

POWER RELATIONS IN THE ROYAL FORESTS OF ENGLAND

Patronage, privilege and legitimacy in the reigns of Henry III and Edward I

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Master's Thesis

November 2013

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INTRODUCTION

In this study I shall examine the subject of power relations in the royal forests of England. The vast forests of late-medieval England contained a variety of valuable resources; some were mundane, like timber and land, and some were of a more symbolic nature like deer and the right to hunt. Control and usage of these resources was to a great extent dictated by the unique legal codes of the forests which aimed to maintain the forests to the king's benefit. But at the same time, forests, by their innate nature, were difficult to guard and thus invited misappropriation. This thorny conundrum caused a great deal of friction amongst the inhabitants of the forest (the primary users) and the royal foresters charged with overseeing resource usage in the forest. This general discord over access to resources will serve as the point of departure for the present study.

In my analysis of resource use in the forest I shall attempt to analyze the interplay of power between the various actors in the forest, namely, the local inhabitants and the foresters. These interactions, be they casual and lawful or covert and illicit, reflect much about the power structures that underlay the royal forest system, and perhaps reflect something of medieval man's notions of justice and authority and privilege. In similar fashion, squabbles over resource use in the forest can also help shine light on the society of late-medieval England, its social make-up as well as the localized power relations constitutive of it. The ultimate goal of this study will be to present and interpret these matters in an attempt to better understand the agency and goals of the various actors present in the royal forests.

Plantagenet England and the Royal Forests

The England of the Plantagenets (1189–1377) which honed the royal forest system was a typically medieval land. Its ultimate foundations lay upon the long established notion of the three estates: those who fought, those who prayed, and those who worked. This in turn was predicated on a complex system of interrelated

loyalties and duties that is often called feudalism but might be better termed privileges for loyalty. At the center of this system was the king, the ultimate fountainhead of power and voucher of legitimate authority. Every inch of the English countryside technically belonged to him, and he was free to dispose of it as he saw fit. His liegemen (the noble class) provided the force to protect and uphold the prevailing order; for their service they were rewarded with privileges, some symbolic, some mundane, but most importantly, they received land – the most essential resource of all in the medieval world. The ecclesiasts, for their part, were tasked with providing society with the framework for achieving salvation and, like the nobles, were expected to work to preserve the social order; they too were linked to the king through ties of patronage. The commoners were expected to work the land and sustenance those who upheld the system; their reward for a life of hard work was a simple, uncomplicated path to salvation. Thus we see a society held in cohesion by a king ‘enthroned in the land, represented as the body politic, with warriors on his arms, the church in his heart and the peasantry tirelessly plowing at his feet,’ as one historian succinctly put it.¹ Nobleman, ecclesiast, king and peasant alike all lived in a highly stratified society in which every level was interlinked through bonds of duty and fealty, predicated on notions of privileges and rights. Status and privilege were thus intrinsically linked in the medieval world, and both played important roles in maintaining order in society.² Thus the social order of late-medieval England was underwritten by the notion that each estate, indeed every person, even of the lowest peasant, was owed certain privileges in return for certain duties³ – the terms of which were dependent on the feasibility of the existing power relations, and thus ever-changing. Though the framework for such a society remained static as a matter of course, an individual’s personal status within it was in a continual state of contestation and need eternally be affirmed or dismissed.

¹ Salih 2012, 86.

² See, for example, Fossier 2010, 252–285. See also Peter Cross (2006) ‘An age of deference’; Richard Kaeuper (2011) ‘Social ideals and social disruption’; and Bloch *Feudal Society* passim.

³ Fossier 2000, 117–127; Bloch 1971; Schofield 2003. Powicke refers to a ‘feudal tendency to look after one’s own man.’ Powicke 1962, 151–152.

Late-medieval England was also a land of gesture.⁴ In a society in which conspicuous consumption paralleled social status, the privileges enjoyed by a person in a position of power were nothing less than synonymous with that status and *vice versa*: neither could exist without the other. Preeminent amongst these privileges was of course the right to own land, that is, to be endowed with the *lordship* of land. The privilege to hunt may have been a close second. Of all of the privileges in the medieval world, the license to take the royal deer was clearly one of the most sought-after.⁵ In late-medieval England, hunting was indeed a very royal affair. After the Conquest of 1066 the early Norman kings had transformed the best woodlands of England into veritable hunting preserves for the crown. These royal forests, as they should properly be called, were distinguished by the salient fact that the king alone reserved the prerogative to hunt in them.⁶ Anyone who wished to hunt within the bounds of the king's forests, however elevated his social position, had to receive the king's blessing, whether by way of office or through the consecrated privilege of traditional right. Thus, to hunt in the king's forests carried with it connotations of royal favor and social prestige.

The royal hunting lands, by the very deer they sheltered, therefore represented important wellsprings of privilege. To maintain and oversee these reservoirs of prestige, the Norman kings created a vast system of law and a corps of officials that we shall call the royal forest system. The elite, naturally anxious for posts which conferred the royal favor, and equally interested in the attendant privileges, served as the eager backbone of this system. Those in the king's favor were chosen as protectors of the royal forests and were accordingly rewarded with certain privileges to exploit the forests to their own benefit.⁷ Thus, throughout the period under analysis, forest stewardship should be viewed not so much as a duty but rather as a privilege that afforded myriad concrete benefits.⁸ In similar light, hunting should be viewed as a performance of sorts, as a symbolic flaunting of

⁴ Fossier (2010, 54) called the Middle Ages 'the age of gesture.'

⁵ Almond 2003, 13–18; Bechmann 1990, 27–36; Griffin 2007, 36–41; Manning 1993, 60, 196–197.

⁶ Griffin 2007, 11–24; James 1982, 9–12; Manwood 2003, 18–20 *ff*.

⁷ Manning 1993, 28–29.

⁸ Rackham 1998b, 166–169.

one's social rank.⁹

Existing Research, Research Aims, Methodology and Sources

Existing Research

The existing research on the royal forests of England in the medieval period has focused primarily on the institution of the royal hunt as well as on the unique nature of the royal forest system and forest law, which was distinctly separate from English common law and hence has generally commanded the attention of historians. Indeed much notable work on the subject was already undertaken in the 19th century.¹⁰ Perhaps for this reason, many subsequent historians were loath to treat the subject as worthy of further research, and hunting, and the royal forests by extension, consequently became somewhat of a dead subject in the early 20th century: Historians by and large tended to satisfy themselves with plucking the odd example from the sources, citing a few anecdotes about evil foresters or the barbarous royal hunt, and then moved on to headier subjects.¹¹ The received knowledge (a bloodthirsty king slaying hundreds of deer with no other agency in play save evil forester and innocent peasant, i.e. the Sheriff of Nottingham and Robin Hood) has tended to be the norm wherever royal forests are mentioned.¹²

Historians, therefore, have successively handed down a portrait that somewhat simplistically portrays the royal forests as vast woodland parks with little more to offer than deer for the king and hardships for the locals.¹³ Later in the 20th and early 21st century, however, some historians began to call aspects of this picture into question. Chief amongst them, Richard Almond, Oliver Rackham, and

⁹ Almond 2003, 28–29; Griffin 2007, 30–32; Manning 1993, 4–5, 57–60.

¹⁰ George James Turner, Robert Bell Turton and Charles Petit-Dutaillis are the most prominent names.

¹¹ Almond 2003, 5–6.

¹² The received knowledge has been quite persistent to change. Even the eminent H.S. Bennett could write of 'the terrors of the Forest Law hanging over the wrongdoers.' Nor could Emma Griffin, writing in the present century, refrain from highlighting 'harsh laws, severe penalties,' and 'mutilation,' all without any qualification or mention of the equally cruel punishments meted out elsewhere in England during the era – showing that while the focus of the research may have shifted, its tone has nevertheless remained remarkably unchanged. See Bennett 1974, 53 and Griffin 2007, 18, 33.

¹³ Some have criticized the traditional view, however. For a critique see Almond 2003 5–6, or, particularly, Rackham 1998b, 83–86, 166.

Roger Manning have posited a more nuanced interpretation of medieval hunting and the material resources of the forest. Typically, these historians have viewed the deer as just one of the many important resources valued and exploited in the medieval forests. In *Trees and Man: the Forest in the Middle Ages* Roland Bechmann brings these resources to the fore, and Rackham in particular elaborated on many of the subtleties of forest usage in his works *The History of the Countryside* and *Trees and Woodlands in the British Landscape*. Emma Griffin touched upon the royal forests as valuable sources of income in *Blood Sport*. In *The Royal Forests of Medieval England* Charles Young examines the forest system as an issue of wider political dispute in England. Roger Manning and Richard Almond also have called into question the long accepted notion of the absolute preeminence of the king's hunting rights and questioned the ostensibly draconian forest laws that predicated them. In *Medieval Hunting* Almond brings to light the less prestigious forms of hunting in the medieval world, showing how the peasantry too exploited many of the resources of the forest traditionally assumed to have been the right of the highest classes alone. Manning, in particular, has shown in *Hunters and Poachers* how infringement on forest law was commonplace. Additionally, in *Village Revolts* he argued that deliberate misappropriation of forest resources was a type of symbolic protest. Interestingly, many recent historians have shown interest in the symbolic/ritualistic nature of hunting and its role in social status creation and maintenance – Susan Crane, N.J. Sykes, Jean Birrell, Anne Rooney, William Perry Marvin and John Cummins, Barbara Hanawalt – to name the most prominent names.

However, although these authors have offered a more varied interpretation of hunting as an institution in the medieval era, and even of the forest as a resource well and source of societal friction, with few exceptions historians have ignored the role of the forester as overseer of the largest wellspring of hunting potential in all of England, nor have researchers taken much note of the *local* conditions, of power and society, that seemingly dictated much of the activities in the forests.¹⁴ In this

¹⁴ One exception being Young's *The Royal Forests of Medieval England* (1979), which though descriptive in nature also dwells on the wider political importance of royal forests. Young's work however does not examine the forester's role in any depth.

sense, the present work is an attempt to create a bridge of sorts between two separate historiographies: that which we might call the traditional view, focused on describing the unique nature of the *royal forest system*, and that of the more recent research into the symbolic aspects of *hunting*. The traditional historiography did the grunt work of researching the royal forest system, the mapping and cataloguing, as it were, but generally failed to consider matters of human agency; the recent research has tended to focus on the human agency and societal friction linked to hunting without considering the actual context of the underlying evidence, often resulting in assertions that on a theoretical level hover precariously in the air. Both traditions have also perpetuated a simplistic interpretation of the forester as a character who acted *arbitrarily*, motivated seemingly by unprincipled greed and self-interest alone. At its worst the foresters appears summarily as a dummy figure attached to a cruel institution. One task of the present research will be to pin this theory to the map, so to speak.

Research Aims and Methodology

The aim of the present study will be to analyze power structures in the medieval English forest, to scrutinize of the available sources in order to shine light on the complexion of power which existed within the forests. In particular, I shall attempt to focus on the aspects of the subject which have been either glossed over by earlier historical research or which have not been adequately addressed in recent historical research. One fundamental task of this research will be to adjust the focus of research onto matters *tangential* to hunting, rather than simply focusing on hunting itself, as has been the main preoccupation of researchers of the field. Of similar import will be to maintain an emphasis on the *actions* of the inhabitants of the royal forests and how they reflect the wider cultural assumptions of medieval English society. Individual actions are always motivated and formed within the framework of the culture which gave rise to them.¹⁵ Here, the overall aim will be to understand that culture by approaching the forest as a unique playing field where various actors come together to contest or maintain established power structures.

¹⁵ Wood J. 2007, 82.

In this sense, I will make use of the notion of power as something that is *performed* as opposed to something more tangible or permanent in nature. The performative aspects of power will thus serve as a fundamental touchstone of the analysis.¹⁶

A secondary aim of this study will be to examine how (and why) power structures change, often as the result of discernible events in the historical record, as well as how these changes materialized and played out within a forest context. The time frame chosen for this work spans from 1250 to 1330, roughly paralleling the reigns of Henry III and his son and heir Edward I. This choice was made to reflect the heyday of the medieval royal forests but also because the era saw great political changes in England. The era was also a time when the royal forest was ‘an object of intense practical concern both to the king and to his subjects.’¹⁷ Indeed many of the surviving forest documents derive from this period, another reason for the chosen delineation.¹⁸

Thus the central question I hope to address in this study is *What was the essential nature of the playing field of the forest, and how did the human agents of the forest function within this field in a localized (i.e. small-scale) context but also with respect to the wider power structures of the realm?* What does the behavior of the actors seen in the forest court records indicate about their aims and means, and, consequently, about local power relations and beyond? In medieval history in general, and medieval forest history in particular, much research emphasis has been placed on the most salient sources of friction in the forests, the great men of the realm and the wider struggles over the liberties and privileges typically being at the fore. I hope to augment this view by focusing rather on local struggles and analyzing their ultimate causes and effects. What were the sources of friction – lesser and greater – that caused contestation of power in the forest? Was the friction preserved in the forest court records the result of the oft-depicted draconian forest system, or was it part of a wider calculus of power in the realm? Were the foresters really the terror they have traditionally been portrayed as?

To answer these questions, I shall examine the roles of two foresters in

¹⁶ Foucault is the ultimate source of this idea. See Simmons 2012, 301–318. See also Staudenmaier 2009, 55 and Wood A. 2007, 100–102.

¹⁷ Powicke 1966, 30.

¹⁸ Stagg 1979, 38–39.

particular. These foresters (Peter de Neville and Walter de Kent) were chosen because they are generally representative of foresters during the age, but also because they represent two separate classes of foresters and served in two very different power landscapes. De Neville was in a situation where he was the only forester of any authority in the area, whereas de Kent was chief forester amongst a group of competing foresters. The cases are also interesting in that, although both foresters were connected to wider structures of power in the realm, on a local level Kent and de Neville functioned with very different goals in mind (de Neville's were rooted in local power structures, de Kent's were not). Thus the cases offer two different perspectives on the types of goals that a forester might be motivated by. I shall first deal with the de Neville case and explore what a forester stood to gain within a local context, moving then on to the de Kent case and issues of wider scope. Before that, an introductory chapter explores the workings of the royal forest system and the power structures that existed within it. As a final analysis, I shall compare and contrast the two cases and offer a number of observations on the significance of the forester's role within the royal forest system, as well as some general insights about the nature of power in 13th-century England. Additionally, a descriptive chapter introduces the general topic and workings of the royal forest system.

Sources

The primary work of this research will hinge on analysis of forest court records. The forest court records are of great use here because they offer a first-hand account of matters within the forest as recorded by those who were charged with protecting its resources. By critically interpreting these records, I hope to gain a nuanced understanding of how the forest system was used legally, but also illegally, by those within its scope. A number of printed compilations of select records will be analyzed. The most important primary sources used here are: *Select Pleas of the Forest*, compiled and edited by G.J. Turner (1901), and *New Forest Documents A.D. 1244–1334*, compiled and edited by D.J. Stagg (1979). In addition, a number of other sources that contain forest records will also be used, most notably, *The*

Honor and Forest of Pickering, vol. 2–4, compiled and edited by R.B. Turton (1895–1897). These sources occur as modern English translations of the original Latin (or, occasionally, Norman French). *Select Pleas* and *Forest of Pickering* also include transcriptions of the original source language, which is occasionally a useful accessory. It should be noted, however, that while the documents were written in Latin, English in fact was the main language of the forest courts and officialdom during the era under investigation.¹⁹ Thus one must bear in mind that although the view of the forest found in the court records might be transcribed by a French-speaking, Latin-literate court official, the records were essentially based upon the first-hand accounts of the English-speaking forest officials, witnesses and defendants. The majority of the primary sources in these works deal with the 13th–14th century, and thus are well-suited to the temporal bounds of the thesis.

The forest records were created to document transgressions against the forest codes as well as the legal usages of the forest, for tax purposes essentially. In principle, they offer a picture of the various illegal and legal activities that went on in the forest. They include such mundane information as the number of deer a particular nobleman hunted in a certain forest or the profit from pasturing animals in the forest in a certain year, as well as the illicit activities that had come to the foresters' attention such as poaching or illegal woodcutting. Of critical importance to the present research, however, is that these records often describe in great detail the context of these activities: very precise details pertaining to actions are often specified, as are opinions about legality or probable causes. For example, a particular detail cited in the documents (e.g. a suspect's home manor or surname, profession, or the place the crime occurred) can offer much in the way of helping deduce the underlying rationale of why a certain activity was viewed as legal or illegal or why it might have caught the attention of the officials. Also of particular interest are the documents that deal with special inquisitions into the misdeeds of the foresters, upon which I will rely heavily. These inquests, which invariably stemmed from royal consternation over local discord, are valuable in that they offer

¹⁹ This was certainly legally the case by 1362 (Barber 2000, 140–142), but one can reasonably assume a native English voice in the courts antedating the official change. Indeed many 'englishisms' are evident in the source texts.

detailed information about the privileges of certain foresters as well as examples of how these privileges might be overly exploited or contested. For our purposes the factuality of the matters related in the documents is a somewhat moot point: the insight, details and opinions the sources offer about the workings of the forest system – particularly with respect to society at large – are the essential foci of this work. Essentially, these matters evidence how power was contested in the forest, by whom and under what circumstances. The veracity of the allegations is fairly irrelevant – the agents and their motivations for making the allegations rather are key.

Also of great interest concerning the aims of this thesis is the fact that, due to the financial nature of the forest system (i.e. it produced money for the king by way of fines), even seemingly trivial offences are recorded in great detail. This helps bring the focus onto less significant actors in the forest (lesser gentry and manorial workers). The forest laws, statutes and official royal proclamations, too, offer a narrow but valuable insight into the king's ideas about power-brokering in the forest. Taken together, these sources offer a varied picture of those who administered the law and those who were touched by it. Thus, for our purposes, I propose to use the forest records – the inquests in particular – as a general source of examples to illustrate the powerplay that went on within the royal forests. The traditional sources of medieval historiography will be used to corroborate and further examine these matters whenever possible.

