	R		CL					
SC 8/123/6122	1322	EL	L	Ch						
SC 8/124/6151	1322	EL	J	Ch						
SC 8/126/6292	1322	EL	L	✓						

Petition Reference	Date	Name	Complaint Type	Further Investigation	ENDORSEMENT TYPE					
					Returned to Legal System	Immediately Granted ✓ or Denied ×	No recorded response	To Wait	Heard by the King	Damaged or Illegible
SC 8/127/6308	1322	EL	J			✓				
SC 8/127/6322	1322	EL	L	Ch						
SC 8/127/6348	1324	EL	L	Ch						
SC 8/129/6409	1322	EL	L	Ch						
SC 8/13/631 ^{NG}	1348	EL, DE	L	✓						
SC 8/132/6559	1322	EL	M		CL					
SC 8/133/6639	1324	EL	L	Ch						
SC 8/135/6747	1330	EL, DE	L		S					
SC 8/136/6762	1322	EL	M				✓			
SC 8/14/671	1323	EL, DY	J		S					
SC 8/14/673	1327	EL, DE	J		CL					
SC 8/14/674	1327	EL, UD	L		CL					
SC 8/14/681	1327	EL, DE, DY	L		KB/S					
SC 8/14/683	1330-1331	EL, DY	L	Ch						
SC 8/14/685	1327	EL	L		CL					
SC 8/14/686	1327	EL	J		CL					
SC 8/142/7095	1322	EL	L							✓
SC 8/143/7102	1324-1325	EL	J	✓	CL					
SC 8/144/7154	1324	EL	L		CL					
SC 8/144/7193	1322	EL	J	✓						
SC 8/147/7326	1322-1327	EL	J/L	✓						
SC 8/148/7375	1322-1327	EL	L	Ch					✓	

Petition Reference	Date	Name	Complaint Type	Further Investigation	ENDORSEMENT TYPE					
					Returned to Legal System	Immediately Granted ✓ or Denied ×	No recorded response	To Wait	Heard by the King	Damaged or Illegible
SC 8/148/7391	1322	EL	L	Ch					✓	
SC 8/149/7433	1322	EL	M	Ch					✓	
SC 8/149/7448	1327	EL	J	Ex	CL					
SC 8/15/701	1327	EL,DE	J		S					
SC 8/15/722	1327	EL,DE	J			×				
SC 8/15/731	1327	EL	J		CL					
SC 8/15/732	1327	EL	J		OT					
SC 8/15/741	1324	EL,DE,DY	L		CL					
SC 8/151/7535	1322	EL	J				✓			
SC 8/152/7588	1322	EL	M	Ex/T						
SC 8/153/7636	1324	EL	R							
SC 8/155/7730	1324	EL	L	✓						
SC 8/156/7760	1327	EL,UD	J	Ch						
SC 8/157/7819	1327	EL	L	Ch						
SC 8/157/7826	1324	EL	L	Ch						
SC 8/157/7833	1323	EL	L				✓			
SC 8/157/7840	1322	EL	L	Ch						
SC 8/158/7863	1322	EL	L							✓
SC 8/159/7936	1322	EL	L	Ch						
SC 8/159/7940	1327	EL,DY	R							✓
SC 8/16/786	1327	EL	J		CL					
SC 8/16/789	1327	EL	J	Ch	CL					

Petition Reference	Date	Name	Complaint Type	Further Investigation	ENDORSEMENT TYPE					
					Returned to Legal System	Immediately Granted ✓ or Denied ×	No recorded response	To Wait	Heard by the King	Damaged or Illegible
SC 8/16/793	1329	EL	L	Ch	KB					
SC 8/160/7994	1334	EL	L	Ex/T						
SC 8/161/8023	1325	EL	R				✓		✓	
SC 8/161/8037	1322	EL	M			✓				
SC 8/162/8066	1322	EL	L				✓		✓	
SC 8/164/8155	1322	EL	J/L							✓
SC 8/164/8158	1327	EL,UD	J/L	Ch						
SC 8/166/8275	1335	EL	Dt			✓				
SC 8/167/8318	1327	EL	M			✓				
SC 8/167/8335	1327	EL,DY	J		S					
SC 8/168/8384	1327	EL,DY	L	Ch						
SC 8/17/805	1329	EL	L	Ch						
SC 8/17/820	1329	EL,DY,I,M	J/L		S					
SC 8/17/833	1327-1330	EL,DY,I	J		WT					
SC 8/170/8471	1334	EL	R	Ch						
SC 8/171/8534	1327	EL,DY	L		S					
SC 8/172/8561	1327	EL,DE	L	✓						
SC 8/172/8584	1322	EL	L	✓						
SC 8/173/8608	1322	EL	L				✓			
SC 8/174/8702B	1326	EL	L	✓						
SC 8/18/852	1322-1326	EL	J		CL					
SC 8/180/8979	1330	EL,M	R	Ch						

Petition Reference	Date	Name	Complaint Type	Further Investigation	ENDORSEMENT TYPE					
					Returned to Legal System	Immediately Granted ✓ or Denied ×	No recorded response	To Wait	Heard by the King	Damaged or Illegible
SC 8/200/9974	1322	EL	J/L				✓			
SC 8/200/9993	1322	EL	R				✓			
SC 8/201/10031	1322-1327	EL,I	J	Ch/T						
SC 8/201/10041	1327	EL/UD	L	Ch						
SC 8/202/10068	1322	EL	L							
SC 8/203/10122	1323	EL	L	Ch					✓	
SC 8/203/10123	1322	EL	L	Ch					✓	
SC 8/203/10126	1322	EL	L	✓						
SC 8/203/10136	1322	EL	L	✓					✓	
SC 8/203/10147	1322	EL	R	✓					✓	
SC 8/203/10150	1322	EL	L	Ch					✓	
SC 8/204/10168	1322	EL	L	✓	CL					
SC 8/204/10197	1322	EL	L	Ch					✓	
SC 8/205/10204	1322-1327	EL	J	✓						
SC 8/206/10277	1322	EL	L							✓
SC 8/207/10301	1327	EL,DY	L	Ch						
SC 8/208/10398	1327	EL,DE	L	✓						
SC 8/209/10420	1329	EL,DE	L				✓			
SC 8/234/11671	1325	EL	J/L	Ch					✓	
SC 8/234/11674	1322	EL	J	Ch					✓	
SC 8/239/11925	1327	EL,DY	J/L				✓			
SC 8/258/12855	1322-1327	EL	M				✓			

Petition Reference	Date	Name	Complaint Type	Further Investigation	ENDORSEMENT TYPE					
					Returned to Legal System	Immediately Granted ✓ or Denied ×	No recorded response	To Wait	Heard by the King	Damaged or Illegible
SC 8/259/12909	1327	EL	J	Ch/E/T						
SC 8/259/12910	1327	EL,DY	J/Dt	✓					✓	
SC 8/259/12930	1327-1330	EL,DY	L	✓					✓	
SC 8/263/13101	1329	EL,UD	L		S					
SC 8/263/13104	1331-1333	EL,M	L						✓	
SC 8/263/13119	1322-1327	EL	M	E						
SC 8/264/13172 ^{NG}	1324	O	L	✓						
SC 8/265/13215	1322	EL	R				✓		✓	
SC 8/267/13315 ^{NG}	1327	I	J				✓			
SC 8/290/14494 ^{NG}	1327	DY	Dt			✓			✓	
SC 8/294/14665	1327	EL	L	Ch						
SC 8/296/14788	1333	EL,DE	J/Dt							
SC 8/3/127	1320	EL	J	Ch						
SC 8/30/1486	1322	EL	L	Ch						
SC 8/31/1513	1327-1328	EL	L	Ch						
SC 8/310/15465	1330	EL,I	L			✓				
SC 8/310/15469	1328	EL	L			✓				
SC 8/311/15502	1327	EL,DE,DY	L	Ch						
SC 8/311/15545	1327	EL	L	Ch						
SC 8/311/15565	1322-1324	EL	R				✓		✓	
SC 8/319/E367	1310-1322	EL	J				✓		✓	
SC 8/33/1612	1322	EL	R/L	Ch						

Petition Reference	Date	Name	Complaint Type	Further Investigation	ENDORSEMENT TYPE					
					Returned to Legal System	Immediately Granted ✓ or Denied ×	No recorded response	To Wait	Heard by the King	Damaged or Illegible
SC 8/332/15784A	1327-1329	EL	L							
SC 8/34/1676	1327	EL	L		CL					
SC 8/34/1679	1327	EL,UD,I	J/L		CL/WT					
SC 8/34/1684	1327	EL,DY	R	Ch/T						
SC 8/342/16127	1327-1335	EL	L	Ch						
SC 8/343/16152 ^{NG}	1330	O	M	✓						
SC 8/343/16155	1323	EL	J/Dt	Ch						
SC 8/35/1704	1331	EL	R	Ch						
SC 8/35/1716	1322-1326	EL	L			✓				
SC 8/36/1755A	1327	EL	L	Ch						
SC 8/37/1813	1322	EL	L	Ch						
SC 8/39/1927	1322	EL	L	✓					✓	
SC 8/4/189	1322	EL	L	✓					✓	
SC 8/4/192	1322	EL	R	✓					✓	
SC 8/4/198	1322	EL	J	✓		✓				
SC 8/4/200	1322	EL	R	Ch						
SC 8/41/2039	1328	EL	L	Ch						
SC 8/41/2044	1327	EL,DE	L	✓						
SC 8/42/2053 ^{NG}	1322	O	L	✓						
SC 8/46/2282	1322	EL	J	Ch						
SC 8/47/2307	1330	EL	L	Ch						
SC 8/47/2336	1322	EL	R				✓			

Petition Reference	Date	Name	Complaint Type	Further Investigation	ENDORSEMENT TYPE					
					Returned to Legal System	Immediately Granted ✓ or Denied ×	No recorded response	To Wait	Heard by the King	Damaged or Illegible
SC 8/47/2339	1322	EL	L							
SC 8/48/2360	1324	EL	L	Ch						
SC 8/49/2437	1327	EL,DE	L			✓				
SC 8/49/2438	1327	EL,DE	L			✓				
SC 8/5/201 ^{NG}	1322	O	J			✓				
SC 8/5/212	1322	EL	Dt							
SC 8/5/214	1322	EL	L			✓				
SC 8/5/215 ^{NG}	1322	O	L					✓	✓	
SC 8/5/218	1322	EL	J	Ch					✓	
SC 8/5/219	1322	EL	L	✓						
SC 8/5/225	1322	EL	J						✓	
SC 8/5/228	1322	EL	L	✓					✓	
SC 8/5/231	1322	EL	L			✓				
SC 8/5/232	1322	EL	J/R	✓						
SC 8/5/241 ^{NG}	1322	O	L	✓						
SC 8/5/249	1322	EL	J/L/Dt	Ch						
SC 8/5/250	1322	EL	L	Ch						
SC 8/53/2644	1327	EL,DE	L	✓						
SC 8/54/2679	1323	EL	R	✓						
SC 8/55/2704	1324	EL	R	Ch		✓				
SC 8/55/2706	1327	EL	J		CL					
SC 8/55/2750	1324-1325	EL	L/R	Ch		✓				

Petition Reference	Date	Name	Complaint Type	Further Investigation	ENDORSEMENT TYPE					
					Returned to Legal System	Immediately Granted ✓ or Denied ×	No recorded response	To Wait	Heard by the King	Damaged or Illegible
SC 8/56/2752	1322	EL,UD	L	Ch					✓	
SC 8/56/2753	1322	EL	L	Ch	CL					
SC 8/56/2754	1322	EL	M	Ex/T						
SC 8/56/2759	1327	EL,DY	J	✓						
SC 8/56/2759	1327	EL,DY	J			✓				
SC 8/56/2763	1323	EL	R	Ch						
SC 8/56/2764	1322	EL	L	Ch						
SC 8/56/2766 ^{NG}	1327	UD	L	✓						
SC 8/56/2768 ^{NG}	1330	O	J/L/R/M	Ex	OT	✓				
SC 8/56/2773 ^{NG}	1326-1345	O	L	Ch					✓	
SC 8/57/2806	1328	EL	L							
SC 8/57/2807B	1328	EL	L				✓			
SC 8/57/2827	1322	EL	L	Ch						
SC 8/58/2872	1322	EL	L				✓			
SC 8/58/2888	1322-1326	EL	R/M				✓			
SC 8/59/2938	1322	EL	J		CL					
SC 8/59/2950	1322-1324	EL	L		S					
SC 8/6/252	1322	EL	J		WT					
SC 8/6/259 ^{NG}	1322	O	M		S	✓				
SC 8/6/263	1322	EL	L					✓	✓	
SC 8/6/269A	1322	EL	L							
SC 8/6/270 ^{NG}	1322	O	L	✓						