The window the forest records provides is not a perfect one, though. It should of course be borne in mind that the selected records used here represent only a small fraction of the total amount of archival records, and those in turn only a fragment of what once existed. Additionally, like all records, the forest court records document the activities of individuals in a large and complex social web – one which we will be tasked with untangling. The true underlying motives which caused the inception of a particular document are, ontologically speaking, never really unknowable. Also imperfect is the fact that, even when taken at face value, the records only document the activities that were noticed by the forest administrators; any activities which may have eluded their view – or were purposefully left out – are, again, entirely open to speculation. Although in some

cases, silence in the records is quite telling. Nevertheless, the forest records offer a good, if imperfect, perspective into the activities and mindsets of the actors, particularly with respect to the foresters, who are naturally the focus here.

ROLES – The Royal Forest and the Structures of Power in England

Castles are forests of stone.

M.P. Tilley, *A Dictionary of the Proverbs of England in the 16th
and 17th Centuries*

The royal forests of England were complex entities, involving numerous agents with competing agendas of differing scope over wide geographic ranges. The resources that the forests represented, both mundane and symbolic alike, were the typical prizes over which these agents competed. In order to better understand the forest, we must first consider the significance of the forest in the eyes of those agents, as well as the roles they played with respect to power, both locally and on a wider scale. The present chapter presents a brief introduction of the forest system with the aim of elucidating the general constituents of a royal forest: its legal system and physical characteristics, and the various agents as well as their conflicting interests in the forest, locally and in the wider English realm.

The Forest System

To better understand the forest system, as well as its resources, there is need to take pause to consider what the term ‘forest’ actually signified in the late medieval period as our modern usage of the word deviates from it a great deal. In Plantagenet England the term ‘forest’ was not equivalent to the modern conception of the word as an area more or less covered by trees, rather it denoted ‘a definite tract of land within which *a particular body of law was enforced*, having for its object the preservation of certain animals’ (italics are mine).²⁰ To this should be added that the animals in the forests were preserved solely for the king’s pleasure

²⁰ Turner 1901, ix. Manwood offers that certain ‘Lawes, Priviledges and Officers’ are essential elements of a ‘forest’ as well. Manwood 2003, 18–19 *ff.*

and use. The function of the English forest system was quite similar to that of a royal game preserve: the sole purpose of the royal forest was to ensure a ready supply of game for the king. Although several species are specified in the forest laws (such as the hare and the boar), the preeminent quarry was the deer.²¹ The forest laws also aimed at preserving the natural fabric of the forest, that is, the timber and the undergrowth, which represented the shelter and sustenance of the deer.²² It is also important to note that while a great deal of the land within the royal forests was in fact owned and overlorded by the king, much of the land in the forests was actually in the hands of private individuals.²³ For landowners in the forest, the forest system effectively meant that their property rights were trumped by the king's rights to maintain deer.²⁴ No landowner could hunt, farm or fell timber on their lands without the king's permission, or some form thereof. In theory this permission – which always came at a price – was calculated with the preservation of the deer in mind. In this sense, preserving the deer and the natural environment of the forest were both intrinsically linked with issues of land use, be it farming, woodcutting or any other activity in the forest. In essence, *forest* denoted a distinct tract of land in which the king enjoyed certain prerogatives, most prominent of which were exclusive hunting rights and the right to determine the terms of land and other resource usages.

The term *forest* requires another slight redefinition for the present purposes as the royal forests of medieval England were in fact not entirely, or even extensively wooded nor were they the vast primeval woodlands that the term readily connotes.²⁵ Rather, as Oliver Rackham has argued, we should envision 'a place of deer, not necessarily a place of trees.'²⁶ And while the royal forests were generally less populous areas than elsewhere in England, they were clearly not the lonely, untrammelled lands that one might image: the records bear out a forest 'full of folk', a place of fields and villages, manors and monasteries, an abode of myriad

²¹ SPF ix–xiv.

²² Manwood 2003, 50–52.*ff.*

²³ That is, they held *possession* of the land (a privilege) by way of services (duty) to the king, who of course technically owned every acre of land in the realm.

²⁴ Griffin 2007, 16.

²⁵ Fossier 2010, 175–177.

²⁶ Rackham 1998b, 164–168; Rackham 1998a, 133.

people – a forest of workers alongside Rackham’s place of deer.²⁷ These workers were a great boon to the local powerholders, as they represented a rough and tumble sort who might be called upon in times of war.²⁸ It is also important to note that forests represented valuable wellsprings of a many essential resources (wood, pasture, land, calories etc.) and that they were typically heavily exploited²⁹ – something which often took on critical importance in an era in which most people were primarily concerned with simply producing enough to eat.³⁰ These resources also had a critical role in sustaining local livelihoods. Indeed, conflict over access to essential forest resources is one of the hallmarks of the history of the royal forest system. In the forest, tradition, usage rights, privilege, ownership and prerogative were all common cause to quarrel. Thus, the royal forests of England should be seen as distinct from the rest of the English countryside in that, aside from their slightly more wooded backdrop, they had a very different legal landscape as regards resource and land usage.

The royal forest system also sheltered other types of resources for the king, resources of a more symbolic nature. During the medieval era, hunting indeed was a very important marker of social status and represented a currency all its own – one that could be bought and sold, traded for other privileges, or conspicuously consumed or flaunted and flaunted.³¹ Herein lies another aspect of the forest system: it functioned as a source and framework for distributing the king’s largesse, so critical to royal power during the period.³² As Nicholas Orme has noted, ‘hunting cemented relations between the king and his nobility and gentry.’³³ For the gentry and nobility, hunting offered the same possibilities but on a more local level.³⁴ In this sense, the forest could be understood as an immense arena (or alternatively as a deep well) in which resources and privileges are meted out and acted on within the ever-in-flux context of factionalism and patronage that underpinned so much of

²⁷ Fossier 2010, 183–184. Roland Bechmann refers to ‘a well-visited forest.’ See *Trees and Man*, 16

²⁸ We often see foresters marshaling the men of the forest to good effect during times of war. See HOP v.3, 243–244 and Powicke 1966, 463, 475, 9–10.

²⁹ Rackham 1998b 169–172.

³⁰ Fossier 2010, 59–64; Bechmann 1990, 22–23.

³¹ Almond 2004 13–21.

³² Rackham 1998b, 172.

³³ Orme 1992, 133. For the prestige value of hunting, see also Marvin 1998 *passim*.

³⁴ Hanawalt 1998, 150–151.

medieval society.³⁵ Thus, with respect to the letter of the law, any incongruence or even abuse recorded in the forest court records should be viewed not as a discrepancy but rather as an insight into the essential workings of the royal forest: Here we shall view the forest as a stage upon which the struggle over power, privilege and resources (mundane and symbolic) unfolds, that is, as an institution in which power relations are revealed, maintained and contested. In this sense the forest court records preserve the detritus of what might be called *the law of privilege* – the notion that status and privilege ultimately define legality – and show how in medieval England the law applied to different persons in vastly different ways for different underlying reasons.³⁶ In the context of this paper, we will approach the forest records with the elementary notion that discrepancy uncovers roles and meanings. In this sense, defiance or misadministration of the law will be viewed as *meaning* something, as a performance of power, and not as criminality as such. Disobedience will be regarded as a *gesture* pregnant with (social) meaning. Although this naturally was true of late-medieval English society in general, the notion is particularly useful in the case of the royal forests as they were zones where the concepts of crime and justice, ownership and rights existed in a somewhat more nebulous form than elsewhere in the realm.

The Foresters

Within such a landscape, preservation of the king's rights in the forests fell upon the shoulders of the various officers of the forest officialdom who worked within the legal scope of the royal forests. Indeed it should be borne in mind that forest law, and by extension the forest as a legal entity, refers simply to the unique body of laws which *governed* resource usage in the forest. Forest law was an alternate body of law that pertained to issues outside the scope of the other law types of England (common law, manorial law, canon law). Forest law was as unique as it was exceptional in that the rights of man (even of landowners) were deeply subverted to

³⁵ Cross 2006 31–45. See also Bennett 1970, 12–26 and Woolgar, Sergeantson & Waldron 2009, 1–5 for examples of such navigation.

³⁶ Bennett 1970 165–179. In the Pickering Forest records we encounter the claim that one forest court official is accused of perverting and selling 'the laws as if they had been oxen or cows.' See Turton 1895, xxxiv.

the prerequisites of the deer, i.e. the king's rights.³⁷ The administrators whose charge was to implement this law and safeguard the forests were of various types. Some, like the *chief foresters*, were appointed by the king and answered directly to him; their sole task was to ensure that the forest was properly maintained and administered. Under the chief forester was his *forester*, who in turn had *underforesters* under them who were responsible for actually physical oversight in the forests; they were selected by the chief forester and answered to him.³⁸ Other notable officials in the forest were the *verderers*, who were locally elected and functioned as overseers and official witnesses in the forest courts. Added to this were various other positions of varying power and status, such as the *agisters* and *woodwards*, who had limited duties in the forest system, sometimes responsible to the king or chief forester or sometimes to private landowners.³⁹ The common feature of all of these officials however was that, whomsoever they might answer to, they were all sworn to maintain the forest, or as sources put it to preserve the *vert* and *venison* (the natural environment and the game, respectively), and they could be punished or discharged if they failed to do so.⁴⁰ Theoretically, every official, and indeed every resident of the forest was subject to the simple guiding star of forest law: the resources of the forest could be used only to the extent that the deer were not hindered.

If there is one constant theme in the court records, it is that the person of the forester was genuinely loathed. The court records are literally filled with pages of allegations of corruption against them. At its very heart, forest system made it almost impossible for the forester to not abuse his position. More often the case than not, the forester received little or no pay whatsoever and was expected to make a living by the fringe benefits he was allowed, that is, he had to live off the land.⁴¹ Indeed the chief foresters even paid an annual rent for their office, sometimes as services rendered, often military service, and sometimes in money or

³⁷ Turner 1901, ix; Manning 1993, 58; Griffin 2007, 16.

³⁸ In the records the terminology varies: *chief forester/steward* and *underforester/steward* and *forester* are the terms employed here for the three classes of foresters.

³⁹ See Turner 1901, xiv–xxvi for a discussion of the various forest officials.

⁴⁰ See Manwood 2003, 188–206 ff. for description of duties.

⁴¹ Turner 1901, xx–xxiii.

in kind,⁴² with the assumption that the privileges gained would be worth the rent. Such benefits included certain rights to exploit resources in the forest, and a certain cut of the fines amerced in the forest. Additionally, the residents of the forest were required to sustenance the foresters and the records often bear witness to foresters demanding a share of the harvest.⁴³ At least in New Forest we see foresters collecting all manner of goods, such as eggs and grain, as well as a portion of the fines for forest offences.⁴⁴ Such collections in some cases were set by custom, as in the New Forest example, but the forest records often allude that the foresters were continually trying to push the limits, often bordering on extortion. In Pickering Forest, for instance, a group of foresters was accused of collecting ‘sheaves [of grain] in the autumn and wool . . . annoying and injuring the country.’⁴⁵ Another common way in which the foresters might generate their own salaries was the scheme of *scotale*. In Somerset Forest the foresters are accused of demanding grain from the local populace then subsequently using it to brew ale which they then forced the locals to buy when they had business with the foresters.⁴⁶ This scheme – which was so notorious that a law had to be made proscribing it⁴⁷ – and many other small extortions contrived by the foresters ‘under color of their office’ would surely have been reason enough for the locals do disdain the forest system.

Another way in which the foresters were at odds with the local populace was that many of them were outsiders. Seemingly with the idea of preventing local cliques from forming, many chief foresters would import able persons from distant manors and employ them as foresters.⁴⁸ In Pickering Forest local residents complained that the foresters had ‘ruined the people of the country by their power’ and had grown rich even though when they came to the country they had nothing but the bows on their backs.⁴⁹ Indeed, often in the records an accused forester is referred to as ‘a certain so-and-so’, with no patronym or toponym specified, which

⁴² Turner 1901, xxiv; Peter de Neville paid 40s a year for his position, SPF 46.

⁴³ HOP v.3, 53, 108; Turner 1901, xxi.

⁴⁴ NFD 358–359.

⁴⁵ HOP v.3, 15. The foresters seem to have always pushed the limits: several laws restricting the practice were made during the era. See, for example, *Statutes* 52 and 263.

⁴⁶ SPF 126.

⁴⁷ *Charter of Forest*, cited in Manwood 2003, 7 ff.

⁴⁸ Turton 1896, xxvi.

⁴⁹ HOP v.3, 245.

would seem to indicate that the provenance of the forester was unknown to the locals, or at least that he was not a well-known man. The aforementioned claim, that the foresters had grown rich ‘in lands, tenements and fine manors’ as a result of their offices, also highlights the fact that foresters were very well positioned to improve their lot in life. Positions in the forest officialdom represented a way to climb the social ladder and were accordingly quite sought after.⁵⁰ In New Forest quite often foresters would seem to have used their office to secure land for them or their relatives.⁵¹ This surely would have been the case wherever the forest system existed. Indeed, one of the curious hallmarks of the royal forest system was that much of what appears as finable ‘crimes’ is actually more akin to proper rent. Typically, when a wooded plot of land was (illegally) converted to arable field, the offender paid a yearly fine for the offence which eventually became a set traditional rent. This of course was contrary to the spirit of the forest system, i.e. to preserve the deer, but eventually became an important source of income for the king.⁵² Additionally, access to convertible woodland was in great demand in medieval England and was a common source of local grousing and conflict.⁵³ That the foresters themselves decided which *assarts*, as they were called, could remain and which were ‘detrimental to the venison’ and should be removed would have been quite a power: the foresters held the keys to the great well of agricultural resources that the forest represented. This, essentially, is likely why they were so commonly despised in the records — not because he was evil, but because he was in the envious position of sole holder and distributor of resources of uncertain ownership. He also had to generate his own income. That the court records evince numerous allegations of favoritism is the natural outcome of such a system.

Power structures in England

In terms of power relations the royal forests were not environments entirely dissimilar to the rest of England, although a few critical differences should be

⁵⁰ Turton 1896, xii. The National Archives offers a few examples of petitions to the king for forest positions, see e.g. TNA SC 8/323/E590.

⁵¹ Compare NFD 1 and NFD 3, for example.

⁵² Griffin 2007, 32–34.

⁵³ Schofield 2003, 21–26; Bennett 1974, 55–60.

noted. Like elsewhere in the English realm, the royal forests would have been dotted with manors, themselves the basic element of power in the medieval era. Each of these manors, be they lay or ecclesiastic, was officiated by a lord who represented the elementary local power player. A lord might own many manors, but most owned only a few, which typically they held not of the king but of another lord such as an earl or baron or bishop. Thus in much of the medieval English countryside we should envision a constellation of manorial lands, sometimes loosely connected, sometimes tightly, but usually clustered together under the aegis of a more substantial lord – and, critically, all under the overlordship of someone else, whoever it might be. Typically the possessor of the *liberty* or *honor*, as the highest orders of land tenantry were called, might be one of the great earls of England or a bishop, alternatively it might be the king himself. The important point here is that whosoever might be in possession, the manor itself was essentially held of somebody else, and that that person functioned as the overlord and general protector of whoever possessed the manor. At its heart the manorial system was a swapping of privilege for duty: The actual possessor of the manor owed his overlord not just rent (in goods or money) but also loyalty; the overlord took the possessor under the aegis of his power and protected him from any abuses by outsiders; the terms of tenancy and manor possession were, in turn, the king's affair, as the royal prerogative allowed him a hand in setting or revoking the terms at his discretion. On a localized level, however, landownership was inevitably predicated on loyalty to a higher-up who might only occasionally visit the locale. These loosely grouped constellations of manorial lands served as the lifeblood of livelihoods in medieval England; the resources that they produced were essentially the only source of wealth in the country.

In the royal forests landownership and the right to exploit the land were somewhat uniquely proscribed, as noted above, in that all rights were subverted by the king's privileges in the forests. A manor within the bounds of the forest, or adjacent to it, would have faced restrictions on such common activities as harvesting firewood or converting woodland to arable, even if the woodland technically belonged to the manor. During the period under consideration, restrictions of this type were a general source of contention between the king and

the great landowners of the realm⁵⁴, but also between the actual manorial owners and the foresters whose job necessitated dictating the terms of these restrictions. In some cases, as will be seen in the example of Rutland Forest, we see the chief forester holding manors of the king (i.e. the king was overlord) while the other landowners in the forest held their lands of other overlords (barons). Such a scheme would seemingly create an environment in which the local parties were not only fundamentally at odds about resource use but also had different overlords from whom they could seek redress in such instances. Any discord over resource use between local actors was thus intrinsically linked to higher order power structures in the realm. That the vast resources of the royal forests were encompassed by a particularly restrictive system that invited abuse would seem to have made this outlay all the more open to contestation. Herein lies the fundamental hallmark of the royal forest system: because access to resources was constrained by the forest laws, the privilege to exploit, which elsewhere in the country would have been more clearly defined, at least in a legal sense, was subject to the whim of the forester. In medieval England a forester was clearly in an envious position in that he could dictate to his neighbors the terms on which they used many of the resources necessary for their manors, be it converting woodland to arable or harvesting firewood, a position which the forester could use to benefit himself as well as his associates and benefactors. In such a situation the office of the forester was bound to be loathed and goes far in explaining the claim or the residents of Pickering Forest – echoed everywhere royal forests existed in medieval England – that the foresters had ruined the countryside and enriched themselves in the process.

It should, however, be noted that the forest system was not without its advantages for some actors. In general, resource exploitation would have been somewhat freer and more open to peasants and freeholders for instance, and anyone on good terms with the foresters would surely have been well placed to benefit financially. Indeed, some locals benefited greatly from inclusion in the forest. The exploitation and favoritism associated with the forest system seems to

⁵⁴ Powicke 1966, 108–114.

have been the major source of concern, not the system per se – although the local lords generally viewed the system as a burden. Also, the fines would ultimately have touched the landed gentry more acutely than the peasantry, and indeed it was the gentry that fought most strongly against the forest system.⁵⁵ Overall, however, friction in the forest was a game of lords, with lesser folk playing only accessory roles within or without the competing factions.