Petition Reference	Date	Name	Complaint Type	Further Investigation	ENDORSEMENT TYPE					
					Returned to Legal System	Immediately Granted ✓ or Denied ×	No recorded response	To Wait	Heard by the King	Damaged or Illegible
SC 8/6/278	1322	EL	L	✓						
SC 8/6/290	1322	EL	R	Ch						
SC 8/6/291	1322	EL	R/L	Ch						
SC 8/60/2953	1322	EL	L	Ch						
SC 8/60/2955	1322-1330	EL	L	Ch						
SC 8/60/2961	1322	EL	M	Ch					✓	
SC 8/60/2998	1324	EL	J		WT					
SC 8/61/3022	1318-1323	EL,DY	J		CL					
SC 8/63/3102	1327	EL	J	Ch/Ex/T						
SC 8/63/3112	1327	EL,DE	R			✓				
SC 8/65/3249	1322	EL	J			✓				
SC 8/65/3250	1322-1327	EL	L	Ch					✓	
SC 8/66/3251	1324	EL	J		CL					
SC 8/66/3283	1327	EL	R							
SC 8/67/3302	1322	EL	R	✓						
SC 8/67/3328	1324	EL	J		CL					
SC 8/67/3329	1324	EL	J		CL					
SC 8/69/3406	1322-1327	EL,UD	L	Ch						
SC 8/69/3423	1322	EL	L	Ch						
SC 8/7/305	1322	EL	Dt	Ch						
SC 8/7/309	1322	EL	L	Ch						
SC 8/7/318	1322	EL	L					✓		

Petition Reference	Date	Name	Complaint Type	Further Investigation	ENDORSEMENT TYPE					
					Returned to Legal System	Immediately Granted ✓ or Denied ×	No recorded response	To Wait	Heard by the King	Damaged or Illegible
SC 8/7/328	1322	EL	J		WT					
SC 8/7/329 ^{NG}	1322	O	J	✓						
SC 8/7/336	1322	EL	Dt						✓	
SC 8/7/340	1324-1325	EL	L				✓		✓	
SC 8/71/3533	1322	EL	R				✓			
SC 8/71/3544	1324	EL	L	Ch						
SC 8/72/3574	1324	EL	J	✓					✓	
SC 8/74/3663	1323-1324	EL	L	✓					✓	
SC 8/75/3711	1327	EL,DE	J/Dt	Ch/Ex/T		✓				
SC 8/76/3760	1322	EL	M	✓						
SC 8/77/3833	1322	EL	L	✓						
SC 8/78/3866	1323	EL	L	Ch						
SC 8/8/366	1324-1325	EL	R	Ch						
SC 8/81/4004	1322	EL	L	✓						
SC 8/81/4006 ^{NG}	1322	O	J	✓						
SC 8/83/4108A ^{NG}	1318	EL	J	✓	OT					
SC 8/83/4136	1322	EL	R	Ch						
SC 8/90/4483	1327	EL,DY	L		CL					
SC 8/91/4525	1322	EL	Dt						✓	
SC 8/91/4527	1326	EL	L	Ch						
SC 8/91/4529	1322	EL	L							
SC 8/91/4532	1323-1325	EL	L	Ch					✓	

Petition Reference	Date	Name	Complaint Type	Further Investigation	ENDORSEMENT TYPE					
					Returned to Legal System	Immediately Granted ✓ or Denied ×	No recorded response	To Wait	Heard by the King	Damaged or Illegible
SC 8/92/4556	1322-1323	EL	L				✓			
SC 8/95/4737	1322-1327	EL	R/Dt	Ch					✓	
SC 8/98/4856	1327	EL,DY	J		CL					
SC 8/98/4881	1322-1323	EL	L				✓			
SC 8/99/4917 ^{NG}	1322	O	M				✓			

Appendix A2: Chapter 2: Hugh Despenser the Elder and Younger

Petition Reference	Date	Name	Complaint Type	Further Investigation	ENDORSEMENT TYPE					
					Returned to Legal System	Immediately Granted ✓ or Denied ✗	No recorded response	To Wait	Heard by the King	Damaged or Illegible
SC 8/100/4979	1327	UD	R	Ch						✓
SC 8/106/5262	1327-1330	UD,M	M	✓						
SC 8/106/5268	1323	DE	J/L			✗				
SC 8/11/525	1332	DY	L		S					
SC 8/11/537	1331-1334	DY	Dt	Ex						
SC 8/111/5536	1326	DY	J		CL					
SC 8/111/5537	1328	UD	L	✓						
SC 8/112/5557	1331	DY	J	Ch/S						
SC 8/122/6099 ^{NG}	1324	O	Dt/L	Ch						
SC 8/123/6103 ^{NG}	1324	EL	Dt/L			✗				
SC 8/123/6108	1322-1327	EL,DY	R		CL					
SC 8/13/631 ^{NG}	1348	EL,DE	L	✓						
SC 8/135/6747	1330	EL,DE	L		S					
SC 8/14/669	1327	DY	L		CL					
SC 8/14/670	1327	DE	L						✓	
SC 8/14/671	1323	EL,DY	J		S					
SC 8/14/673	1327	EL,DE	J		CL					
SC 8/14/674	1327	EL,UD	L		CL					
SC 8/14/675	1327	DE	L						✓	

Petition Reference	Date	Name	Complaint Type	Further Investigation	ENDORSEMENT TYPE					
					Returned to Legal System	Immediately Granted ✓ or Denied ✗	No recorded response	To Wait	Heard by the King	Damaged or Illegible
SC 8/14/681	1327	EL, DE,DY	L		KB/S					
SC 8/14/682	1327	DY	L	✓Ch						
SC 8/14/683	1330-1331	EL,DY,M	L	✓Ch						
SC 8/14/695	1327	DY	L		CL					
SC 8/14/696	1327	DY	L		CL					
SC 8/147/7311 ^{NG}	1322-1327	O	Dt/L		CL					
SC 8/147/7317	1327	DE	J	✓						
SC 8/15/701	1327	EL,DE	J		S					
SC 8/15/703	1327	UD	Dt			✗				
SC 8/15/712	1327	DY	L	✓						
SC 8/15/716	1327	DE	L						✓	
SC 8/15/722	1327	EL,DE	J			✓				
SC 8/15/727	1331	DE	L	✓Ch						
SC 8/15/730	1327	DE,DY	L		CL					
SC 8/15/741	1324	EL, DE,DY	L		CL					
SC 8/15/743	1333	DE	J	✓Ch/S						
SC 8/152/7578	1327	DE	L	✓						
SC 8/156/7760	1327	EL,UD	J	✓Ch						
SC 8/156/7774	1327	DE	R	✓Ch						
SC 8/156/7789	1327	DE,DY	L	✓Ch						
SC 8/157/7803	1327	DY	J	✓Ch						
SC 8/157/7805	1327	DE	L	Ch/Ex						

Petition Reference	Date	Name	Complaint Type	Further Investigation	ENDORSEMENT TYPE					
					Returned to Legal System	Immediately Granted ✓ or Denied ✗	No recorded response	To Wait	Heard by the King	Damaged or Illegible
SC 8/157/7830	1327-1337	DY	L	Ch						
SC 8/158/7861	1327	UD	L	✓						
SC 8/158/7879	1327	UD	L	Ch						
SC 8/159/7907	1327	DE	L	Ch						
SC 8/159/7909	1330	UD	L	✓						
SC 8/159/7915	1328	DE	L	✓						
SC 8/159/7940	1327	EL,DY	R							✓
SC 8/16/769	1326-1327	DE	R				✓			
SC 8/16/774	1327	DE	R	Ch						
SC 8/16/787	1327	DE	L	✓						
SC 8/16/788	1327-1328	DE	L		CL					
SC 8/16/796	1327	DE	L	✓						
SC 8/160/7956	1327	DE,DY	L	✓						
SC 8/160/7975	1327	UD	L	Ch						
SC 8/160/7980	1327	DE	L		CL					
SC 8/160/7986	1327	DY	R	✓						
SC 8/160/7988	1327	UD	L	Ch						
SC 8/161/8035	1327	DY	R	Ch						
SC 8/161/8045	1327	DE,DY	Dt	Ch/Ex/T						
SC 8/162/8054	1327	UD	J	Ch						
SC 8/162/8071	1330	DE,DY	L	✓						
SC 8/162/8084	1326	UD	L	Ch						

Petition Reference	Date	Name	Complaint Type	Further Investigation	ENDORSEMENT TYPE					
					Returned to Legal System	Immediately Granted ✓ or Denied ✗	No recorded response	To Wait	Heard by the King	Damaged or Illegible
SC 8/162/8098 ^{NG}	1328	DY	L							✓
SC 8/163/8102 ^{NG}	1330	O	L	Ch						
SC 8/163/8107	1327	UD	L	Ch						
SC 8/163/8132	1327-1339	DE,DY	L	✓						
SC 8/164/8158	1327	EL,UD	J/L	Ch						
SC 8/164/8173	1327	DY	M	Ex						
SC 8/164/8200	1327	DY	L							✓
SC 8/165/8212	1327	UD	L	Ch						
SC 8/165/8217	1327	DY	L	Ch						
SC 8/165/8240	1327-1330	DE	L	Ch						
SC 8/165/8242	1327	DY	J				✓			
SC 8/166/8282	1327	DY	L				✓			
SC 8/167/8306	1327	UD	R	Ch						
SC 8/167/8335	1327	EL,DY	J		S					
SC 8/168/8374	1327	DE	L	Ch						
SC 8/168/8384	1327	EL,DY	L	Ch						
SC 8/168/8388	1327	DE	L	Ch						
SC 8/169/8415	1334	DE,DY	J/L	Ch						
SC 8/169/8437	1327	DY	M	Ch						
SC 8/169/8440	1327	DE,DY	L	Ch						
SC 8/169/8443	1327	DY	M	Ch						
SC 8/17/813	1328	DE	Dt	✓						

Petition Reference	Date	Name	Complaint Type	Further Investigation	ENDORSEMENT TYPE					
					Returned to Legal System	Immediately Granted ✓ or Denied ✗	No recorded response	To Wait	Heard by the King	Damaged or Illegible
SC 8/17/819	1327	DY	J/L		CL		✓			
SC 8/17/820	1329	EL,DY,I,M	J/L		S					
SC 8/17/825	1327	DE	L	✓						
SC 8/17/830	1327	UD	R	Ch			✓			
SC 8/17/832	1327	DY	L	✓						
SC 8/17/833	1327-1330	EL,DY,I	J		WT					
SC 8/17/840	1327	DY	L	✓						
SC 8/17/842	1327	DE	L	✓						
SC 8/17/843	1327	DE	L	✓						
SC 8/17/844	1327	DE	L	✓						
SC 8/17/845	1327	DE	L		WT					
SC 8/17/846	1327	DE	L						✓	
SC 8/17/848	1327	DE	L		S					
SC 8/17/849	1327	DE	J	Ex						
SC 8/17/850	1327	UD	L		CL					
SC 8/170/8461	1327	DE	L	Ch						
SC 8/171/8511	1327	DY	L	Ch						
SC 8/171/8531	1327	DY	L	Ch						
SC 8/171/8534	1327	EL,DY	L		S					
SC 8/172/8558	1327	DE	L	Ch						
SC 8/172/8561	1327	EL,DE	L	✓						
SC 8/172/8573	1327	DE	L							✓