In the following chapters we shall examine the cases of two foresters, whom I take to be generally indicative of the era. In doing so, we will attempt to assess not only the general roles these agents played in the forest, but also the wider implications of their actions within their proper context, or to quote Powicke within ‘the interplay of public and private, local and central, royal and baronial, financial and administrative activities in social life.’⁵⁶ Examining the actions of these two men, and how and why they used their power on the ground, can help us understand their maneuvering in their social roles as well as the precise ends they may have had in mind, thereby elucidating something of the nature power in the 13th century.

⁵⁵ Birrell 1988, 156. The gentry were typically the target of fining, but the peasants were fined as well. Who suffered more is a matter of debate, but surely all parties suffered together, as peasant and lord were intrinsically (and fiscally) linked together; fining one directly affected the other.

⁵⁶ Powicke 1962, 364–366.

ABUSE – Peter de Neville, Forester of Rutland Forest

The rage of a wild boar is able to spoil more than one wood.

M.P. Tilley, *A Dictionary of the Proverbs of England in the 16th
and 17th Centuries*

In the following chapter the royal forest system will be examined by focusing on the fate of one royal forester. The example will serve as prism through which the forest system as a whole can be better dissected and therefore its agents and their goals understood. Here we see a forester – Peter de Neville – charged with safeguarding the forest but acting more or less as a tyrannical lord, with his own ends in mind. As royal favor was the ultimate vouchsafe of status in medieval England, de Neville was ultimately dependent upon the king for his position in the forest and thus, we assume, Peter would have had a vested interest in not abusing his office. Peter, however, eventually was stripped of his position for malicious abuse of the forest. This would seem to be a clear-cut example of an abusive forester who fell from royal grace due to malfeasance. And indeed Peter has often been held up as the archetypical example of the evil medieval forester. (Turner tellingly called his actions ‘shameful.’)⁵⁷ However, the case of Peter de Neville was more complex than that. Also, the abuses attributed to him should rightly be viewed in the context of the turbulent era in British history that marked the end of the reign of King Henry III (1220–1272). And, although Peter was eventually outlawed for his misdeeds in the forest, our goal here will be to examine *why* he acted as he did. What goals did he have in mind? Were they inane, or was there a distinguishable logic behind them?

⁵⁷ Turner 1897, xvii.

Peter de Neville

Peter de Neville, like many foresters of his age, came into his position by way of inheritance; he was a forester of fee. The de Neville family had been chief foresters of Rutland Forest since the early 12th century and, as was typical of foresters of fee, they paid an annual rent of 40 shillings to the king for this privilege.⁵⁸ That Peter and his family should have to pay the king rather than vice versa is understandable in that as chief foresters they enjoyed a number of privileges in Rutland by way of the office, such as rights to use various resources and a portion of the fines collected. The de Neville family clearly gained financially from the deal.⁵⁹ The king, for his part, gained the lion's share of the fines generated by the forest system,⁶⁰ but also secured a loyal vassal who could be counted on to safeguard the royal rights in the forest and administer the law in his name. Thus the interplay of services and loyalty for fealty and privileges was at the heart of Peter's place in Rutland Forest as well as his place in its local power structures.

Rutland Forest was a very typical medieval English forest in that it was not very heavily wooded.⁶¹ Rutland was likely less than 20% wooded during the era and farming would have been the mainstay of the local economy. In this sense, the woodlands that we see in the records should be viewed more as accessory resources (providing wood and woodland pasture and some marketable goods such as charcoal) used primarily in the nearby manors, the fundamental units of the English economy. Also, some of the wooded areas of Rutland were in fact private deer parks, fenced off from the general forest but subject to the authority of the forester – something which caused a great deal of friction between forester and park owner.⁶² Rutland Forest was an agricultural forest; and through his duty of

⁵⁸ SPF 45–46. The fine rolls also mention other debts owed to the king which seem to stem from abuses during Peter's father's tenure as forester (Cal. FR Henry III C 60/47 and Cal. FR 34 Henry III 304).

⁵⁹ SPF 45–46. To give an idea of the value of the privileges, after Peter lost the position his son Theobald paid the incumbent forester 240 shillings per annum for life to be quit of his claim. The rent for the position remained 40 shillings (Clough 1998, 340–341).

⁶⁰ Griffin 2003, 27–28.

⁶¹ Rackham 1998b, 50–52.

⁶² Cantor 1980, 17–18.

overseeing resource usages in the forest, Peter would have been intrinsically involved with the machinery of the local manors – and thus with politicking with the local lords over access to resources.

Peter's career as a forest administrator, however, was abruptly altered by the failed rebellion which came to be known as the Second Barons' War (1264–1267). The war, a baronial uprising against the policies of King Henry III, found particular support in the English Midlands. Almost all of the barons and great lords that held sway in Rutland Forest rebelled. The most prominent of these were Richard Gravesend (bishop of Lincoln) and Simon de Montfort (earl of Leicester), but many other local lords also adhered to their cause as well.⁶³ Fortuitously, de Neville chose to remain loyal to the king and served on the royalist side in the war.⁶⁴ In this he was rather a unique case: he likely represented the only notable local adherent to the royalist cause in the entire county of Rutland.⁶⁵ In reward for his loyalty, King Henry privileged Peter and installed him as overseer of estates that had been expropriated from the rebellious barons.⁶⁶ As forester, however, Peter would seem to have exceeded accepted norms. Eventually his excesses led to a royal inquisition in 1269 which stripped him of his office. In this sense, Peter is a good candidate for investigating the limits of the power and rights of a chief forester in that he exceeded them and was accordingly punished.

The inquisition makes quite clear that de Neville was a fairly typical forester in that he widely abused his position for financial and personal gain.⁶⁷ The 1269 inquisition accuses Peter of everything from illicitly selling timber to illegally jailing his enemies.⁶⁸ Illicit sales (or gifting) of wood was a crime the foresters were often accused of in the records. In Peter's case however the scope of the illegal felling was fairly exceptional: Over the course of a dozen years, some 7,000 oaks were allegedly cut and sold to wood sellers, lime burners and charcoal burners, amounting to an

⁶³ Phillips 1912, 71.

⁶⁴ Clough 1998, 335–336; Young 1996, 88.

⁶⁵ Phillips 1912, 71. The king's brother Richard of Cornwall, who was not a local man, was another example, as was John de Warenne, earl of Surrey.

⁶⁶ Young 1996, 88–92; Cal. FR Henry III 48/102.

⁶⁷ Hereditary foresters would seem to have been particularly notorious abusers, which is logical given their rather secure position. See Turner 1901, xvi–xvii.

⁶⁸ SPF 44–53.

estimated 7,000 shillings⁶⁹ in grift – monies which rightly belonged to the king.⁷⁰ Peter also used his office to appropriate other resources ‘to the injury of the king.’ The inquisition mentions de Neville pocketing monies for *agistment*, that is, the right (for a small fee) to fatten one’s pigs on the acorns of the forest during the autumn, a critically important privilege amongst forest dwellers.⁷¹ In Peter’s case, he is accused not only of stealing the fees but also of agisting more animals than the forest could handle and (illegally) agisting his own pigs, nearly 300 per year, totaling some 940 shillings of damage.⁷² Such misuse of the forest, aside from cutting into the king’s pocket, would also have had the effect of damaging the local manors by hindering their access to the resources of the forest. While illegal wood sales and agistment alone might seem fairly insignificant, on a wider scale any limitation on exploiting the forest would have represented a general burden to the locals.⁷³ The inquisition estimates that the *estimable* damages in fines and fees expropriated since the last inquisition totaled some 11,000 shillings, added to which likely was an inestimable amount of smaller, insignificant fines.⁷⁴ Here we should recall that Peter paid only 40 shillings per year for his office.

Aside from exploiting the material resources of the forest, a chief forester like Peter might also burden the local residents by surcharging the forest with excess foresters. As chief forester, Peter would likely have had several underforesters in his charge. Tradition dictated that the local population maintain and sustenance these foresters. But a sly forester might keep in his employ an excessive number of underforesters which the locals would duly have to maintain. These underforesters were essentially expected to live off the land. As discussed earlier, the records often refer to foresters ‘collecting’ the goods due to them (their sustenance), from seemingly unwilling locals. The inquisition into Peter’s deeds in

⁶⁹ A note about currencies: As many of the fines cited in this chapter are quite small, I shall refer to fines in terms of shillings. In the following chapter and thereafter pounds will be the favored denomination. The conversion rate is 20 shillings = 1 pound. It should be remembered, however, that in medieval England both denominations were in fact purely abstract: Numismatically, no such coin as shilling or pound existed during the era; only pennies existed in coin form. For a brief introduction, see Powicke 1966, 316–318.

⁷⁰ SPF 44–45.

⁷¹ Albarella 2006, 77; Bechmann 1990, 21.

⁷² SPF 51.

⁷³ Bechmann 1990, 256–258.

⁷⁴ SPF 45.

Rutland Forest duly sets the ideal number of underforesters for Rutland, specifying that six foresters are sufficient to guard the forest, as customarily had been the case, implying that de Neville was guilty of surcharging the forest with too many underforesters.⁷⁵ Underforesters might also aggravate the countryside by extorting fines of their own. The inquisition cites a certain Thomas de Salford whom for several years Peter had allowed to charge carts entering the forest *chiminage*. *Chiminage* rightly was a small fine charged for carters passing through the forest, a toll of sorts. However, whereas Peter's office included the privilege to collect *chiminage*, his underforesters' certainly did not, as the inquest points out.⁷⁶ The records would seem to indicate that Peter was allowing Thomas, who himself may have received no salary as an underforester, to generate his own livelihood by illegally fining the traffic through the forest. On one instance, a carter complained and de Salford fined him an extra 2 shillings on the spot and jailed him – illegally – in Peter's castle. Peter later charged the carter an additional 7 shillings to secure his release.⁷⁷ Such actions, aside from being illegal, would have represented quite a burden to the local Rutland populace. Instances like these would indicate that Peter seems to have been pressing the limits of his power – not an uncommon tendency for a forester, though.

However, what makes de Neville's an exceptional case, and what likely eventually led to his fall from grace was the *scope* and *target* of his abuses. As the forest court records show, particularly prominent amongst the targets of his abuse were members of the local gentry associated with the losing side in the Second Barons' War. The forester of Rutland indeed would have been well placed to take vengeance on the losing side: the rebellion had received most of its support from the Midlands counties and de Neville was one of the few authorities in Rutland after the royalist victory. As mentioned, Peter himself was given custodianship of baronial lands seized into the king's hand, an indicator that he was privileged to take part in the royal retribution.⁷⁸ In this sense, some of Peter's actions could be viewed as stemming from the royal policy of punishing the losing side, a

⁷⁵ SPF 52.

⁷⁶ SPF 46, 51–52.

⁷⁷ SPF 52.

⁷⁸ Cal. FR Henry III 48/102; Powicke 1966, 511–513.

punishment which was occurring all across the country at the time.⁷⁹ Throughout England, the lands of the disgraced barons were being plundered, their estates fleeced, and their tenants harassed. As we shall see, Peter's actions as chief forester of Rutland offer good evidence that he was consciously taking part in the royal policy of retribution. In this, he used this position well, appropriating lands for himself and his family.⁸⁰

If the goal of the king was to punish the rebellious barons by systematically pillaging their lands, many of whom were either dead or in exile, the actual brunt of the retribution would have fallen on the lesser lords and landowners, who, without powerful overlords to protect them, now found themselves the target of the royalists' ire. A typical example of how this was happening in Rutland is Peter's dealings with the folk of Liddington manor, which was owned by the Richard of Gravesend, rebellious bishop of Lincoln, who was in exile at the time.⁸¹ The inquest of 1269 includes several cases in which Peter would seem to have systematically targeted the residents of the vill, which lay within Rutland Forest.⁸² We see, for example, three complaints that Peter had extorted money on the spot from locals caught stealing hares.⁸³ In one case of alleged hare hunting, the inquiry notes that Peter had 'imprisoned Peter the son of Constantine of Liddington . . . and bound him with iron chains' and that the accused had even been compelled to pay two pence (1/6s.) for a bench to sit on because the jail cell was flooded with water!⁸⁴ The fines, as the inquest points out, rightly belonged to the king, and by law such fines should have been determined and paid in court. Private imprisonment was also illegal, it was noted.

That other and more prominent men under the bishop of Lincoln's fealty were generally being hassled as well is exhibited in the case of Giles le Rus. A complaint in the inquest notes that le Rus, who owned a manor that abutted the forest by way of his office as the archdeacon of Northampton, had been unjustly

⁷⁹ Powicke 1966, 510, 548, 553–554.

⁸⁰ Young 1996, 92.

⁸¹ Page 1935, 191.

⁸² For extent of Rutland Forest, see James 1981, 89.

⁸³ SPF 49–50.

⁸⁴ SPF 50.

fined by Peter.⁸⁵ However factual the accused's crime may have been (he allegedly was keeping greyhounds in the forest), the archdeacon was under the feudal fealty of the bishop of Lincoln, and thus the bishop's man, and would have been an open target for extortion while the bishop was in exile. Additionally, le Rus' fine was a hefty 100 shillings, taken on the spot, which seems fairly high for the crime.⁸⁶ Indeed, several of the complaints against Peter cited at the inquest are from persons with direct feudal links to the bishop of Lincoln's faction (See Fig 1.). And although Peter does seem to have harassed a few locals associated with the royalist side, the fines are notably lesser. For example, the inquest cites the fining of a certain William Bassett (of a manor under the earl of Warwick, a rebel-later-royalist in the war).⁸⁷ But although William Bassett and le Rus were both fined for the same offence, in this case le Rus' fine was 10 times higher.

Fines assessed to royalists are nearly non-existent. A few aberrations notwithstanding, a pattern of Peter's targeting becomes readily evident. Numerically, the majority of the fines cited in the inquest – and by far the largest ones – were directed against parties whose overlords had rebelled against the king and thus were in prison, exiled or experiencing the royal displeasure.⁸⁸ For instance, Richard the prior of Launde, whose feudal overlord was the bishop of Lincoln, was amerced a fine for allegedly having a deer wander into his deer park – somewhat understandably as Launde Abbey lay just outside the forest boundary. This fact notwithstanding, in a fitting act of symbolic violence, Peter caused the fence of the Abbey's park to be burned down and compelled the prior to give him

⁸⁵ The manor, known as the Prebendal Manor, was situated in Empingham and appears in Giles' name. Greenway 1977, 30–32.

⁸⁶ One would typically see higher-ups paying such sizable fines. For a poaching a deer, the scale seems to range from 200 shillings per deer for a man of status down to 20 shillings for a lesser freeholder. Occasionally, the fines would be nothing if the offender was poor. Currie–Herbert cite average venison fines of 40s., see Currie–Herbert 1996, 453–477. Based on the New Forest Documents, we would imagine some 40s. for a poaching offence; the lesser crime of keeping greyhounds in the forest would of course have incurred a lesser fine. Birrell cites fines for venison ranging around 20–40s., usually for repeat offenders. Birrell 1988, 154–156.

⁸⁷ SPF 47. Although the earl of Warwick eventually adhered to the royalist side, at the war's onset he sided (and fought) with the rebels, thus making him a vacillator of sorts. See, for example, 'William Maudit' ODNB.

⁸⁸ ODNB 'William Gravesend, Bishop of Lincoln.'

400 shillings to settle the issue.⁸⁹ Comparing this reaction to the 26½ shillings for a poaching offence extracted from the prior of Weston Priory, which was not under the lordship of the bishop of Lincoln or associated with the rebel side, gives a ready idea of the disparity of the fines.⁹⁰ Peter likely had other issues with Launde Abbey as well, as it was closely linked with the Martival family, whom we shall become further acquainted with below.⁹¹

Another large fine mentioned in the inquisition into Peter's stewardship of Rutland was the 320 shillings exacted from Richard of Whitchurch.⁹² While the alleged crime is fairly notable (poaching a deer) and might explain the heavy fine, Peter de Montfort – a head conspirator in the uprising, killed in 1265 – is known to have owned a Whitchurch manor which might explain why the fine for the crime is so high.⁹³ Although the inquest seems to imply that the extortion occurred after de Montfort was already dead, i.e. in the aftermath of the war, this fact mattered little: alive or dead, the rebels' estates were fair game. Although the exact office of the said Richard is not evident from the sources, with such a high fine extracted on the spot we could postulate that he was a bailiff of de Montfort and thus in a position to pay such a fine. If Richard of Whitchurch was indeed a bailiff associated with de Montfort's Whitchurch estate, then 320 shillings would be a sizable fine indeed: a few years later the entire manor was estimated to be worth 600 shillings. This provides an idea of the scale of Peter's extortions.⁹⁴

⁸⁹ As Peter owned the adjacent manor of Leighfield, his rage may have been further fueled by the fact that the Prior of Launde was his neighbor. Additionally, the abbey's lands were within the bounds of the forest during Peter's father's tenure and had recently been disafforested, thus we can imagine a long history of animosity between the two parties. For boundaries of the Forest of Rutland, see James 1980, 89.

⁹⁰ SPF 47. The offences in question were, of course, not identical but they were similar. The priors were not men of equal riches either (Launde would seem to have been a more valuable estate). But the magnitude of the difference in fines clearly exceeds the difference in value, (cf. Page 1908, 163–164, for Weston. For Launde Abbey, see Hoskins 1954, 10–13.) An alien (i.e. foreign) cell like Weston would likely not have drawn any especial ire from Peter.

⁹¹ Martivals often appear as priors during and around Peter's tenure as forester. See, Hoskins 1954, 10–13.

⁹² SPF 50.

⁹³ Salzman 1948, 209–213.

⁹⁴ Salzman 1948, 209–213. The manor was appraised on the death of de Montfort in 1265, thus the appraisal is contemporaneous with the fine. Also, if Richard were a bailiff of de Montfort, he would presumably have been travelling around the region attending to the de Montforts' affairs, thereby explaining his presence in Rutland Forest – some fifty miles distant from his (ostensible) namesake manor. In this sense, we could imagine Richard as inquiring into the affairs of Uppingham on behalf of recently pardoned Peter de Montfort, the younger, who would soon see the manor reinstated in

Peter's fining of Henry Murdoch is another example of how the estates of defeated rebels were targeted. In the inquest of 1269 Henry Murdoch had several complaints against the forester of Rutland. Peter was accused of extorting 267 shillings out of Henry on the claim that Henry's son was 'an evil doer' with respect to the venison. He also extorted 100 shilling from Henry for having mastiffs in the forest,⁹⁵ and Peter had allegedly fined Henry for his ploughmen taking mastiffs into the forest while they worked in a meadow there. Peter also fined Henry when his oxen got loose and wandered within the forest bounds (67 shillings).⁹⁶ Also, adjacent to the complaints voiced by Henry, we find Peter repeatedly and inconveniently calling the local villages to court (apparently without due cause), and then fining them when they failed to attend fully. This would have been a way for de Neville to fleece Henry by fining his villeins and freeholders. Murdoch's overlord was the famous rebel earl of Leicester, Simon de Montfort, and thus Henry would have been a likely target for retribution. Indeed in tone the fines seem somewhat heavy-handed for what appears to have been fairly slight infringements, particularly since Murdoch's manor bordered the forest on two fronts.⁹⁷ Murdoch probably also held lands within the forest, which would explain much of the animosity between the two.

Aside from his links to the rebel side, Murdoch is also an interesting case in that he was a verderer in Rutland Forest and thus a forest official himself.⁹⁸ This fact notwithstanding, his job as a verderer was not necessarily complementary to that of Peter's as forester. Indeed, it seems that within the forest system one of the verderer's primary duties was to keep an eye on the forester and vice versa.⁹⁹ This likely would have been a point of contention between de Neville and Murdoch, and, as we shall see more clearly in the case of Walter de Kent, highlights one of the reasons that competing factions tended to form within royal forests: contrary interests. In the inquisition, the verderers appear as sworn witnesses and presented

his name. Indeed, bailiffs would seem to have been common malefactors of the forest: see, for example, NFD 72–73.

⁹⁵ SPF 50.

⁹⁶ SPF 50. Technically, Peter might have claimed that Henry was guilty of illegally pasturing, a commonly allegation in the forest records.

⁹⁷ Lee–McKinley 1964, 303–308; James, 1981, 82, 89.

⁹⁸ SPF 43.

⁹⁹ Turner 1901, xix–xx; Stagg 1979, 22.

much evidence against Peter.¹⁰⁰ That Henry's manor neighbored Peter's own manor of Allextun would seem to have added to the animosity between the two.¹⁰¹

Although many of the discrepancies in fines may be explained by the fact that the offenders were of differing status (i.e. richer or poorer), and even bring to mind Robin Hood's 'fining' travelers on the spot based on how much money they travel with and their honesty in disclosing it, the pertinent fact here is that almost all of the fines cited in the inquisition are directed at anti-royalists, and that the majority of the most prominent fines were clearly directed at men of status. Table 1 indicates that of the 22 persons specified in the inquiry twelve can directly be linked to prominent rebels and 4 can be linked to barons who at one point or another sided with the rebels during the war. The remaining 6 persons appear to be either outsiders (clergy associated with alien cells or Frenchmen from the continent), and therefore somewhat politically on the sidelines, or locals whose loyalties cannot be traced. In any case, the fines of the unknown persons were relatively small, typically being of an order 10 times lesser than the fines against those associated with the Montfortian rebels.¹⁰² The salient issue here is that the majority and by far the largest finds are clearly associated with rebel adherents. In the case of persons under the fealty of notorious rebels, the fines are exceptionally large, and even when they are not it would seem that this was only the case because no more affluent targets existed in Rutland, i.e. for the bishop of Lincoln we see only a few small fry being harassed (~5s.) alongside a few larger fines, of which the prior of Launde (400s.) was one.¹⁰³ However, in the case of other prominent rebels, the baron Montforts and Robert de Ferrer, earl of Derby, the fines are uniformly

¹⁰⁰ SPF 44, 47. The verderers were no angels either; they too were duly fined at the inquest for their misdeeds. See SPF 46.

¹⁰¹ Lee-McKinley 1964, 77–81

¹⁰² Included in the category of 'unknown overlord' is the interesting William le Rider, one of Peter's underforesters who seems to have simply run afoul of his master's wrath. The fine cited in the inquisition (for trespass against the forest – a fairly ludicrous pretense given the context – was 20s., which may well have been the exact salary Peter owed him as an underforester. A similar salary occurs in HOP v.3, 15, 229, which Turton takes to be generally indicative (see Turton 1896, xxi). Cox cites salaries of 60s. in 1360. See Cox 1915, 20.

¹⁰³ It is clear, however, that the Bishop of Lincoln was a general target of vendetta after the war: the Bishop complains of several of his churches being occupied violently by 'lay forces' after the war, one of which in fact lay just outside of Rutland Forest. It is tempting to see Peter's hand in the affair. That 20 years later Thomas de Neville is accused of forcefully occupying another church of the Bishop's in Rutland would seem to make Peter's involvement all the more probable: the vendetta lived on. See TNA SC 8/201/11737 and SC 8/201/11731.

high, ranging from 40s.–320s. (see Table 1). Although the inquisition does evidence a few persons associated with the royalist side, e.g. the earl of Warwick, as being fined, it should be kept in mind that the earl was somewhat of a vacillator in the war: he only eventually chose the royalist side. In this sense, to Peter the earl's manors might have seemed like fair game in the aftermath of the war. At any rate, the retribution against the earl's men was fairly low-scale, confined to only 3 smallish fines (see Table 1). Another important fact to bear in mind about the fines cited in the 1269 inquisition is that most of the fines are exceptionally high: An earlier inquest during Peter's tenure, dating from 1256, cites fines for venison offences ranging from 1s.–40s.; the later fines are of a completely different class and explain why the Turner chose to translate them as 'extortions.'¹⁰⁴

Peter's treatment of the de Martival family was another clear-cut case of exacting retribution from rebels, although it also had interesting local connections. The Martival family was based in Noseley Manor, which lay just outside of Rutland Forest but earlier had been included in it, and was headed by a certain Anketimus de Martival. Anketimus had been a Montfortian during the war and seems to have faced the royal displeasure as a result of his dealings with the rebels.¹⁰⁵ And while Anketimus is shown leniency by the king after the peace¹⁰⁶, his conduct had been treasonous enough that the king confiscated his lands in 1264.¹⁰⁷ In this sense, Peter likely felt free to target the Martivals, imprisoning William de Martival – twice – and amercing him a fine of 100 shillings for poaching in the forest. Additionally, Peter seized 'two cows, of the price of 20 shillings,' and 'twenty heaped quarters of wheat, the price of each quarter 4 shillings,' valued at 120 shillings from Alice, whom said-William seems to have been the guardian of.¹⁰⁸ At the inquisition, the verderers and regards of the forest all swore that William was no evil-doer of the forest and he was duly acquitted.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ Page 1935, 191.

¹⁰⁵ Ridgeway 1998, 82.

¹⁰⁶ For leniency towards Anketimus and other rebels, see Ridgeway 1998, 82–83.

¹⁰⁷ FR Henry III 48/101 (14 April 1264).

¹⁰⁸ SPF 49, 51.

¹⁰⁹ SPF 49.

Victim	Fine	Manor	Overlord	Lord's Faction
Parson of Harbury	540 s.	Harbury	Robert de Ferrers	(rebel – in prison)
Bailiff of Bardolfs*	530 s.	unknown	William Bardolf	(rebel baron – prison)
Robert de Neville	480 s.	Ropesley?	William Gravesend?	(rebel bishop – in exile)
Henry Murdoch	433 s.	Stockerston	Simon de Montfort	(head rebel – dead)
Prior of Launde	400 s.	Launde Priory	William Gravesend	(rebel bish. – in exile)
Richard de Whitchurch	329 s.	Uppingham?	Peter de Montfort	(rebel baron – dead)
Hugh de Uppingham	200 s.	Uppingham	Peter de Montfort	(rebel baron – dead)
Alice Martival	120 s.	Noseley	Anketimus Martival	(rebel – in exile)
Giles le Rus	100 s.	Empinham	William Gravesend	(rebel bishop – in exile)
William Martival	100 s.	Noseley	Anketimus Martival	(rebel – in exile)
Robert Pilton	69 s.	Pilton	Earl of Warwick	(rebel later royalist)
Ralph de Kirkby	20 s.	Luffenham	Earl of Warwick	(rebel later royalist)
Ralph de Senlis	27 s.	<i>unknown</i>	<i>unknown</i>	<i>unknown</i>
Prior of Weston	27 s.	Weston Priory	Alien cell	abroad
William le Rider	20 s.	Peter's own	Peter de Neville	–
John Uffington	20 s.	Uffington	<i>unknown</i>	<i>unknown</i>
Geoffrey Empingham	15 s.	Emphingham	William Gravesend	(rebel bishop – in exile)
Henry Gerard	13 s.	<i>unknown</i>	<i>unknown</i>	<i>unknown</i>
William Basset	10 s.	Luffenham	Earl of Warwick	(rebel later royalist)
Geoffrey de Liddington	7 s.	Liddington	William Gravesend	(rebel bishop – in exile)
Robert de Liddington	5 s.	Liddington	William Gravesend	(rebel bishop – in exile)
Peter de Liddington	1/6 s.	Liddington	William Gravesend	(rebel bishop – in exile)

Table 1. The extortions of Peter de Neville based on SPF. The table shows all persons named in the 1269 inquiry and their respective fines. Also noted is the manor of residence/business, as well as the identifiable overlord of the manor and the overlord's situation and factional affiliation at the time the fine occurred. Additionally, one individual (*) occurs in a separate inquiry mentioned in the Patent Rolls. The Rutland Forest inquiry of 1256 cites no fine higher than 40s.

Aside from being a prominent rebel (he was a steward and emissary of Simon de Montfort in the war), Anketimus de Martival was also sheriff of Rutland (1259–1272),¹¹⁰ that is, during the period when de Neville was active as chief forester of Rutland. This likely would have resulted in a great deal of friction

¹¹⁰ Anketimus was also closely associated with the de Montfort faction, as was his predecessor, Ralph de Greneham (in office 1254–1259), providing a sense of the natural alliances of the respective sides. For Anketin, see Ridgeway 1998, 69–70; for Ralph, see TNA SC 1/11/41

between the two (sheriffs during this era appear just as abusive of their powers as foresters) and may even explain why Peter chose to throw his lot in with the royalists.¹¹¹ Perhaps the animosity between the two officials, whose positions in some ways mirrored each the other,¹¹² was the ultimate cause of Peter's anti-rebel stance – this may have been a chance to settle scores with his bothersome well-connected neighbors. Indeed one prominent complaint in the inquisition, such a serious crime that the matter eventually went before the king, is that Peter had imprisoned people in his own castle.¹¹³ Detaining prisoners was rightly the responsibility of the sheriff, Anketimus. With this in mind, Peter's imprisoning of William de Martival would have been quite the affront to the Martival family – a jailing of the jailor in a sense. Peter's egregious treatment of the Martivals indeed does have a twinge of personal vendetta to it, of which Peter seems to have been quite keen.¹¹⁴

The Patent Rolls preserve another example that highlights the animosity between the two sides: In 1267 Peter was ordered before the sheriffs of Nottingham and Leicester, accused of violently seizing Martival lands and plundering a bailiff of 530 shillings when he attempted to regain the contested lands.¹¹⁵ Naturally, the rightful overlords of these Martival lands, William and Thomas Bardolf, had been rebels during the war and in fact were probably in prison at the time of the incident, further underscoring the timing and nature of Peter's exploits.¹¹⁶ In fact it

¹¹¹ A 1258 royal proclamation to the men of Rutland gives an example of shrieval misdeeds (*Royal Letters* v.2, 363–365). This proclamation details the excesses of the aforementioned predecessor of Anketin, Ralph de Greneham.

¹¹² See Powicke 1966, 95–102 for discussion of sheriff's responsibilities. For interplay between sheriff and forester in Rutland, see *Royal Letters* v.1, 345–348.

¹¹³ SPF 49, 50.

¹¹⁴ Peter's penchant for revenge is well evidenced in an interesting anecdote that occurred at the end of the Barons' War. On passing through a village in Leicestershire, one of Peter's men was insulted and slightly injured by some local men who apparently favored the rebel cause. Upon discovering the slight, Peter quickly exacted firm vengeance from the entire village, to the tune of 30 shillings, even going so far as to break into the church where the culprits had taken sanctuary (itself a serious breach of ecclesiastical law) and drag them out into the streets to atone, threatening to put the entire village to the torch – an affair that the king later judged 'excessive'. The incident is cited in Powicke 1966, 509–510.

¹¹⁵ Patent Rolls HIII, v.6, 158–159. The lands in question lie in Hallaton and Brounston, adjacent to de Neville estates. For their proximity, see Lee–McKinley 1964, 122–133. It is also noteworthy that Anketimus has likely been reinstated as the sheriff of Leicester at this point.

¹¹⁶ 'William Bardolf' ODNB. Peter was eventually pardoned of these crimes (Clough 1998, 336). The Bardolf brothers were probably in prison in 1265/6. Their complaints come to the king's ear in 1267.

was actually their bailiff that was plundered trying to recover the Martival lands.

A similar example is Robert de Neville, who, although many historians have assumed a connection, was likely not a relative of Peter. The inquest of 1269 accuses Peter of having falsely amerced Robert 400 shillings, with an additional 53 tacked on for another offence.¹¹⁷ Given the pattern of Peter's actions, with a fine of this size we would image, a) that he was a man with access to such funds, and b) that he was associated with the rebel side. It is possible that he belonged within the officialdom of the bishop of Lincoln, and – although this cannot be said with firm certainty – we can tentatively place him a bailiff or steward of Vaudey Abbey, located just north of the forest, and thus a target comparable to the aforementioned bailiff of the Bardolfs.¹¹⁸ The fines too are quite comparable (453/530 shillings) and we might imagine men of similar status or position. Indeed part of Robert de Neville's fine was paid with a horse (valued at 53 s. in the inquest), which would imply a man with itinerant duties.

At this point in our examination of Neville's dealings in Rutland Forest it is important to note that although Peter was one of the only royal adherents in the area during the Second Barons' War, he was not the only one. Of interest to the pattern of Peter's transgressions is the fact that no allegations of extortion were made by persons under the fealty of the lord of Oakham (Richard of Cornwall, 1st earl of Cornwall, the king's loyal brother) nor the by persons under the lord of Stamford (John de Warenne, 6th earl of Surrey). Both earls were very significant overlords in the area; Richard had vast holdings within and without Rutland Forest and John was lord over much land on the eastern fringe of the forest (see Figure 1).¹¹⁹ We would expect at least some mention of fines against these lords' men. Such

¹¹⁷ SPF 50.

¹¹⁸ The Chancery records (TNA C 241/25/205) mention a Robert de Neville of Ropsley, where the Abbey of Vaudey owned a grange nearby the forest (Page 1906, 143–145). One generation later we also see a de Neville active in Lincolnshire as a clerk for the bishop of Lincoln and we also see a William (de Neville?) de Ropsley active in maintaining the Bishop's affairs early in the 14th century (Clubley 1965, 18). The Bishop's diocese of course included Rutland Forest. And although other de Nevilles related to Peter were living in Rutland at the time, there is no indication that the brothers Robert and Ralph mentioned in the inquisition were related to Peter (see Page 1935, 221–227). Peter would not seem to have been fleecing his relatives, contrary to what many historians have implied, e.g. Young 1996, 88–89.

¹¹⁹ For Warenne and Stamford, see Roffe 2011, 'Stamford' (internet publishing) and 'John de Warenne' ODNB. For Richard, see ODNB 'Richard of Cornwall' and Page 1935, 5–27.

mention is, however, entirely lacking: no manor overlorded or even associated with the earls is mentioned in the inquest, nor are there any fines associated with any royalist overlord for that matter. This would seem to signify that Peter was wise enough to not hassle anybody well connected to the royalist side.¹²⁰ Also quite notable is that no names associated with Peter's own holdings in the forest, the manor of Leighfield or his castle at Allextun or other lands, nor are there any names that can be associated with Preston manor, the rebel estate Peter was maintaining for the king. This would imply that he was not exploiting his own tenants – at least not by way of his position as forester.¹²¹ With this in mind, it appears then that Peter was harrying nearly every rebel manor in Rutland, sparing only those manors on the royalist side.

Indeed when one bears in mind that the fines mentioned in the inquiry would only have been those deemed noteworthy, the scale of Peter's misdeeds becomes all the more sizable. Small-scale extortions like charging *chiminage* or hindering access to common resources would likely have had the ultimate impact of infringing on the rights of nearly anybody who lived within or had business in the forest, as we saw was the cases of Richard of Whitchurch and the Bardolfs' bailiff. On a long enough timeframe, such petty extortions would have represented a not insignificant draining of money from the Rutland countryside. The irony of the situation is that Peter's actions occurred at a time when he was the sole authority responsible for preventing royalists from exacting revenge on ex-rebels in Rutland!¹²² In such a case, with their overlords dead, exiled or facing the royal disfavor, the plundered bailiffs and manor holders would have had scant possibility to seek redress: their protectors had vanished, leaving them helplessly open to exploitation. This was the situation in the Midlands in the aftermath of the baronial uprising.

¹²⁰ Although in 1275 we do see Peter fining Oakham tenants, this presumably was after Richard had died (1272) – the interim being a typical time to challenge rights and authority of others. Additionally, Henry of Almain, Richard's heir apparent, was off crusading at this time. Page 1935, 5–27. Peter was outlawed in 1274; thus the fines must have come earlier. It is also interesting that Oakham manor had deer parks in the forest – which typically would have been a source friction between forester and park owner. See Cantor 1980, 18.