Petition Reference	Date	Name	Complaint Type	Further Investigation	ENDORSEMENT TYPE					
					Returned to Legal System	Immediately Granted ✓ or Denied ✕	No recorded response	To Wait	Heard by the King	Damaged or Illegible
SC 8/173/8609	1328	DY	J/Dt				✓			
SC 8/173/8631	1327	DY	L	Ch						
SC 8/174/8700	1328	DY	L	M						
SC 8/175/8723	1333	DY	J				✓			
SC 8/176/8753	1333	DY	J				✓			✓
SC 8/176/8760	1329	UD	L	Ch						
SC 8/18/859	1327-1330	DY	L		CL					
SC 8/18/861	1323-1327	UD	J/L		CL					
SC 8/18/863	1327	DY	J/L		CL					
SC 8/18/868E	1327	DY	L	Ch						
SC 8/188/9362	1321	UD	L			✕				✓
SC 8/195/9741B	1321	DE	L					✓		
SC 8/201/10041	1327	EL,UD	L	Ch						
SC 8/207/10301	1327	EL,DY	L	Ch						
SC 8/207/10304	1330	DY	L		CL					
SC 8/207/10323	1333	DE	L	Ch						
SC 8/208/10398	1327	EL,DE	L	✓						
SC 8/209/10408	1327	DY	M	Ch						
SC 8/209/10420	1329	EL,DE	L					✓		
SC 8/238/11876	1331	DY	J					✓		
SC 8/238/11895	1328	UD	L	Ch						
SC 8/239/11925	1327	EL,DY	J/L					✓		

ENDORSEMENT TYPE										
Petition Reference	Date	Name	Complaint Type	Further Investigation	Returned to Legal System	Immediately Granted ✓ or Denied ✗	No recorded response	To Wait	Heard by the King	Damaged or Illegible
SC 8/257/12839	1331	DE	J	✓						
SC 8/259/12910	1327	EL,DY	J/Dt	✓						✓
SC 8/259/12930	1327-1330	EL,DY	L	✓						✓
SC 8/263/13101	1329	EL,UD	L		S					
SC 8/270/13479	1326-1327	DY	L	✓						
SC 8/279/13926	1330	DE	J		S					
SC 8/290/14481	1327	DY	L	✓						
SC 8/290/14494	1327	DY	Dt				✓			✓
SC 8/293/14641	1327	DY	J/Dt	Ch						
SC 8/294/14660	1327	DE	L	Ch						
SC 8/294/14675	1327	UD	L	Ch						
SC 8/294/14692	1327	UD	L	Ch			✓			
SC 8/294/14694	1327	DY	J	✓						
SC 8/294/14695	1327	DY	J	Ch						
SC 8/295/14715	1327	DE	L	Ch						
SC 8/295/14716	1327	DY	L	Ch						
SC 8/295/14717	1327	UD	L	Ch						
SC 8/295/14720A	1327	DE	L	Ch						
SC 8/295/14720C	1331	DE	L	Ch						
SC 8/296/14788	1333	EL,DE	J/Dt		CL					
SC 8/297/14819	1321-1327	DE	L					✓		
SC 8/30/1475	1327	UD,I	J	Ch						

Petition Reference	Date	Name	Complaint Type	Further Investigation	ENDORSEMENT TYPE					
					Returned to Legal System	Immediately Granted ✓ or Denied ✗	No recorded response	To Wait	Heard by the King	Damaged or Illegible
SC 8/30/1496	1327	DE	L	✓						
SC 8/307/15309	1326-1327	DY,I	J		CL					
SC 8/310/15476	1327	UD	L	Ch						
SC 8/310/15484	1328	DE,DY	L		S					
SC 8/311/15502	1327	EL,DE,DY	L	Ch						
SC 8/311/15528	1328	DY	Dt	Ex/T						
SC 8/311/15537	1331	UD	R		KB					
SC 8/311/15555	1327	DE,DY	L	Ch						
SC 8/33/1640	1330-1331	DY	L					✓		
SC 8/33/1646	1327	DY	L	✓						
SC 8/33/1647	1324	DY	L	✓						
SC 8/34/1671	1327	UD	J	✓	CL					
SC 8/34/1679	1327	EL,UD,I	J/L		CL/WT					
SC 8/34/1684	1327	EL,DY	R	Ch/T						
SC 8/34/1698	1327	UD	L	Ch/KB						
SC 8/35/1712	1327	DY	J			✗				
SC 8/35/1726	1334	DE,DY	Dt				✓			
SC 8/36/1763	1322-1326	DY	L	Ch						
SC 8/36/1780A	1323-1327	UD	L		CL					
SC 8/36/1782	1327	DE	L						✓	
SC 8/39/1931	1327	DY	J		CL					
SC 8/41/2003	1327	DE,DY	L		CL					

Petition Reference	Date	Name	Complaint Type	Further Investigation	ENDORSEMENT TYPE					
					Returned to Legal System	Immediately Granted ✓ or Denied ✗	No recorded response	To Wait	Heard by the King	Damaged or Illegible
SC 8/41/2044	1327	EL,DE	L	✓						
SC 8/42/2054	1322-1326	DE,DY	L		CL					
SC 8/42/2096	1329	DE	L						✓	
SC 8/43/2106	1327	DE	L	✓						
SC 8/43/2107	1327	UD	L		CL					
SC 8/44/2154	1327-1333	DY	L			✗				✓
SC 8/47/2303	1327	DY	L/R			✗				
SC 8/48/2375	1328-1333	UD,M	R	✓						✓
SC 8/48/2396	1327	UD,I	L	Ex						
SC 8/49/2437	1327	EL,DE	L				✓			
SC 8/49/2438	1327	EL,DE	L				✓			
SC 8/50/2473 ^{NG}	1315	DE	R		CL					
SC 8/50/2485	1330	UD,M	J/Dt	T						
SC 8/50/2492	1322-1326	DE,DY	L		CL					
SC 8/51/2507	1331	DY,M	J							✓
SC 8/51/2518	1327	DE,DY,M	L		CL	✗				
SC 8/53/2644	1327	EL,DY	L	✓						
SC 8/55/2749	1322-1326	DY	Dt	✓						
SC 8/56/2752	1322	UD	L	Ch						✓
SC 8/56/2753 ^{NG}	1322	EL	L	Ch					✓	
SC 8/56/2754 ^{NG}	1322	EL	L	Ex/T						
SC 8/56/2759	1327	EL,DY	J	✓						