¹²¹ Page 1935, 5–27.

¹²² Young 1996, 88.

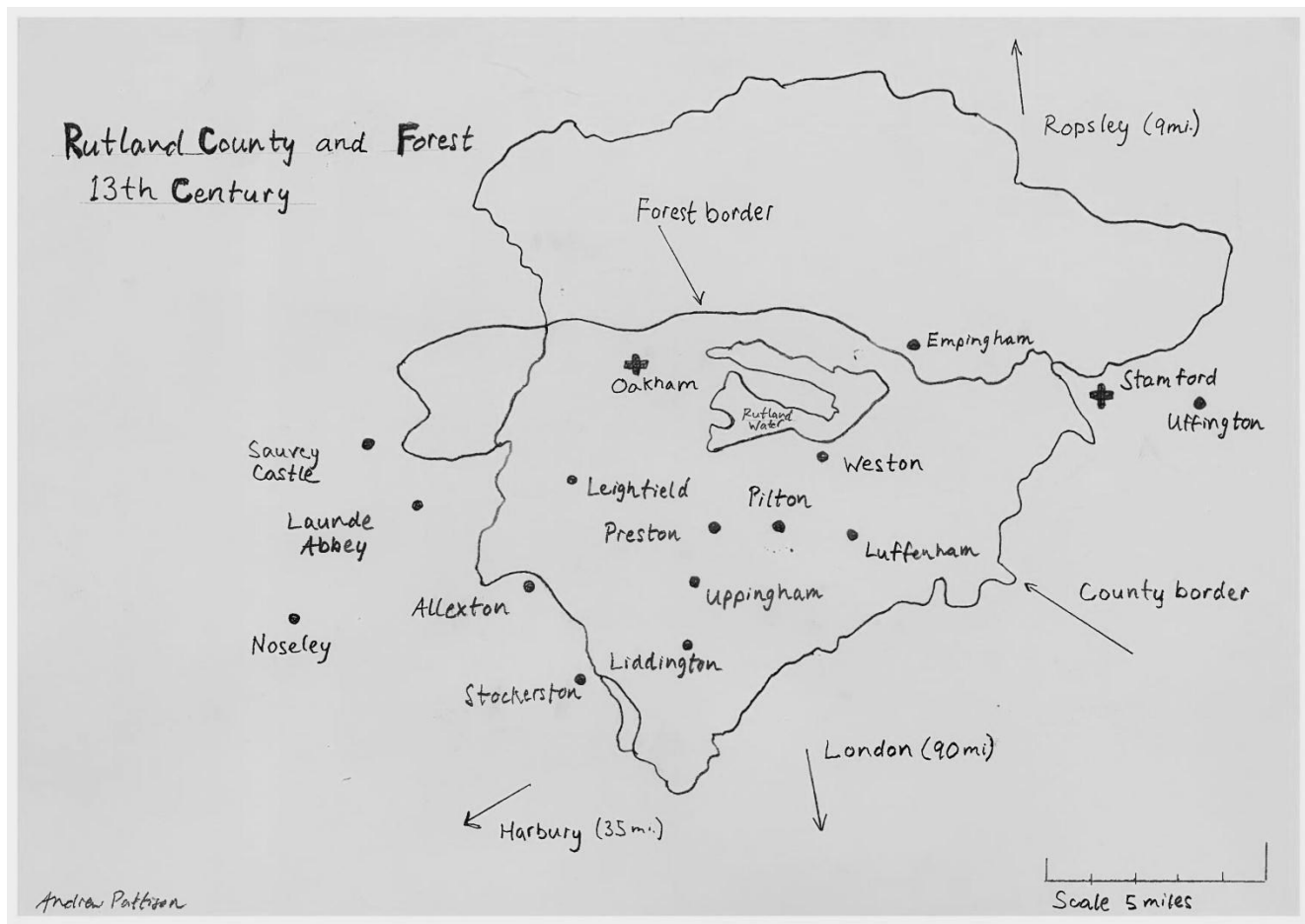


Figure 1. Map of Rutland County and Forest showing the scope of Peter de Neville's extortions based on the 1269 inquiry. Peter de Neville was lord of Sauvey Castle, Allextton, and Leighfield; Preston was in his charge after the Second Barons' War. All other manors shown are associated with fines, showing the geographical proximity of Peter's targets. The areas north and east of the forest were associated with the lords of Oakham and Stamford, respectively, i.e. royalists Richard of Cornwall and the earl of Surrey.

Peter, however, should not be judged overly harshly. Effectually, what he was doing was only a small part of a somewhat royally sanctioned policy of *weakening* the agents who had rebelled by reducing their estates.¹²³ This course, which was accepted and even espoused on occasion by the king, was prudent but only to a certain point. Denying the rebels their lands permanently would have been

¹²³ Powicke 1966, 510–513.

unthinkable in a feudal society that was based on notions of power-sharing and balance, fealty and homage, such as England in the 13th century. Ultimately, reconciliation was viewed as the only possible course for securing cohesion of the realm.¹²⁴ Indeed, the Second Barons' War was in fact mainly fought over the very issue of power-sharing.

With respect to royal authority, however, such a system, which invested enormous power in widely diffused actors (like Peter), ultimately needed a foundation more stable than simply loyalty for privileges; it needed a network of competent officials that could undertake the (ever-growing) tasks of government and sufficiently police itself at the same time.¹²⁵ Peter de Neville's role in the forest was shaped by just such needs and evidences the elementary problem underlying such a scheme: he was loyal but he was not just, and in order to maintain his loyalty he must be paid with privileges (here the privilege to exploit), and in order to prod him to justness he needed to be kept in check by another agent who would demand similar privileges (again, to exploit). The fundamental issue here is that, somewhat paradoxically, both actors were expected to exploit the same resources, to draw water from the same well. During the aftermath of the Second Barons' War, this situation would have been extremely exacerbated and problematic. Indeed, this fundamental paradox may underlie the reason why Anketinus de Martival – though a very prominent rebel – was reinstated his lands and sheriff's position so quickly after the war, and why Peter stayed in power so long despite his politically loaded excesses.¹²⁶ Without another agent to police him, Peter would have spoiled the well. The same would have been true of Anketinus too.

In the 13th century, justice meant the critical ability of local agents, be they petty lord or freeholders, to seek redress to injustices through the influence of their overlords, which of course came at a cost – money, loyalty, privileges etc. This system was ruled by what we might call the *law of privilege*. Put simply, magnate affinity was the principal determinant of and safeguard to power on the ground; wider power structures in the realm served to coerce local feuding towards

¹²⁴ Ridgeway 1998, 83–84.

¹²⁵ Powicke 1966, 92–102.

¹²⁶ Ridgeway 1998, 82–84.

socially/politically accepted norms.¹²⁷ When this system of power checks vanished in the Midlands after the Second Barons' War, agents like Peter were free to exploit with little fear of reprisal. But only temporarily. The rebels eventually reconciled themselves to the king and by the end of the decade they (or their heirs) were slowly being reinstated their privileges. The 1269 inquiry into the happenings in Rutland Forest was a direct result of this shift: as the forgiven overlords began to filter back into their power roles, so too they began to reassert themselves and press for investigations into the wrongdoings they and theirs had suffered in the interim. In this sense, the inquiry of 1269 was a great reckoning for de Neville.

Conclusion

The case of Peter de Neville shows in general that much of the abuse traditionally heaped on the foresters was in fact not of an extraordinary nature. The actions of de Neville were hallmarked by a clear political calculus: nearly all the targets of his actions were associated with the losing side in an internal civil war – the defeated lords and barons of the Second Barons' War. Notably, Peter's actions were directed against the men under these lords, be they their manor workers (like the Liddingtons), officials (like the Bardolf steward), or their relations (like William de Martival). In this sense, Peter was attacking the barons vicariously; he was bleeding their men, the local power holders. However, it is critical to note that in attacking the barons vicariously, Peter was in fact attacking the very cornerstone of the feudal relationship: the lord's responsibility to protect persons under his fealty. Thus de Neville's actions could also be interpreted as a re-appropriation of power at the expense of other power players, here local lords and their baron overlords. Plundering a lord's bailiff was equivalent to appropriating that lord's authority – his ability to collect rents and administer justice – in his manors. Tellingly, of the highest fines cited in the inquest, one was clearly extracted from a bailiff, and an additional two could easily be postulated as the same (Robert de Neville and Richard of Whitchurch). It is important to note that men like these would have functioned to uphold and maintain local power structures in Rutland. This is a

¹²⁷ Ridgeway 1998, 85.

clear indication that Peter's ultimate goals involved enhancing his own position on a local level, but also a reminder that local power structure were always intrinsically linked with wider structures of power. Posturing such as this was surely an extension of the local feuding that took place in more stable times. (Peter certainly seems to have had a long history of problems with the Martivals, as did earlier de Neville foresters.¹²⁸) But such excesses as the records bear witness to were only possible so long as the rebel barons themselves were out of power/favor. In this sense, the situation in Rutland Forest after the Second Barons' War could be viewed as a case of a dramatic shift in prevailing (local) power complexions as a result of the general shift in (realm-wide) power structures brought about by the war. Peter's actions only become *excessive* when there was no one to challenge him. Doubtless many of the allegations against the foresters seen in the historical record were voiced by parties inherently at odds with the forester's position or perhaps articulated by agents in positions of diminished authority. They should therefore be taken with a grain of salt.

Whatever the true nature of the crimes Peter was committing after the war, he certainly was not punished for anything immediately. This is quite telling. It may be that, due to his loyal service during the war, de Neville was able to make some kind of amends with the king.¹²⁹ (He seems to have made amends for his father's excesses in 1250 as well.¹³⁰) In 1267 we still see him undertaking the king's business in nearby Norfolk, so Peter must have still enjoyed the king's confidence at that time.¹³¹ Indeed even after his forester's position had been taken into the king's hand after 1269, presumably due to the findings of the inquisition, Peter was quickly reinstated his office after presenting sureties for his trespasses.¹³²

Peter's eventual downfall however seems not to have been due to any wrongdoings as forester but rather to his refusal to accept that the political winds were shifting in the realm. His attitude regarding Preston manor is a fitting

¹²⁸ Rutland forest records from 1209 cite a Martival who appears to have been excessively fined, as well as malefactors from other manors that occur in the 1269 inquiry. See SPF 6–7.

¹²⁹ Peter indeed seems to have enjoyed the king's confidence during the war and was entrusted with responsibilities of great importance to the realm, such as being personally charged with preventing Simon de Montfort's widow from fleeing to France. See *Royal Letters v.2*, 292.

¹³⁰ Cal. FR Henry III 11/304.

¹³¹ Cal. PR Henry III v.6, 48.

¹³² Turner 1901, xvii.

example. During the rebellion, Preston had been taken into the king's hand and given to Peter's charge.¹³³ The rightful lord of the manor, Nicholas de Seagrave, had held out with other rebel adherents in the Isle of Ely, but eventually surrendered in 1267 after receiving assurances that he would be restored his lands.¹³⁴ For Peter, however, Preston likely seemed too good an opportunity to pass up and he was reluctant to return the manor to Seagrave.¹³⁵ The king had chosen a policy of reconciliation with the rebels and this act of disobedience, coupled with Peter's general behavior in Rutland, would seem to have sealed the forester's fate. Justice, however, was slow in coming. It was not until 1274, long after his crimes had come out in the inquiry, that he was finally outlawed, seemingly because he refused to concede any of the privileges he had appropriated in the aftermath of the war.¹³⁶ This pronouncement was actually not as harsh as it sounds, as it simply meant that Peter officially lost his privileges as a lord; his estate and offices were put in a sort of holding pattern. Eventually, too, it seems that local agents in the forest, likely with the support of their lords, forced an end to Peter's excesses: A document from around 1276 asserts that they 'halted the outlawry of Peter de Neville.'¹³⁷ Perhaps a belated leveling off of the post-bellum power imbalance effected this change. However, the infighting between the factions seems to have had a longevity typical of the age: Peter's son Thomas was still feuding with the bishop of Lincoln in the mid-1280s, and Thomas and his men were accused of violently occupying one of the Bishop's churches, quite tellingly in an area whose inclusion in the forest was disputed.¹³⁸

That Theobald even inherited his father's position should indeed be an indicator of the judgment of Peter's malfeasance. Taking advantage of the slow process that was royal power in the 13th century, Peter secured his estate and inheritance for Theobald. Notwithstanding a few legal stumbling blocks, his son fully reestablished his claim as forester of fee of Rutland in 1300, gaining much of

¹³³ Cal. FR Henry III, 48/102.

¹³⁴ The Duns. Chron., 246–247; ODNB 'Nicolas Segrave.'

¹³⁵ Page 1935, 88–91; Young 1996, 88–89.

¹³⁶ Turner suggests this. Turner 1901, xvii.

¹³⁷ TNA SC 8/201/10008.

¹³⁸ TNA SC 8/235/11731.

his lands and privileges already in 1275.¹³⁹ He went on to have a respectable career in Edward I's reign. This continuity between father and son should serve to guide our final judgment of Peter in particular and of the medieval sense of justice in general: the only concrete result of Peter's crimes was that the de Neville family lost the stewardship of Rutland Forest for a handful of years, tellingly at the very end of Peter's life.¹⁴⁰ (He died in 1276.) In keeping with the era's sense of justice, the de Neville family's privileges were simply *temporarily* revoked. Thus Peter's true triumph was in ultimately securing for his son the surreptitious achievements he had gained as forester of Rutland.

¹³⁹ Young 1996, 60–61; Page 1908, 253–254.

¹⁴⁰ The keepership had been given to one Ralph Malore in 1280 (for life *pro forma*). This development was likely the only concrete punishment the de Neville family received for Peter's misdeeds. Alternatively, the interim appointment may simply stem from Theobald's being underage: in 1300, i.e. when he formally inherits the keepership, he is mentioned as being 'over thirty,' and likely only then would have been considered old enough for the responsibility. Peter too had seen his father's position temporarily fall into the hands of another forester before he inherited. See Clough 1998, 334, 341 and Page 1908, 253–254.

Contestation – Walter de Kent, Forester of New Forest

Where the deer is slain some of her blood will lie.

M.P. Tilley, *A Dictionary of the Proverbs of England in the 16th
and 17th Centuries*

In the following chapter we shall examine the fate of Walter de Kent, the keeper of New Forest. Walter, like Peter de Neville, would seem to be another perfect example of an evil forester. (Stagg noted that he ‘robbed both rich and poor.’)¹⁴¹ And at a glance, de Kent’s experience in New Forest would seem to mirror that of de Neville’s: a forester widely abuses his position, falls out of royal favor, and is eventually stripped of his position. However, the power structures of New Forest differed in one significant respect with those seen in Rutland: because most of the land in New Forest was royal demesne, most of the important landholdings were held directly of the king. This made the king was the most important overlord in New Forest. Due to this fact, nearly all disputes in New Forest were in a sense internal: as all power stemmed directly from the king, there were no competing overlords as we saw in Rutland. Also a notable distinction is that New Forest had two distinct classes of foresters: One set of foresters of fee who held their bailiwicks hereditarily and directly of the king. These men in turn were under a chief forester who was appointed directly by the king. Whereas the foresters of fee tended to be local men who resided in the forest, the chief forester (the other class) tended to be an outside royal appointment and did not hold the position on a hereditary basis. In theory this setup was meant to ensure that that the two sides exploited the forest equitably; effectively, each class of forester was meant to keep an eye on the other, thereby preventing abuses. Thus New Forest was a forester’s forest. The de Kent case also took place during a less tumultuous time in English history. In this sense,

¹⁴¹ Stagg 1979, xi.

New Forest should have been a more peaceful setting. With this in mind, we shall use the case of Walter de Kent to examine how power structures were negotiated and contested in this context as well as the available means the various power players adopted to further their goals.

New Forest and Walter de Kent

New Forest itself was a bit of an anomaly as far as royal forests go. Traditionally, New Forest has been highlighted as the paragon of abusive royal power. The forest was created by the early Norman kings, who are often accused of destroying a vast, prosperous agricultural region for no other reason than that they wished to create a hunting preserve for deer. However, New Forest was never a very populated region. Indeed its very geography made it neither exceptionally wooded (estimates range from 20–50%) nor very fertile. New Forest was fairly inhospitable: agriculture existed in places, but the forest was likely dominated by heathlands.¹⁴² Such an environment, with vast stretches of unpeopled land, would have meant that for the inhabitants of New Forest primary resource exploitation took on an even more important role than elsewhere in England where agriculture was preeminent. In places like New Forest, resources would have been the key to successful livelihoods.¹⁴³ Indeed activities such as salt-making, charcoal burning and peat/heath harvesting seem to have been important activities in New Forest, as was poaching – for consumption or for export to the nearby towns of Southampton, Winchester and Salisbury.¹⁴⁴ Therefore, in New Forest we should perhaps not see a forest ‘full of folk’ as was the case in Rutland but rather a forest occasioned by workers, harvesting whatever they may according to the rhythms of the year and the caprices of nature.

Walter de Kent comes into the historical record late in the reign of Henry III (in 1265) at a time when England was settling down after the upheavals of the Second

¹⁴² Darby–Campbell 1962, 324, 337–338; Rackham 1998a, 77–78.

¹⁴³ Platt 1997, 115.

¹⁴⁴ NFD evidences a healthy venison traffic to the nearby towns of Southampton, Salisbury and Winchester. See e.g. NFD 239, 449, 453, and 237.

Barons' War.¹⁴⁵ By this time the country was largely pacified and royal power had generally been reaffirmed. Henry III, living his final days, was technically still king, but lord Edward, the heir apparent, was effectively in charge of the country.¹⁴⁶ Into this picture steps Walter de Kent as the attorney of Edward's wife, Eleanor of Castile.¹⁴⁷ By trade Walter was a clerk, and therefore a churchman, and it would seem that as Eleanor was preparing to leave England with Edward on crusade to the Holy Land in 1270 Walter was appointed to attend to Eleanor's finances and affairs in the interim. Walter seems to have been a favorite of the queen – he appears endowed with the title 'keeper of the queen's gold' and 'queen's steward' – and therefore was close to the seat of power. The king too entrusted de Kent with important jobs, and amongst his many duties we see him performing such sundry jobs as extracting money from the Jews,¹⁴⁸ collecting debts owed to the throne¹⁴⁹ and confiscating land into the king's hand – all of which seem to have been specialties of de Kent's.¹⁵⁰ Around 1270 Henry III appointed him chief keeper of New Forest, just prior to Eleanor and Edward's departure for the Holy Land on his ill-fated eponymous crusade.¹⁵¹ In the same year, Henry had awarded the entire honor of New Forest to Eleanor, making her the overlord, and thus Walter's appointment would seem to have occurred in cognizance with Eleanor. As keeper of New Forest, Walter was afforded the manor of Lyndhurst, the traditional seat of the keeper of New Forest.¹⁵²

The environment that Walter stepped into in New Forest would have been typical of many of the royal forests in England. A vast forest filled with resources open to exploitation would have stretched before him at Lyndhurst manor and his charge would have been to see that they were used to the benefit of his mistress and his king. However, the other foresters – the foresters of fee – in New Forest (Thomas

¹⁴⁵ De Kent first appears as a clerk of Eleanor in 1265. See *Royal Letters v.2*, 299.

¹⁴⁶ Powicke 1966, 503.

¹⁴⁷ PR HIII v.6, 461.

¹⁴⁸ See, for example, Cal. CR Edward I, v.1 315 and SP Ex. Jews, 107–108 ff.

¹⁴⁹ Cal. CR Edward I, v.1, 431.

¹⁵⁰ Cal. CR Edward I, v.1, 119

¹⁵¹ An inquest into Walter's misdeeds in the forest refers to happenings in 1270; his tenure is delineated accordingly. See NFD 210.

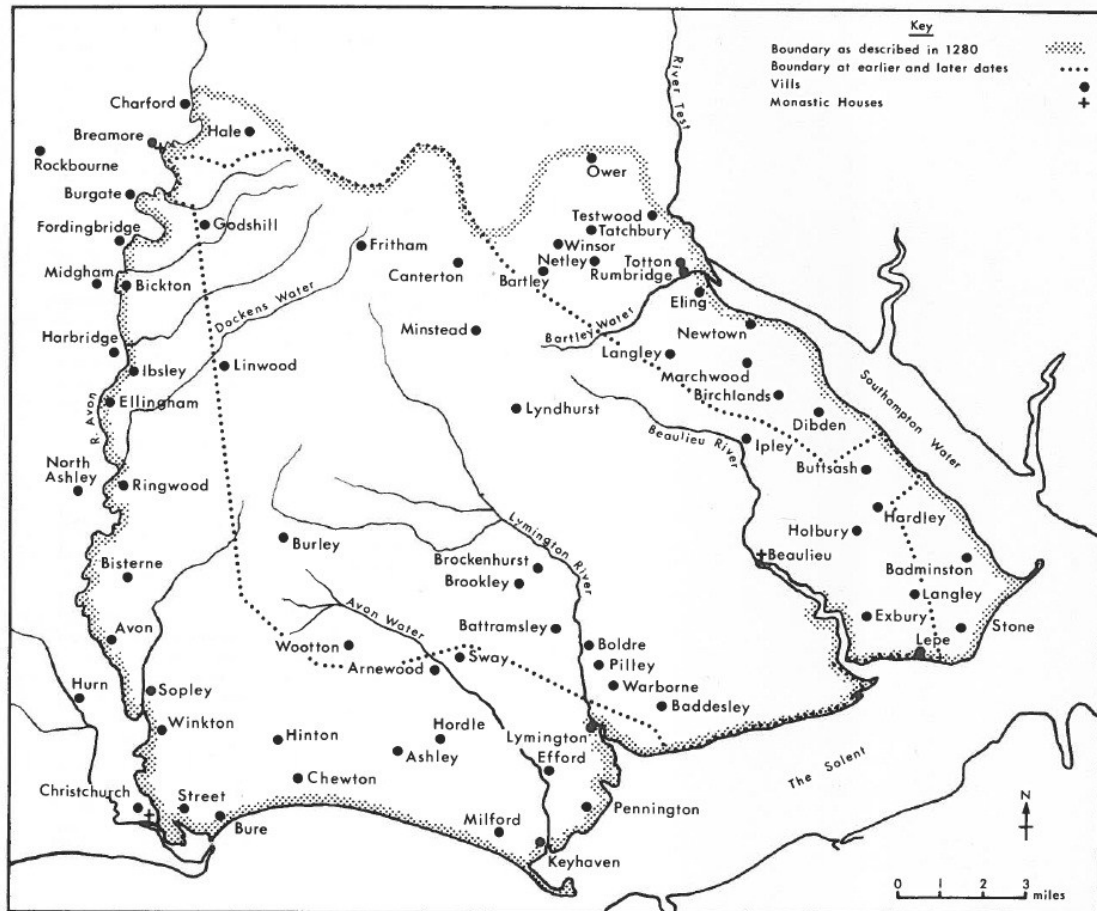
¹⁵² Page 1911, 630–634.

de Foxcoat at Fritham manor, John de Linwood at Linwood manor, William de Burley of Burley and Eustace Fulcher of Battramsley, see Figure 2) would have been similarly charged with overseeing the forest, albeit on slightly different terms. Also, like the case of Peter de Neville in Rutland Forest, all of these foresters essentially paid rent for the privilege of exploiting their bailiwicks, with the notable exception of Walter, who would seem to have had the role of a temporary official working in the queen's interest. At this point it is important to take note of Walter's position in society as a clerk. Although throughout the historical record we see him owning or maintaining manors in various places at various times in the realm, these positions invariably were temporary in nature and he was never the well-established lord that Peter de Neville was or even a petty lord like the foresters of fee; he was simply a royal official temporarily charged with overseeing royal interests. This highlights an important source of social friction in the medieval era, that of the un-landed aspiring to the landed class, land being the only resource that brought with it anything more than fleeting social status during the era. Thus it is through this prism that Walter's motivations in New Forest should be viewed.

The foresters of fee, as mentioned above, were established lords in New Forest; they held their manors and bailiwicks directly of the king, here technically Eleanor of Castile.¹⁵³ As was the case with Peter de Neville, the foresters of fee were seemingly free to exploit the forest so long as they avoided abusing their privileges and thus infringing on their overlord's rights. Thus the schema of power relations in New Forest included six different foresters (one outsider, five locals), all answering to the same authority, with the general understanding that they all extract their livelihoods from the same well of resources.

A brief glance at what actually constituted the (legal) income of a forester in New Forest quickly reveals the types of resources that were at play in New Forest: the foresters all had unique privileges to exploit within their bailiwicks. For example, at Lyndhurst, Walter's income would have derived mainly from the dues that the local residents paid, such as rent for their lands, but a great deal of his income would also have been generated by the fines (rents) the manorial folk paid

¹⁵³ Cal. ChR HIII—Ed v.1, 150.



Vills listed in Lay Subsidy Roll 1327-8

Figure 2. Map of New Forest showing the various manors mentioned in the New Forest records: the chief keeper's manor, *Lyndhurst*, and the manors of the foresters of fee: *Fritham* (Thomas de Foxcoat), *Godshill* (John de Godshill), *Linwood* (John de Linwood), *Burley* (William de Burley) and *Batramasley* (Eustace Fulcher). Additionally *Minstead* and *Bisterne* were owned by John de Bisterne, Walter de Kent's underkeeper. The proximity of Lyndhurst and Minstead is notable, as is the peripheral distribution of the foresters of fee. The town of Southampton occurs (unmarked) on the east shore of Southampton Water; Salisbury and Winchester are located some miles to the north, off the map. Source: Stagg, *New Forest Documents: A.D. 1244–1334*

for exploiting the forest. Fines for access to forest pasturelands feature prominently in the incomes of the foresters in New Forest as do payments for harvesting wood but also peat and heathlands, which in some of the bailiwicks actually accounted for more income than pasturing livestock.¹⁵⁴ (This likely is linked with salt

¹⁵⁴ Examples are found in NFD 353–369. These official assessments seem to have functioned as a way for the king to keep tabs on the value of his demesne lands, and consequently the rents charged.

production industry in New Forest.¹⁵⁵) The estimated ratios of rent/income for the New Forest bailiwicks are also quite telling: the Linwood bailiwick, for example, is assessed as producing closer to £5 per year, yet the rent is £3.¹⁵⁶ At Lyndhurst we see a predecessor of de Kent paying £34 a year for the bailiwick, though it is estimated as producing only £35. Similar examples are attested in the records.¹⁵⁷ These are hardly smashing profit margins and it is quite clear, then, that the foresters must have been expected to supplement their fees through their own devices, that is, illicitly.¹⁵⁸ It was likely the requisite need to exploit the forest through not-so-legal means which pitted the local foresters of fee against Walter from the very onset. Problems evidently arose from the very start of Walter's tenure as chief forester of New Forest. What follows is a reconstruction of events based primarily on a series of inquests which occurred in 1276 and 1280 in which royal justices attempted to audit the (mis-)handling of the forest.

Evidently, one of Walter's first actions was to find a suitable local man to be his second in charge. During the years between his appointment in 1270 and his removal in 1276, Walter was of course still a member of the Queen's household, and her attorney, and therefore would have been busy dealing with Eleanor's affairs throughout the realm. The historical record attests to his attending to various items of royal business throughout the country during that period. With this in mind, it was only logical that de Kent choose an underkeeper to act as a local power-holder on the ground. Walter chose John de Bisterne of Minstead manor as his understeward. The de Bisterne family's estates were closely linked with those of Lyndhurst manor, and John does not seem to have had any close dealing with the other foresters of fee, perhaps an indication of the natural alignment of power in

¹⁵⁵ In medieval England a favored method for making salt was burning peat that had been soaked in seawater. Additionally, heath, which New Forest abounded in, would have offered a viable source of fuel to fire the saltpans seen in New Forest (see Rackham 1998b, 295–296). The seemingly curious links between New Forest manors and properties on the nearby Isle of Wight may in fact have their basis in salt-making (see Darby–Campbell 1962, 291, 343–344). Indeed at Lyndhurst some rents were paid in salt (see NFD 355, 359), likely stemming from the manor's saltmarshes at Totton, thus evidencing an inland-manor–coastal-holding salt production connection: the inland lands provided the fuel needed for the saltpans on the coast. New Forest also seems to have harbored a trade in wood for salt production (see, for example, NFD 509).

¹⁵⁶ NFD 364. The rent is cited by Page (1911, 629–630).

¹⁵⁷ Cf. NFD 366, 367–368 and Cal. ChR HIII–EI, 362.

¹⁵⁸ A good manor might be expected to turn some £20–60 in profit.

New Forest.¹⁵⁹ Additionally, it would have made good sense to have a local man in his pocket, as New Forest and its workings were surely unfamiliar to de Kent. While the exact date when de Bisterne became Walter's trusted second is uncertain, this was clearly the case by 1271. The links between the two would seem to have been strengthened further in 1273 when the manor of Ringwood was then committed to de Kent's charge, making Walter the lord of de Bisterne by way of his lands in Ringwood.¹⁶⁰ The records would seem to imply that de Kent generally left de Bisterne in charge of New Forest when he was away on royal business or, as the records put it, Walter 'demised to him the stewardship.'¹⁶¹

Walter's appointment of de Bisterne may have altered the scheme of things in New Forest: de Bisterne was a petty lord in New Forest, and putting him in charge may have seemed like an affront to the foresters of fee. Another way that Walter would have changed whatever power relations existed in New Forest prior to his tenure was that he brought in a number of outsiders as underforesters. As noted above, outsider foresters seem to have been a common source of complaint on the part of locals. Indeed, it is quite enlightening to examine who precisely Walter emplaced as underforesters in New Forest. Of the eleven persons specifically cited in the inquest as 'foresters of Walter de Kent,' five are of unknown provenance (although one seem to have been derived from a de Bisterne manor or perhaps was a relation) but five others can unmistakably be identified as outsiders whom Walter imported from elsewhere in the realm. Additionally, one forester (Robert de Salop') has a surname that would allude to a distant provenance, i.e. from of Shropshire in the Midlands. Indeed it would seem that the Midlands in particular was a region that Walter was quite familiar with, as many of his earliest appearances in the historical record have to do with business in the Midlands, a pattern that recurs throughout his career.¹⁶² In this sense, Walter likely would have drawn on his personal connections in order to acquire trustworthy men, or possibly to curry favor. Such a scheme likely would have been beneficial for all parties involved.

¹⁵⁹ Page 1911, 635–38.

¹⁶⁰ Cal. CR 59; Page 1911, 606–614.

¹⁶¹ NFD 211.

¹⁶² Cf. Cal. CR HIII 1268–1272 232, 266, 295, 558, 588.

John de Bisterne	Walter's understerward, local lord of Mindstead and Bisterne manors
John del Ponte ¹⁶³	servant of queen Eleanor, jointly administers lands with de Kent, later appears as justice
John de Espaynell ¹⁶⁴	of merchant family, 'a servant of the queen', later mayor of Lynn
Richard Paunche ¹⁶⁵	a local man from Minstead, i.e. de Bisterne's man
Robert de Salop'	'of Salop' = Shropshire, likely an outsider
Thomas le Bret	likely a younger son from a Devon family, later appears as beneficed clergyman
Walter de Boyville ¹⁶⁶	son of a prominent Midlands landowner and royal official who had business dealings with de Kent
William de Burton ¹⁶⁷	likely a son of Midlands merchant of same name, later appears as prominent merchant in Stamford, also as clerk
Thomas de Cantelyn	perhaps (?) a member of the prominent Cantilupe family

Table 2. The foresters of Walter de Kent. The table shows persons named in the inquiry and their identifiable provenances. Also noted are the likely livelihoods and future positions in life. Four unidentified foresters are not shown.

That such a scheme indeed would have been beneficial for all parties can be seen from the fact that several of the contacts Walter made via his underforesters later proved quite useful in his later business dealings. In particular, Walter's taking on of Walter de Boyville, the son of a prominent landowner in the Midlands, would seem to have been instrumental in paving the way for many important land transactions which Walter maneuvered there later, notably his securing of Gartree

¹⁶³ Cal. CR EI v1 253; Ball 1926, 58.

¹⁶⁴ Alsford 1998–2003, *The Men Behind the Masque: Office-holding in East Anglian boroughs, 1272–1460* (internet publishing); NFD 212.

¹⁶⁵ NFD 215.

¹⁶⁶ Burt 2013, 166–167.

¹⁶⁷ A William de Burton appears as a wool merchant in Stamford (adjacent to Rutland Forest) during the era. Perhaps William was another of Walter's imports from the Midlands (TNA DL 25/1565; 44M69/C/416; Cal. PR EI v.1, 68; Lincolnshire Archive MON/3/27/2). Indeed, we see Walter dealing in wool, presumably for the queen (Lloyd 1977, 292). It is also interesting the this incident mentions a certain Henry le Veil as a servant of Walter's: a John le Veil is seen helping bail out an underling of Walter's in NFD 99, attesting to the cliquy nature of Walter's men.

Hundred and Harcourt manor for Queen Eleanor.¹⁶⁸ Walter would have known William de Boyville through his dealings with the crown: de Boyville occurs as a borrower of money from the queen and therefore would have been familiar to Walter. (Eleanor was of course abroad at the time; Walter handled her finances.) The dealings of de Boyville and de Kent are quite well attested in the early 1270s, precisely when Walter de Boyville appears as a forester in New Forest.¹⁶⁹ In such a scheme the young de Boyville, for his part, would have attained the useful position of underforester in New Forest, with all the attendant social prestige and practical skills so respected by the nobility – and likely would have enriched himself slightly in the venture. The records indicate that the young de Boyville was complicit in damaging the forest by ‘gifts, renting and sales of vert’ and eventually was found guilty of poaching the king’s deer, for which he was later fined £2/3. Ironically, Walter’s father is mentioned to have bailed him out, showing that such deals were not without their little dangers.¹⁷⁰ It is notable however that this fine was exacted, or rather *pledged*, eight years after the offence had occurred. One wonders how many deer young Walter de Boyville might have poached or gifted that did not come to the attention of the authorities.

De Boyville’s small fine notwithstanding, several other underforesters under Walter too would seem to have generally benefited from their positions. In the very first allegation against Walter’s foresters to occur in the New Forest records, one John del Ponte is indicted of taking 13 deer in the forest without warrant – a notable crime. Like Walter, del Ponte was a member of the queen’s household, and it would seem that Walter emplaced him as an amicable colleague. It was Walter in fact who bailed John out after he was sentenced at the inquest.¹⁷¹ Del Ponte occurs elsewhere in the New Forest records accused of poaching and is even singled out as one of the main accessories in the inquest that led to Walter’s downfall: he, de Kent, de Bisterne along with another forester were indicted of ‘the offence of 500 beasts taken at his [Walter’s] command’ for a total fine of £5000, in addition to

¹⁶⁸ Cf. Cal. CR HIII 1268–1272 588; Cal. PR EI v.1 156; NA SC 1/11/51; Cal. CR EI v.2 61 .

¹⁶⁹ NFD 95; Cal. CRIII 1268–1272 431, 558.

¹⁷⁰ NFD 190,219.

¹⁷¹ NFD 95.

‘waste of both venison and vert . . . which it is not possible to estimate.’¹⁷² Bearing in mind the value of venison during the era, a ‘currency’ in its own right, this fine – although clearly fanciful (the king’s royal income was some £30,000 per annum¹⁷³) – affords some indication of the scale of the sums a forester like Walter might have access to by poaching or gifting venison in New Forest, not to mention vert. It was likely exploitation of this scale that the foresters in fee confronted when de Kent settled into his role as chief forester.