Petition Reference	Date	Name	Complaint Type	Further Investigation	ENDORSEMENT TYPE					
					Returned to Legal System	Immediately Granted ✓ or Denied ✕	No recorded response	To Wait	Heard by the King	Damaged or Illegible
SC 8/56/2760	1327	DY	J/L		CL					
SC 8/56/2766	1327	UD	L	✓						
SC 8/56/2781	1327	DY	J	Ch	CL					
SC 8/57/2831	1320-1330	DY	J		CL					
SC 8/57/2833	1320-1330	DY	J		CL					
SC 8/57/2835	1326	DY	J		CL					
SC 8/58/2871	1327	DE	L			✕				
SC 8/59/2911	1327	DE	L		CL					
SC 8/59/2918	1327	DE	L		CL					
SC 8/59/2919	1327-1330	UD,I	J		CL					
SC 8/59/2920	1327	DE	J		CL					
SC 8/59/2947	1327	UD	L	Ch						
SC 8/60/2968	1327	DY	J		CL					
SC 8/61/3022	1318-1323	EL,DY	J		CL					
SC 8/63/3112	1327	EL,DE	R				✓			
SC 8/64/3160 ^{NG}	1328	O	L	✓						
SC 8/66/3265	1327-1333	DY	Dt	✓						
SC 8/66/3288	1327	DY	J		CL					
SC 8/66/3289	1331	UD	R				✓			✓
SC 8/66/3294	1327	DY	J	Ch						✓
SC 8/69/3406	1322-1327	UD	L	Ch						
SC 8/70/3461	1327	DY	L	Ch						

Petition Reference	Date	Name	Complaint Type	Further Investigation	ENDORSEMENT TYPE					
					Returned to Legal System	Immediately Granted ✓ or Denied ✕	No recorded response	To Wait	Heard by the King	Damaged or Illegible
SC 8/71/3515	1327	UD	L	✓						
SC 8/71/3536	1327	UD	L		CL					
SC 8/71/3547	1327	DE	J	Ex/T						
SC 8/72/3571	1327	DY	J		CL					
SC 8/72/3572	1327	DY	L		CL					
SC 8/73/3610	1333	DE	L		CL					✓
SC 8/74/3667	1334	UD	Dt	Ex						
SC 8/74/3668	1326-1327	UD,I	J		CL					
SC 8/75/3711	1327	EL,DE	J/Dt	Ch/Ex/T			✓			
SC 8/76/3796	1328	DE	L	Ch						
SC 8/77/3823	1327	UD	J		WT					
SC 8/79/3938	1330	DE,DY	J						✓	✓
SC 8/8/396 ^{NG}	1322	O	L	Ch						
SC 8/80/3972	1327	DY	L	Ch						
SC 8/81/4001	1327	DE,DY	L		S					
SC 8/81/4003	1327	DE	L	Ch						
SC 8/81/4022	1327-1328	DY	R					✓		
SC 8/81/4050 ^{NG}	1315-1322	DE	L	✓						
SC 8/84/4152	1323-1326	DE,DY	J		CL					
SC 8/84/4167	1327	UD	J	Ex/T			✓			
SC 8/90/4483	1327	EL,DY	L		CL					
SC 8/97/4815	1327	DY	L			✕				

Petition Reference	Date	Name	Complaint Type	Further Investigation	ENDORSEMENT TYPE					
					Returned to Legal System	Immediately Granted ✓ or Denied ✗	No recorded response	To Wait	Heard by the King	Damaged or Illegible
SC 8/97/4831	1327	DY	L	Ch						
SC 8/98/4856	1327	EL,DY	J		CL					
SC 8/99/4949	1327	UD	M							✓

Appendix A3: Chapter 3: Queen Isabella and Sir Roger Mortimer of Wigmore

Petition Reference	Date	Name	Complaint Type	Further Investigation	ENDORSEMENT TYPE					
					Returned to Legal System	Immediately Granted ✓ or Denied ✕	No recorded response	To Wait	Heard by the King	Damaged or Illegible
SC 8/103/5129	1324	I	R	Ch					✓	
SC 8/104/5178	1332	M	EL	✓						
SC 8/104/5179	1322	M	EL	✓						
SC 8/106/5258	1330	I,M	J		OT					
SC 8/106/5262	1327-1330	UD,M	M	✓						
SC 8/108/5381	1332	M	EL			✓				
SC 8/109/5430	1324	M	J				✓			
SC 8/11/529	1333	M	EL	Ch						
SC 8/11/542	1334	I	J	✓						
SC 8/11/546	1334	I	Dt	Ch						
SC 8/110/5455 ^{NG}	1302-1312	O	R	✓		✓				
SC 8/110/5488	1330	I	R	✓						
SC 8/117/5806	1328-1329	EL,I	EL	Ch						
SC 8/120/5968	1327	I	Dt	Ex/T						
SC 8/123/6111	1324	I	R	Ch					✓	
SC 8/123/6129	1330	M	Dt			✓				
SC 8/124/6154	1310-1322	I,M	R			✓				
SC 8/126/6299	1335	M	Dt	✓						
SC 8/128/6395	1324	M	J	✓						

Petition Reference	Date	Name	Complaint Type	Further Investigation	ENDORSEMENT TYPE					
					Returned to Legal System	Immediately Granted ✓ or Denied ✗	No recorded response	To Wait	Heard by the King	Damaged or Illegible
SC 8/128/6397	1324	M	J	✓						
SC 8/13/649	1331	M	M/Dt/EL	Ch		✓				
SC 8/137/6827	1331	M	EL		CL					
SC 8/14/683	1330-1331	EL,DY,M	EL	Ch						
SC 8/143/7117	1331	I	EL			✓				
SC 8/145/7234	1330	I	J/EL		CL					
SC 8/15/724	1331	I	R/EL	T						
SC 8/15/729	1330	M	EL	Ch		✓			✓	
SC 8/152/7583	1333	M	R	✓						
SC 8/155/7726	1300-1325	I	J	Ch						
SC 8/157/7801	1331	I,M	EL	✓						
SC 8/157/7832	1330-1331	M	J/EL	Ch						
SC 8/158/7874 ^{NG}	1325-1350	I	J	T						
SC 8/159/7914	1330	I	EL	✓		✓			✓	
SC 8/161/8039	1330	I	R			✓				
SC 8/165/8204	1330	M	M	✓						
SC 8/167/8348	1330	M	EL	✓		✓				
SC 8/17/815A ^{NG}	1327-1358	I	R	Ch/Ex/T						
SC 8/17/820	1329	I,M,DY	J/EL		S					
SC 8/17/823	1331	I	Dt	Ex/T						
SC 8/17/833	1327-1330	EL,DY,I	J		WT					
SC 8/170/8469	1330	M	R	✓						