Whatever the underlying cause, although surely it must have been related to differing opinions over exploitation of the forest, by 1276 the foresters in fee clearly were leagued together in opposition to de Kent. Likely at the behest of both sides, the king and queen, now back from the Crusades, arranged an inquest into the excesses in New Forest for September 1276.¹⁷⁴ The accusations voiced at the September inquest were quite one-sided and therefore quite telling. Nearly every accusation at the inquest is either in reference to Walter and his foresters or to persons clearly linked to them. We see Walter and his foresters charged with poaching deer (13 for de Ponte, 40 for Paunche, 151 for de Kent and ‘beasts without number’ for de Bisterne) as well as generally abusing New Forest.¹⁷⁵ Also of general interest is that dozens of malefactors of the venison are mentioned as hailing from Lyndhurst and Minstead, the implication being that de Kent and de Bisterne had been turning a blind eye or even encouraging offences in their manor folk. Members of de Bisterne’s household too are specifically implicated: a recurring and quite indicative pattern is ‘so-and-so was indicted for a venison offence whilst in the household or service of John de Bisterne, and John is present and speaks in his defense.’¹⁷⁶ In many ways the inquisition of September 1276 was a withering exposé of Walter’s misfeasance. This is evident from the fact that, though he was present at the inquest, he was not allowed to present evidence against the foresters in fee. With one voice, all of the officialdom of New Forest and indeed all of the men of the

¹⁷² NFD 212, 249.

¹⁷³ Powicke 1962, 36.

¹⁷⁴ NFD 180. It is notable that they had come to New Forest personally to question the foresters the previous August.

¹⁷⁵ NFD 95, 99, 109, 117.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. NFD 122. His ‘household’ of course meant his followers, not necessarily his immediate family, although in this case the two senses of the word overlapped: de Bisterne’s relatives are accused of forest offences too.

forest, excepting Walter's own, would seem to have been spoken against him. In the one exception where a forester of fee – Thomas de Foxcoat of Fritham bailiwick – is accused of any wrongdoing (a member of his household was accused of a venison offence), it apparently comes as a surprise to the other foresters, who quickly attest to Thomas' innocence as he pleads ignorance.¹⁷⁷ The only foresters found or even accused of anything misdoings are de Kent and de Bisterne and their underlings.

Also of interest is that the offenders cited in the inquest were invariably bailed out by their lords: in many cases de Bisterne and de Kent are forced to come up with, or at least pledge the money to bail out their underlings, like when Walter bailed out del Ponte for poaching 13 deer.¹⁷⁸ The theme of the inquest is well evidenced in recurring phrases like 'of Lyndhurst,' 'of the household of Bisterne' and 'of Minstead' attached to the offenders and pledgers in the inquest. Walter's faction was clearly the target of the inquest.¹⁷⁹ The aim of targeting the men of Lyndhurst, Bistern and Minstead at the inquest would ultimately have been to bleed Walter's underlings and, by extension, his authority in New Forest. Although not all of the offences cite the exact amount of the fines – some of the more notable offences would have gone before the queen – the noted fines typically range from small (2s.) to significant (£4). Again, it should be noted that the entire New Forest bailiwick was estimated as (legally) producing £35 per year in 1291, thus these fines, whoever inevitably was the payer, would have significantly impugned on the profit of those under Walter's tutelage and made their work all the less profitable.¹⁸⁰ Additionally, it would seem that the September 1276 inquest resulted in Walter's bailiwick being seized into the queen's hand.¹⁸¹ In that sense, the foresters of fee would appear to have scored a victory: their ability to produce evidence and witnesses against de Kent before royal authority resulted in Walter's fall from reginal favor.

Whatever victory the foresters of fee may have secured, however, was rather short-lived victory. In November 1276 Walter, reinstated as steward of New Forest,

¹⁷⁷ NFD 125.

¹⁷⁸ NFD 95.

¹⁷⁹ Cf. NFD 116, 131.

¹⁸⁰ NFD 369.

¹⁸¹ NFD 117.

reappears at another inquisition into the excesses in New Forest, and this time it appears that he had succeeded in turning the tables on the foresters of fee: this inquiry uniformly casts light onto *their* abuses.

The November inquest was the exact mirror image of that of two months earlier. Here we see how Walter clearly had his way with the foresters of fee. With reference to the foresters of fee (de Godshill, de Burley, de Foxcoat, de Linwood and Fulcher), it is noted that the forest is ‘much destroyed by gifts and sales and by charcoal burners who manufacture an unknown quantity of charcoal within the woods’ and by their venison offences.¹⁸² Their underforesters are accused of the same, and it is of passing interest to note that these men all appear to be local men; most seem to be relatives of the foresters of fee, and thus not outsiders like Walter’s men, showing the difference of scale between the foresters of fee and the chief forester as far as scope of power relations. The local foresters were just that: local; whereas Walter was a man of the realm at large who could draw on a wide web of connections that spanned across England. The import of the inquest was that the foresters of fee and several men of their manors are fined repeatedly. The end result was that they were found guilty of abusing their bailiwicks, which were subsequently seized into the queen’s hand.¹⁸³

An addendum to this inquest, however, puts these findings in an interesting light. Due to their indictments, the foresters of fee traveled to Westminster to answer for their offences before the king and queen (their overlord and mistress) and argued that de Kent had in fact rigged the jury at the inquest. It appears that de Kent and de Bisterne, having got wind of the intended tenor of the inquisition from one of the justices, succeeded in empanelling a friendly jury. The trial was set to empanel 48 knights from surrounding counties, with the understanding that they would be an unprejudiced jury, alongside 28 jurors chosen from within the forest. The records claim that Walter coerced his underforesters, manor men and various others from elsewhere in New Forest to attend as the 28 jurors – seemingly with the full complicity of the justices, whom he likely knew from his dealings with royal business. The jury de Kent secured even included a notorious poacher named Cole

¹⁸² NFD 148, 150, 152.

¹⁸³ NFD 150.

le Pannur (Richard Cole), and one Peter le Minur, ‘who was said to be the falsest man in the county,’ was enticed with the promise of a beneficial marriage for his son!¹⁸⁴ Also, a ‘compliant’ (i.e. malleable) verderer was brought in and two ‘worthy’ verderers were purposefully excluded, ‘for what they well knew could not be proved to be true.’¹⁸⁵ De Kent had informed these men beforehand how they should proceed ‘to obstruct the foresters of fee.’¹⁸⁶ His ability to effect this complex miscarriage of justice is a stark indicator of the scope of his power relations. When the ill-starred foresters arrived and noticed the jury that would decide their fate, they naturally protested, but to no avail. Thus was the guilt of the foresters of fee proved and their bailiwicks disseized of them.¹⁸⁷

Aftermath

However, the end result of the two inquests seems to have been that everybody lost their positions. With the notable exception of Eustace Fulcher, the foresters of fee disappear from the New Forest records. An inquest of January 1280 details Walter’s misdeeds more clearly and helps explain why he too lost his office. Walter and his foresters are accused, somewhat formulaically, of selling and gifting vert, but the inquest also details quite specifically how Walter was extending his privileges around. For example, a certain John de Ripariis (lord of Burgate manor, just outside the bounds of the forest) was apparently paying Walter £2 per year for ‘special favors.’¹⁸⁸ Also evident in the 1280 inquest is the scope of the venison offences Walter was turning a blind eye to, or perhaps even selling. The inquest claims that on one occasion, in 1271, John de Ripariis had gone with his men into New Forest on what appears to have been a large and leisurely hunt. Eventually John was assessed a fine of £40, ‘for himself and his men,’ but this only comes nine years later and the records point out that he was not assessed (the crime was not

¹⁸⁴ NFD 182. Their occupational surnames are of passing interest – coal burner and miner – and give an idea of medieval notions of occupation and the upright citizen.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Foresters are often accused of coercing juries; in the 14th century a law specifically outlawing the practice had to be made (*Statutes* 365).

¹⁸⁷ NFD 183.

¹⁸⁸ NFD 190.

addressed) at the time, an indictment that Walter had abetted the crimes.¹⁸⁹

Another example of how Walter might use his position in New Forest to benefit those around him was the case of Roger Martel. On 21 July 1271, fifteen identifiable malefactors and many others of unknown provenance entered the forest ‘with bows and arrows, crossbows and greyhounds’ and took nine deer. The indictment implies that Roger Martel, a prominent local nobleman, headed this frolic, but also noted is that Martel was remised of his deeds by Walter de Kent and that one of Walter’s underforesters was even with the party while they poached. Although Martel was later fined £100 (in 1280), and also resulted in a £200 fine for Walter, the instance highlights how Walter’s underforesters stood to gain from their positions.¹⁹⁰ The forester in this case is a certain Thomas le Bret. Le Bret was also privy to another even more imposing poaching party which we shall next examine.

On 15 July 1270 a party of some 60 men, who seem to have been gentry from the surrounding counties, but also came from as far away as Bath, entered the forest by night to poach deer. The records mention that they took 15 deer but they also seem to have generally wreaked havoc in the forest. (Amongst other things, the party stole 180 lbs. of cheese from a nearby manor!) Thomas le Bret was implicated in these trespasses and one almost wonders if he had acted at a guide. The records also note that a great many of the poaching party (some 40 persons) had rested at the house of John de Bisterne, thereby implicating him as well.¹⁹¹ Such an instance of hunting, which resulted in quite a few notable fines (to prominent lords), would have been quite a happening. Surely de Bisterne and le Bret would have stood to gain from hosting such a party; it is unthinkable that they, or Walter for that matter, would have allowed and presided over such blatant ‘crimes’ on their watch expecting nothing in return. Again, it should be recalled that in late-medieval England hunting was in some ways a currency all its own, an ‘aristocratic sacrament’ in its own right.¹⁹² These foresters must have received something in return for serving up such a currency.

¹⁸⁹ NFD 216.

¹⁹⁰ NFD 205, 207.

¹⁹¹ NFD 205.

¹⁹² Spearing 1970, 10.

Whatever gains de Bisterne, le Bret and de Kent received, however, came at a cost. Coupled with his other misdeeds, the result of these poaching instances (of which dozens are alleged during his tenure) would seem to have caused de Kent's fall from grace. The inquest of 1280 assesses Walter a total fine of £5000, £10 for each of the 500 deer he is indicted of misappropriating.¹⁹³ The underforesters for their part seem to have got off quite lightly: only de Boyville and de Bisterne actually paid any fines, and quite small ones at that, £2/3 and £2 respectively.¹⁹⁴ De Bisterne still appears as a lord in New Forest in 1280 and the family thrived in nearby Wiltshire in the 14th century.¹⁹⁵ Paradoxically, it would seem that the only foresters that suffered any long-lasting punishments were the foresters of fee, who saw their bailiwicks confiscated and then vanish from the historical record. They seemingly lost everything. For all his misdeeds, Walter got off quite lightly as well. A few months after the 1280 inquest, the king pardoned him of all wrongdoings in the forest, though the king did later order an inquest into a claim that de Kent had committed a murder in New Forest.¹⁹⁶ The results of the murder inquest have not survived, but Walter clearly still enjoyed the royal favor well into the 1280s, as attested by his attending to royal business; he even appears sorting out legal issues in New Forest in 1280 and served as a justice there in 1281.¹⁹⁷ Thus, his checkered tenure as chief forester of New Forest notwithstanding, Walter's career continued unabated.

In the end, however, Walter de Kent was only a clerk. In that, his career had a predictable course. If at times he attained great responsibilities, he nonetheless could never have joined the ranks of the landed lords. As a churchman, his fortunes inevitably were linked with church positions. Indeed over his career Walter seems to have acquired not a few church appointments: placements in St Andrews Priory in Northampton and the rectorship of Great Bowden (near Rutland Forest) are but

¹⁹³ NFD 212.

¹⁹⁴ NFD 211, 219.

¹⁹⁵ NFD 290. It appears that his great grandson, John Bettesthorne (1327–1399), a forester himself (see TNA SC 8/102/5099), became sheriff of Hampshire and was called to Parliament. 'John Bettesthorne' Hist. Parl.

¹⁹⁶ PR EI v.1, 392, 413.

¹⁹⁷ PR EI v.1, 472.

a few examples of how he bettered himself by acquiring church livings.¹⁹⁸ Also, Walter's long record of moneylending – he was the most prominent loaner in the royal household in the 1270s and was twice convicted of 'trespass of money'¹⁹⁹ – as well as his dealings with the Jews would seem to have afforded him the chance to acquire a fair deal of land. At his death we see him enfeoffed of lands in Kent (Bereacre manor) which clearly fell to him because of a loan default.²⁰⁰ Also, lands near New Forest came into Walter's hands due to his dealings with usury: lands in Drayton came to Walter when a Jew named Benedict de Wytonia was hanged for usury, Walter being complicit in the loan to the original landowner, possibly through his stewardship of New Forest.²⁰¹ However, much of Walter's dealings with the Jews and a great deal of his own usury would seem to have been part of a larger royal policy whereby lands confiscated through the Jewish laws were taken into Queen Eleanor's hands, thereby creating an income for the queen without alienating crown lands.²⁰² Indeed, Walter's dealings with usury would seem to follow a pattern: Walter, on royal business, offers a loan, the loaner defaults on payment, the pledged land falls into the king's hand through the usury laws and is then transferred temporarily to Walter but eventually comes to Eleanor.²⁰³ This seems to have been the case at Neuton Harcourt manor, Drayton and Bereacre Manor, which all evidence a borrower-> loan default->Walter-> (queen) pattern and show something of the transitory nature of landholding in the 13th century.²⁰⁴ Some years after Neuton Harcourt manor had fallen to the queen's hand, we hear a complaint that Eleanor and de Kent had deviously cheated the manor's rightful heir

¹⁹⁸ These positions, or more properly *benefices*, in many instances were jobs in name only. Walter was likely an absentee officeholder with respect to the church positions he held. The positions would have provided a steady income, an annuity of sorts.

¹⁹⁹ Mundill (1988), 135–137. Both 'trespasses' were pardoned by the king. See Cal. CR EI v.2, 2, 154.

²⁰⁰ Cal. CR EI v.2, 191.

²⁰¹ Cal. CR EI v.2, 76.

²⁰² For scheme, see ONDB 'Eleanor of Castile'; Mundill (1988), 125; Powicke also notes Edward's exploitation of the land-tenure chaos begat by the war. Powicke 1966, 704.

²⁰³ This scheme seemingly would have distanced the king from the disdained – and illegal/immoral – practice of usury, and thus insulated him from accusations of wrongdoing. Also, the lands ended up in Eleanor's hands, not the king's, thus avoiding the impression that the king was the primary benefactor – although he of course fully inherited these lands upon Eleanor's death, so the end result was the same.

²⁰⁴ Harcourt is the clearest case, see Cal. PR EI v.1, 156, 430; Cal. PR EI v.2, 114; Cal. CR EI v.2, 61, Cal. CR HIII 1268-1272, 558, 588; Cal FR EI 132; TNA SC 1/11/51, SC 8/328/E889.

out of his inheritance.²⁰⁵ In other instances, Walter's financial dealings are referred to as 'machinations.'²⁰⁶ In all of these examples it seems that Walter was working not necessarily for his own benefit but for his mistress's. Complaints about Walter's business dealings typically are connected to property that ended up in the queen's hand, and often occur after her death in 1290.

Neuton Harcourt manor too is also interesting in that in 1272 we see Walter pledging support on a loan by a certain Thomas Basset. It is of passing interest that Peter de Neville also pledged support on this loan but even more so because William de Boyville did as well. This brings us back to the earlier connection between the de Boyvilles and de Kent: as we saw, Walter de Boyville (William's son) was one of de Kent's underforests. This evidences quite well one of the ways that a chief forester might use his position in society to his advantage. Perhaps during his business dealings with the Leicestershire folk (he often is seen on royal business there) de Kent offered to take on William de Boyville's son as an underforester with the aim of providing him a living. As we saw earlier, de Boyville benefitted in various ways from 'gifts, rentings and sales of vert' as one of de Kent's underforesters.²⁰⁷ In William de Boyville, de Kent likely gained an ally that he might use in his business dealing in Leicestershire (de Boyville was a prominent lord in the area). We can only imagine that Walter would have used the connections he gained via the other underforesters to similar advantage.

One also wonders if it might not have been Walter's six-year tenure as chief forester at New Forest which allowed him to generate the funds sufficient to become such an extensive lender in the first place. The first recorded instance of Walter as a money-lender indeed appears in 1270, the very year he seems to have taken over as chief forester in New Forest.²⁰⁸ Albeit somewhat fanciful, the suggestion by the foresters of fee that Walter and his foresters were complicit in £5000 of poaching offences (500 deer á £10 per beast), plus vert offences inestimable, gives a ready

²⁰⁵ NA SC 8/328/E889, SC 8/321/E486.

²⁰⁶ NA SC 8/329/E909.

²⁰⁷ NFD 190.

²⁰⁸ CR HIII v.13, 266.

idea of the scale of riches which Walter had access to as chief forester.²⁰⁹ It is possible that the monies Walter succeeded in generating in New Forest were sufficient to make him a notable creditor well into his later years; as late as 1282 we see him lending funds against lands.²¹⁰ Although de Kent continues to be active handling royal affairs well into the 1280s, by 1286 he is referred to as ‘formerly the queen’s clerk.’²¹¹ New Forest would seem to have been the summit of his career. He apparently died without an heir in or around 1290.²¹² The only land that Walter seems to have died enfeoffed of was the manor of Bereacre, which had come to him through usury.²¹³ Along with the benefice in Great Bowdon, this small manor seems to have been Walter’s final reward for a long career of handling the queen’s business. Thus was the tumultuous rise and fall of Walter de Kent, clerk.

Conclusion

The New Forest case highlights one of the more salient facts about the job of the forester. What on paper may appear as indiscriminate criminality upon deeper reflection becomes rational action. Additionally, the matters under contestation in forests like New Forest were the direct result of a system that encouraged competition amongst agents. Where there are two separate classes of foresters with competing goals and a common resource pool, infighting cannot but be expected. The abuses we see in New Forest were in this sense little more than infighting over the limits of power local actors might strive for. What was at stake for these actors ultimately was a matter of power and power wielding, i.e. how much and to what extent. In New Forest, foresters like the foresters of fee needed to ensure that their manors – which relied heavily on forest resource exploitation – function smoothly and thus any excesses by competing factions would have meant a hindering of their own exploitation of the forest. The limits of exploitation (and by extension power)

²⁰⁹ To better appreciate the value of the position: the previous chief forester had rented the bailiwick and manor at a rent of £34 per year. See Cal. ChR v.1, 362.