Petition Reference	Date	Name	Complaint Type	Further Investigation	ENDORSEMENT TYPE					
					Returned to Legal System	Immediately Granted ✓ or Denied ✕	No recorded response	To Wait	Heard by the King	Damaged or Illegible
SC 8/170/8470	1330	M	J			✕				
SC 8/173/8638	1332	M	EL			✓				
SC 8/176/8787	1327	I	EL			✓				
SC 8/176/8789	1331	I	M			✓				
SC 8/179/8929	1330	I	J	✓						
SC 8/18/851	1327-1330	I	J		CL					
SC 8/18/858	1327-1330	I	EL		CL					
SC 8/18/875A	1327	I	EL						✓	
SC 8/180/8979	1330	EL,M	R	Ch						
SC 8/181/9019	1328	M	J				✓			
SC 8/201/10031	1322-1327	EL,I	J	Ch/T						
SC 8/205/10205 ^{NG}	1308-1326	O	R							✓
SC 8/233/11637 ^{NG}	1330	O	J	✓						
SC 8/238/11877	1331	M	EL				✓			
SC 8/238/11895	1328	UD,I	EL	Ch						
SC 8/239/11946	1330-1331	I	M	Ch/Ex		✓			✓	
SC 8/248/12358	1332-1334	M	EL				✓			
SC 8/257/12803	1330	M	EL	✓						
SC 8/257/12814 ^{NG}	1329	O	J	✓						
SC 8/257/12832	1327	I	J/R			✓				
SC 8/259/12904	1328-1333	I	EL			✓				
SC 8/259/12934 ^{NG}	1332	O	Dt	Ch/E/T						

Petition Reference	Date	Name	Complaint Type	Further Investigation	ENDORSEMENT TYPE					
					Returned to Legal System	Immediately Granted ✓ or Denied ✕	No recorded response	To Wait	Heard by the King	Damaged or Illegible
SC 8/261/13035	1330	I	EL			✕				
SC 8/263/13104	1331-1333	EL,M	EL			✕			✓	
SC 8/263/13145 ^{NG}	1325-1350	I	R	✓					✓	
SC 8/264/13152 ^{NG}	1325	O	EL				✓		✓	
SC 8/266/13294	1330	M	Dt						✓	
SC 8/267/13315	1327	I	J				✓			
SC 8/268/13375 ^{NG}	1309	O	M				✓			
SC 8/269/13425 ^{NG}	1328	O	M	✓						
SC 8/275/13705 ^{NG}	1325	O	Dt	✓						
SC 8/295/14726	1330	I	EL	Ch						
SC 8/295/14730A	1330-1338	M	EL/Dt/R	Ch/E/T		✕			✓	
SC 8/297/14840	1330-1333	M	R				✓			
SC 8/30/1475	1327	UD,I	J	Ch						
SC 8/30/1496 ^{NG}	1327	DE	EL	✓						
SC 8/307/15304	1322	I/Q	Dt	T						
SC 8/307/15307	1326-1327	I/Q	J		CL					
SC 8/307/15309	1326-1327	DY,I/Q	J		CL					
SC 8/31/1514B	1330	M	J/EL	✓						
SC 8/31/1517	1330-1334	M	Dt	Ex/T						
SC 8/310/15465	1330	EL,I	EL			✓				
SC 8/310/15471	1333	M	EL							✓
SC 8/318/E328 ^{NG}	1308	I	Dt				✓			

Petition Reference	Date	Name	Complaint Type	Further Investigation	ENDORSEMENT TYPE					
					Returned to Legal System	Immediately Granted ✓ or Denied ✕	No recorded response	To Wait	Heard by the King	Damaged or Illegible
SC 8/318/E351 NG	1318-1319	O	R				✓			
SC 8/32/1572	1326-1327	I	M		WT					
SC 8/325/E672	1316-1322	I	M			✕				
SC 8/327/E807 NG	1312	I	J				✓			
SC 8/33/1629	1327	I	R				✓			
SC 8/33/1648	1323	I	EL/Dt	✓						
SC 8/331/15684	1330	M	EL	✓		✓			✓	
SC 8/334/E1119 NG	1308-1326	O	R	✓						
SC 8/339/15960 NG	1300-1315	I	EL		CL					
SC 8/34/1679	1327	EL,UD,I	J/EL		CL/WT					
SC 8/36/1784 NG	1331	O	Dt	Ex/T						
SC 8/38/1877 NG	1327-1330	O	EL		CL					
SC 8/40/1972	1323	M	R	Ch						
SC 8/40/1975	1327-1335	M	R	Ch						
SC 8/40/2000	1307-1327	I	J			✕				
SC 8/41/2001	1327	I/Q	EL	✓	CL					
SC 8/41/2050	1324	M	EL	Ch						
SC 8/42/2055	1334-1338	M	EL	Ch						
SC 8/46/2256	1325	I	J/EL		CL					
SC 8/46/2277	1330-1331	M	EL					✓		
SC 8/48/2375	1328-1333	UD,M	R	✓					✓	
SC 8/48/2396	1327	UD,I	EL	Ex						

Petition Reference	Date	Name	Complaint Type	Further Investigation	ENDORSEMENT TYPE					
					Returned to Legal System	Immediately Granted ✓ or Denied ✕	No recorded response	To Wait	Heard by the King	Damaged or Illegible
SC 8/5/208	1321-1322	I	Dt	✓						
SC 8/50/2481	1327-1330	M	EL	✓						
SC 8/50/2485	1330	UD,M	J/Dt	T						
SC 8/51/2507	1331	DY,M	J							✓
SC 8/51/2518	1327	DE,DY,M	EL		CL					
SC 8/52/2551	1327-1330	M	EL	✓						
SC 8/52/2570	1330	M	EL		CL					
SC 8/53/2607	1327	I	Dt							✓
SC 8/53/2645	1331	I,M	J/R	✓						
SC 8/55/2710	1317-1321	M	EL	✓						
SC 8/55/2731	1322	I	J						✓	
SC 8/58/2867	1330-1331	M	EL	✓						
SC 8/58/2899	1327	I	J	✓						
SC 8/59/2919	1327-1330	UD,I	J		CL					
SC 8/6/255	1322	M	R			✕				
SC 8/6/280	1321-1322	I	Dt	Ch						
SC 8/60/2968 ^{NG}	1327	DY	J			✕				
SC 8/60/2995 ^{NG}	1314	I	EL			✓				
SC 8/61/3027	1332	M	EL/M	✓		✕				
SC 8/64/3179 ^{NG}	1307-1316	O	EL			✓				
SC 8/66/3286	1324	M	EL	✓						
SC 8/68/3382	1331	M	EL	Ch						

Petition Reference	Date	Name	Complaint Type	Further Investigation	ENDORSEMENT TYPE					
					Returned to Legal System	Immediately Granted ✓ or Denied ✗	No recorded response	To Wait	Heard by the King	Damaged or Illegible
SC 8/71/3507	1330	M	J	✓		✗				
SC 8/73/3648	1324	M	EL					✓		
SC 8/74/3652	1327	I	EL			✓				
SC 8/74/3668	1326-1327	UD,I	J		CL					
SC 8/74/3669	1326-1327	I	J/Dt		CL					
SC 8/77/3827 ^{NG}	1325-1375	O	J	Ch						
SC 8/78/3877	1327-1330	I	M			✓				
SC 8/79/3903	1331	I	EL			✓				
SC 8/79/3922 ^{NG}	1308-1309	O	M	✓						
SC 8/79/3925 ^{NG}	1307-1322	O	R			✓				
SC 8/8/361 ^{NG}	1325	O	M			✓			✓	
SC 8/80/3981	1322-1331	M	J	✓						
SC 8/81/4011	1322	M	EL	✓						
SC 8/83/4125	1320	M	EL	Ch						
SC 8/87/4326 ^{NG}	1320	O	J		OT	✓				
SC 8/87/4327	1320	I	J		OT					
SC 8/89/4407	1330	I,M	J	✓					✓	
SC 8/90/4482 ^{NG}	1327-1332	O	J	✓						
SC 8/91/4528 ^{NG}	1322	O	R	✓						
SC 8/92/4561	1322	M	J		OT					
SC 8/92/4565 ^{NG}	1318	O	J	✓						
SC 8/92/4566 ^{NG}	1330	O	J		CL					

Petition Reference	Date	Name	Complaint Type	Further Investigation	ENDORSEMENT TYPE					
					Returned to Legal System	Immediately Granted ✓ or Denied ✗	No recorded response	To Wait	Heard by the King	Damaged or Illegible
SC 8/98/4852	1331	M	EL				✓		✓	
SC 8/98/4880	1331	M	EL/Dt	Ex/T						
SC 8/99/4910 ^{NG}	1319	M	R	✓						

APPENDIX B

Members of the Panels of ‘Triers’ of Petitions, 1320-1335.

The evidence illustrated in this appendix was gathered from the records of the parliamentary rolls as depicted in *PROME*. Unless otherwise stated, the *ODNB* was consulted to further identify the individual triers.

Name	Ref.	Parliament			English panel	Wales, Ireland, Gascony etc. panel	Position
		October* 1320	July** 1321	January*** 1333			
Edmund of London - chancery clerk	A	✓	✓		✓	✓	Receiver
Adam of Lymbergh - Remembrancer of the exchequer		✓	✓		✓		Receiver
Robert of Bardelby	B	✓	✓		✓		Clerk of Chancery
Henry de Cliff	C	✓	✓		✓		Clerk of Chancery.
Gilbert of Toudeby	D	✓	✓		✓		Admin.
Richard de Burton	E	✓	✓			✓	Admin
Bishop of Worcester – Thomas Cobham		✓	✓			✓	Church
Henry of Canterbury	F	✓	✓			✓	Receiver
Bishop of Bath and Wells – John Droxford		✓	✓			✓	Church
Abbot of Ramsey – Simon de Eye	G	✓	✓			✓	Church
Abbot of St Albans - Hugh of Eversden	H	✓	✓		✓		Church
Guy Ferre	I	✓	✓			✓	Baron
Walter of Friskney	J	✓	✓			✓	Admin
Bishop of London – Stephen Gravesend		✓	✓		✓		Church
William de Herle		✓	✓		✓		Justice
William of Herlaston	K	✓	✓		✓	✓	Receiver
Bishop of Chichester – John Langton		✓	✓		✓		Church
Jordan Moraunt	L	✓	✓			✓	Admin
Bishop of Hereford – Adam Orleton		✓	✓			✓	Church
John Somery	M	✓	✓		✓		Baron
Hugh de Courtenay	N	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Noble
William Martin	O	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Baron
Geoffrey le Scrope		✓	✓	✓	✓		Justice
Richard de Grey	P	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Baron

Name	Ref.	Parliament			English panel	Wales, Ireland, Gascony etc. panel	Position
		October* 1320	July** 1321	January*** 1333			
John Stonor		✓	✓	✓	✓		Justice
Sir Henry le Scrope				✓	✓		Justice
Sir Richard of Aldborough				✓	✓		Baron
Bishop of Norwich - William Ayermin	Q			✓		✓	Church
Sir Ralph Basset of Drayton				✓		✓	Baron
Sir Thomas Bacon				✓		✓	Baron
Sir Thomas de Bamburgh				✓	✓		Receiver
Sir Thomas of Brayton				✓		✓	Receiver
Bishop of Lincoln - Henry Burghersh	R			✓		✓	Church
John of Blebury	S			✓		✓	Receiver
Sir William de Denum	T			✓	✓		Justice
Sir Henry de Edwinstowe, clerk of parliament	U			✓	✓		Receiver
Sir Thomas de Evesham – chancery clerk				✓	✓		Receiver
Sir Geoffrey of Edenham, justices				✓		✓	Justice
Bishop of Exeter - Grandison, John				✓		✓	Church
Bishop of Ely - John Hotham				✓	✓		Church
Archbishop of York – William Melton				✓	✓		Church
Bishop of Chester, John Offord				✓	✓		Church
Sir William la Zouche of Ashby				✓	✓		Baron

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