²¹⁰ Cal. CR EI v2 191. A – quite sizeable – loan of £55 occurs in 1281. Cal. CR EI v.2, 130.

²¹¹ Cal. CR EI v.2 398.

²¹² Cal. Gen. HIII–EI v2, 456.

²¹³ Again, a clear case: In 1282 we see Walter loaning £10 to William de Say against Bereacre manor (Cal. CR EI v.2, 191); the manor eventually appears in Walter’s name at his post-mortem inquest (Cal. Gen. HIII–EI v2, 456).

was thus the real matter being contested with Walter. At stake in such a situation was not only the concrete matter of money but also the general profitability of the manors in New Forest: without secure access to resources, the forest manors were of scant value, nor for that matter was the forester of fee position of much value. An additional bone of contention was the patronage system that was intrinsically linked to the forester's position. Much of the local power that the forester enjoyed stemmed from his ability to keep a large number of men in his employ (his men), as well as his ability to protect their livelihoods, i.e. by securing livelihoods punishing interlopers with fines. In New Forest this would have meant the ability not only to keep a great number of people gainfully employed in resource exploitation, but also within the officialdom of the forest system. Walter's numerous underforesters are a case in point: In engaging them, Walter might secure reciprocal favors elsewhere; the local foresters of fee likely secured their position in New Forest in similar fashion, albeit on a more local level. Additionally, and particularly in a prestige society such as medieval England, a forester's ability to provide access to venison (like the poaching parties Walter and his men seemingly hosted or the singular instances of poaching the foresters of fee seem to have sold) was also a valued and thus understandably highly-contested resource.

What was at stake in New Forest, and what was duly contested in the inquiries and via the feuding, was in truth nothing more than the relative limits of the foresters' (or factions') powers, their ability to thrive in the prestige economy. The New Forest case is also interesting in that it shows not only what was being contested and why, but also how such matters were contested. The instances of hurling salacious accusations at the other side, such as the allegations of murder, or simply highlighting the other side's excesses in court are interesting but so too are Walter's rigging of the jury (with the judges turning a blind eye) and the foresters of fee going to plead their case before the king and queen. These examples in general show some of the tools these agents had at their disposal in their struggle to maintain or extend their privileges, and Walter's case in particular shows what a forester stood to gain in such a system. It is also quite notable that de Kent is ultimately forgiven his excesses because, unlike the foresters of fee, he is useful to

the King, thus highlighting something of notions of justice in the 13th century. In this sense, crime should be viewed more as a matter of perspective.

Conclusion – The diffuse nature of power in 13th-century England

The greatest deer-stealers make the best park keepers.

M.P. Tilley, *A Dictionary of the Proverbs of England in the 16th
and 17th Centuries*

In this thesis I have sketched the careers of two foresters whom historians have been apt to view as evil. Indeed, Walter de Kent and Peter de Neville could easily be interpreted as poor foresters; both abused their offices, sometimes even violently so, and both were eventually stripped of their positions. In this sense, they were no saints. However, we must also recall that our two foresters were in the tenuous position of being power players in an age in which power was a matter of eternal contestation. Also, it must be borne in mind that the allegations against Walter were made by his enemies, just as the allegations against them were made by him. In Peter's case too, we only begin to hear of his exploits in 1267, that is, after the disgraced rebels begin to filter back into their power roles and contest the new lay of the land in the Midlands.²¹⁴ In this sense, Peter's case represents an initial, violent realigning of local power structure followed by a slow renormalization to a more sustainable state. Walter's case is similar in that in negotiating the power structure in New Forest the competing factions seem to have failed to exert caution, and thus committed excesses – an oft-used word in the records – excesses the king wished to avoid. For the king, the ideal state of a royal forest would have been for all players to be contesting but not overly so, policing but not abusing. Excesses in fact are often cited as the reason why forest positions were seized. Peter and Walter must have known this, but it should be remembered that *normal* and *excessive* were terms that were largely defined (and negotiated) within the context of the vast web of power structures that existed in and beyond the forest. Whatever excesses

²¹⁴ Here it is telling that Peter was accused of stealing from the Bardolfs' bailiff *while the Bardolf brothers were in prison* for their part in the rebellion. The allegation being voiced only after the brothers had secured their release.

our foresters committed, the import of their actions should ultimately be defined by its proper context.

The numerous periodical – but invariably temporary – seizures of bailiwicks attested in the historical record are perhaps indicative of that. More often than not, excesses were simply met with temporary penalties, a ‘cease, desist and atone’-type punishment. The king, as the ultimate owner and arbiter of the resources of the forest would have had a vested interest in preventing over-exploitation and excessive contestation of authority. In a sense, the forest system’s very essential function was to prevent excesses through the threat of financial retribution: a fine made excesses all the less profitable to the offender, and would have compelled him to limit the exploitation to within the bounds of what was permissible. This simple rule would have been true for any agent in the forest, and would have been true of power roles too. Consider the case of Eustace Fulcher, the forest of fee who exceptionally preserved his bailiwick in New Forest. Eustace likely kept his office due to the fact that he had avoided much of the excesses committed by de Kent and the other foresters of fee – his crimes and allegations seem lesser than those of the other foresters.²¹⁵ Fulcher is even on occasion seen bailing out some of Walter’s underlings, thus he was clearly not an intractable member of the forester-of-fee clique, nor was he closely associated with de Kent either. In the November 1276 inquest against the foresters of fee, Fulcher is not grouped or accused with the others.²¹⁶ He seems to have been a rather separate case. Perhaps Eustace Fulcher had chosen a middle road policy in New Forest; at very least it appears he avoided the worst of the acrimony. And although his bailiwick was seized into the king’s hand, he was quickly reinstated (in 1277) and continued as a forester long after de Kent and the others had been expelled from their positions.²¹⁷ A forester like Fulcher would have been a valuable commodity to the king, especially in a society that favored the preservation of existing power structures for fear of the chaos that

²¹⁵ The Close Rolls show that Fulcher got his bailiwick back in 1277, but the bailiwicks of the foresters of fee fell to the king (Cal. CR Edward I v.1, 386, 405). There is also the slightest hint that the king was hesitant about punishing the foresters – perhaps their guilt was unclear – as ‘the king does not wish that they be ejected *unjustly* from their lands or rents’ (Cal. CR Edward I v.1, 386, italics mine). Eventually, however, they were ejected.

²¹⁶ NFD 148–150.

²¹⁷ Cf. NFD 189 and 203.

would ensue if they evaporated.

Some historians have viewed hunting and hunting culture as having an inherent possibility for social mobility and have postulated that hunting culture facilitated a ‘crossing the barriers’ of society and social leveling.²¹⁸ Some have seen the forest officialdom as offering similar possibilities.²¹⁹ While this is certainly true in some cases, and some individuals certainly did improve their life situation through the hunt or forest organization, I would argue that this is a slight misreading of the forest system, and perhaps of the hunting culture it engendered. It would seem that for many, a position in the forest was likely only a temporary stop before taking on a more substantial position in society, not necessarily a *means* to that end. Indeed, it is notable that many of the underforesters, at least the outsiders, seem young. Socially speaking, a position in the forest would have served two wider socially relevant purposes: the person would have learned the ways of the hunt and would have been gainfully employed. It is important to note that during the era hunting was closely linked with martial prowess and thus an education in the ways of the forest could be seen as a very valuable education indeed.²²⁰ Additionally, knowing the lingo of the hunt was a must for any man of standing. As noted in the de Kent case, for the young gentry in Walter’s care access to the hunt would have also allowed them valuable access to social prestige, via hosting hunts etc., and thus perhaps their first critical experiences of the prestige-and-favors economy that dictated much of the power structures of the realm. Thus the lesson de Kent was offering up was a lesson on the language of power and how to wield it. In this sense, a forest position represented one career path (of many other possible paths) a young man might take in his procession towards more prestigious positions later in life. Whatever greatness such a man might attain later in life, it is likely that such positions represented a critical first step. An underforester’s job might simply be the chosen starting point in a career that for many was already clearly set – in this light, the position itself was a valuable commodity that a chief forester like Walter

²¹⁸ Almond 2003, 115–142; Manning 1993, 234–236.

²¹⁹ Turton 1896, xii.

²²⁰ Manning 1993, 4–7; Sykes 2009, 164.

might use to his benefit. That Walter de Boyville was under Walter's tutelage in New Forest surely would surely have enhanced de Kent's position in his later land dealings in Leicestershire; having a prominent lord and sheriff like William de Boyville as an ally in the Midlands could not have hurt. It is hard to imagine that other foresters in the era would not have used their positions in the same way.

Although on a local scale the ability to dictate the terms of resource usage in a forest was of course quite valuable, the wider social value of the forest positions may have been of equal if not more importance. The prestige value of the favors offered up by Walter de Kent and his underforesters has already been dealt with, but we should again take note of the societal value of taking on a gentleman's son as a forester. Many of the foresters who occur under Walter seem indeed to be younger sons from gentry families, sons who have yet to inherit their estates and seem to have nothing else to do in the interim. It is notable that at least five of Walter's foresters later went on to have reputable careers elsewhere in the realm: for instance, John del Ponte, a servant of Queen Eleanor in the 1270s, went on to more important royal business later, eventually becoming a high justice on the King's Bench in 1304. Also of note is that a number of Walter's foresters were of burgesses stock. William de Burton and John le Espaynell both clearly came from merchant families, the latter eventually attained the esteemed position of mayor of Lynn in the 1280s. The merchant class was of course up and coming during this era, and, in allowing them access to the hunt, Walter would have been offering such families the opportunity to learn the ways of the landed nobility.²²¹ Indeed, a forester's position likely afforded these parvenu families a tone of respectability: for them, familiarity with 'the crafte of venery' would have represented a valuable marker of prestige and breeding otherwise lacking.

Thus Walter's position in New Forest, while surely benefitting him financially, also would have offered many intangible benefits as well. It allowed him a hand in the wider privileges-for-duties dynamics upon which so much of English medieval society was premised. Indeed, although Walter clearly used monies

²²¹ The Cely letters is a good example a merchant family and the prestige of hunting, as it seems they were quite keen hunters and entertained their guests with hunting. They also seemed to have owned a deer park. See Cely Letters, 17–18, 179.

generated from New Forest to further his moneylending operations, his ultimate rewards (the manor of Bereacre and his church benefices) were bestowed by the king and should be viewed for what they rightly were: privileges given for duties well done. Walter's privileges, then, ultimately stemmed from his success in navigating the power structures of the realm on his master's behalf. It should also be noted that much of Walter's dealings ultimately benefited not him but his masters, Queen Eleanor and King Edward. From his business with the Jews to his handling of royal or confiscated estates, Walter's work could generally be described as (often surreptitiously) securing lands for Eleanor, which of course benefitted Edward too. This was indeed part of a royal policy widely discussed in the era. As one 13th century chronicler put it: *The king desires to get our gold/the queen, our manors fair to hold.*²²² Walter's misdeeds in New Forest – and perhaps the fate of the foresters of fee – should rightly be viewed within this context.

Peter de Neville too, so long held up by historians as the archetypical evil royal forester who robbed from rich and poor alike would seem to be owed a modicum of reanalysis as well. When viewed through the prism of English politics in the 1260s, his deeds do seem a shade more excusable. Peter, like nearly everyone else on the winning side of the Second Barons' War, was after all only punishing agents who had rebelled against the king. This was a royal policy. In Peter's case it should also be borne in mind that Rutland was rebel territory throughout the war.²²³ As one of the only royalists in the area, Peter may very well have suffered some of the same afflictions that he inflicted upon his rebel neighbors after the war. Indeed, the war unleashed an outpouring of local acts of vengeance on both sides.²²⁴ The critical point of no return in the war can be seen as the moment the rebels began plundering royalist estates (in early 1263), and we could easily imagine de Neville being a target of such retribution.²²⁵ And while the records do not specifically bear this out, there are hints that Peter's powers in Rutland were limited during the war. A qualification noted in the 1269 inquest is

²²² Quoted in ODNB 'Eleanor of Castile.'

²²³ The castle of Oakham, the main royalist stronghold in the region, was taken by the rebels in 1264 (Page 1908, 173).

²²⁴ Powicke 1962, 175–177.

²²⁵ Powicke 1966, 438–442.

quite telling: ‘The same Peter, in every year, except in the years between the battles of Lewes and Evesham, had his piggery’²²⁶ The battles of Lewes and Evesham mark the beginning and end of the war, so during 1263–1265 something prevented Peter from exploiting the forest as he was wont to.²²⁷ One might maintain that he was off fighting for the king, and indeed he was away from Rutland during this time, but surely his absence would not have precluded his foresters and manor workers from using his privileges in Rutland. Peter certainly would not have been shepherding the pigs himself. Why, then, the break if not because his power to act was blocked by the new power holders? It is quite likely that Peter would have seen his powers in Rutland Forest greatly curtailed, and possibly even his lands plundered.

In the Midlands, royal authority was not reestablished until after the battle of Evesham (1265), and it is precisely then that we begin to see Peter harassing rebel manors in Rutland.²²⁸ In this sense, his actions could be interpreted as personal vendetta or, alternatively, as Peter simply reasserting his status in Rutland through gestures of power. It may be that both interpretations are actually two sides of the same coin. Whatever the aim, de Neville’s actions were clearly forged by the war and the eventual royalist victory. This may explain why Peter retained his position as forester (as well as other offices of responsibility) for so long despite the many allegations against him. Although his actions were genuinely excessive in nature, they were also at least somewhat understandable given the context. They must be read in the context of the momentous upheavals in power structures caused by the Second Barons’ War. Peter, then, would require slightly more sympathy than historians have been apt to afford him.

²²⁶ SPF 51.

²²⁷ The inquest also includes the wording ‘in the previous three years’ etc., offering a tentative 1266–1269 range for Peter’s anti-rebel excesses.

²²⁸ Powicke 1966, 509.

Reconciliation

In the long term, however, de Kent and de Neville, the latter especially, would have likely fared slightly better had they had a better nose for the winds of rumor. Both keepers' misdeeds seem to have become an issue after their excesses had repeatedly been reported to the king. In Walter's case the allegations were so heady that in 1276 King Edward and Queen Eleanor personally came to New Forest to set the wheels of justice spinning. The inquests that ensued were the effect of just such spinning. The New Forest documents mention that Edward ordered the inquest 'to determine the truth of transgressions and concealments . . . and to determine such excesses and offences.'²²⁹ The de Neville case of too seems to have gained momentum similarly: 'And whereas the king understands on the report of trustworthy persons that the said Peter and other avowing themselves by him have committed various trespasses and offences'²³⁰ Essentially, Peter seems to have missed his cue that reconciliation was now the favored royal policy. Walter apparently was in a position to ignore the cue entirely; he was not fiddling with the scales of power in the realm, just locally. Or perhaps both foresters realized a very simple truth: it wouldn't be a position of power if you couldn't abuse it too.

The cases of Peter and Walter also highlights another very salient fact true of the medieval period in general: it was an era in which power was very widely diffused, and justice was equally so. Or, as one historian has argued, 'the distinction between the enforcement of the law as a means of serving public justice and as a means of promoting private interests was blurred.'²³¹ In such a context a *crime* might well be equated with a *privilege* and any claim of abuse need employ hyperbole as a matter of course. Revoking a privilege – the fundamental mortar that bound medieval society together – would have necessitated strong grounds. Order was 'sacrosanct.'²³² In this sense, the fates of Walter and Peter are quite telling. Walter, who was accused of abuses far in excess of £5000, continued his career seemingly as if nothing happened. Peter, whose abuses were financially less

²²⁹ NFD 93.

²³⁰ PR Henry III v.6, 159.

²³¹ Kleinke 2009, 131.

²³² Barber 1984, 28.

excessive but politically damaging, suffered but slightly. Indeed, Peter seems to have been punished only because he was acting contrary to the general policy of reconciliation King Henry had chosen, not necessarily because he had abused the *forest*. He was outlawed, but he did not take to the forest like Robin Hood. And though he did lose his privileges, for the de Neville family this was only a temporarily setback: his son Thomas later inherited the forestership of Rutland without issue.

Faced with agents like Peter and Walter, in a system such as the forest system of England, the king's only recourse was to attempt to re-adjust the scales of local power to an outlay somewhat less confrontational, a resetting to a more neutral state if you will. Typically, overly-aggressive agents like de Kent and de Neville are simply sanctioned temporarily, or removed to elsewhere, but are never really punished because ultimately they are indispensable elements of order in the realm, nor have they committed anything that could be called crimes. Misappropriation and contestation of power were the illative outcomes of such a society. Here it is very interesting to note that in Turner's translation Peter de Neville's actions are 'extortions,' whereas in the original Latin the corresponding word is *prisa*, a fairly neutral, almost legal term that could easily be translated as a requisition or levy or even as a tax.²³³ This perhaps betrays a touch of Victorian prejudices and also brings us back to the crux of the problem: Historians have been apt to conceive of the forest as a perfect legal institution, as a nexus of rules and offices and resources, and have contented themselves with description (*what was the institution, how ought it to have been used*) without stopping to consider matters of human agency (*how was the institution used, by whom and to what end*). The idealized has tended to obscure the actual. The latter class of questioning is essential in uncovering the often logical considerations that underlay the seemingly lawless actions seen in the forest records, and would seem to make Peter and Walter not quite so evil after all.

²³³ *Mediae Latinitatis lexicon minus*, 837. Powicke understood the word as a tax or custom, a requisition (See Powick 1966, 522, 544). This interpretation was seconded by the kind guidance of Dr. Timo Sironen of the University of Oulu.

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OED *Oxford English Dictionary*, www.oed.com

TNA *The National Archives*, the.nationalarchives.gov.uk