

of south-east Warwickshire, its boundaries abutting both Oxfordshire and Northamptonshire to the east (Fig. 1). From the heavily dissected scarp slope of the Cotswolds embracing the eastern half of the parish, the land drops gently from a height of about 515 ft. around the village itself to 315 ft. on its western boundary. The sharp break of slope between the Cotswold Fringe and the broad plain of the Feldon of south Warwickshire coincides with a geological contrast between the resistant, dark-brown Middle Lias Marlstone above 500 ft. and the heavy, impervious greyish-brown Lower Lias Clay below (Fig. 2). Numerous springs, fed by seepage through the porous Marlstone and the glacial sands and gravels that occasionally overlie it, appear along the scarpfoot and contribute to the headstreams of the river Itchen draining northward to the Leam and Avon. A long narrow spur slightly exceeding 400 ft. curves westward from the village of Wormleighton and divides the lower land into a northern and a southern block. From the latter, movement south-eastward across the Cotswold scarp was rendered easy by the Fenny Compton gap, due partly to headward erosion of dip-slope streams like the Clayholme Brook draining to the Cherwell (Fig. 2) and partly to downcutting associated with an overflow of glacial Lake Harrison.¹ This gap was to be used successively by road, canal, and railway leading south towards London.

WORMLEIGHTON BEFORE THE DEPOPULATION OF 1499

Dense forest, with a high proportion of oak, covered most of Warwickshire in Neolithic times and this was true of the Wormleighton area, particularly on the heavy clays. By Early Iron Age times a good deal of clearing and settlement had taken place both along the river terrace sands and gravels of the Avon valley, and around a line of Celtic hill forts following the scarp-top of the Cotswolds. The prehistoric trackway, known to archaeologists as the Jurassic Way,² that ran diagonally across England linking these hill forts appears to have crossed the Fenny Compton gap near Wormleighton, perhaps following in part the course of the Anglo-Saxon 'Ridge Way' shown in Fig. 2. But although some clearing may have occurred along the trackway, there is no evidence for settlement around Wormleighton before the Anglo-Saxon colonization. Although during the Roman occupation a great arterial road, the Fosse Way (Fig. 1), was constructed south of the Avon and many settlements sprang up along it, there is as yet little evidence for the spread of Romano-British population across the densely wooded Lower Lias Clays into the Cotswold Fringe. Scattered finds, such as pottery and coins, along the valleys of the rivers Itchen and Dene may encourage one to look more closely for evidence of Roman settlement around Wormleighton, but, apart from a wooden coffin associated with Roman coins³ found between Wormleighton and Stoneton, nothing has so far come to light.

When the Anglo-Saxon settlers entered Warwickshire about A.D. 500 they were quick to take advantage of land already cleared in Romano-British times,

¹ G. H. Dury, 'A 400 feet bench in south-east Warwickshire', *Proceedings Geologists' Association*, lxii (1951), 167; 'A note on the Upper Cherwell', *Journal Northamptonshire Natural History Society*, xxxii (1953), 193. See also W. W. Bishop, 'The Pleistocene geology and geomorphology of three gaps in the Midland Jur-

assic Escarpment', *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London*, ccxli, no. 682 (1958), 255-306.

² O. G. S. Crawford, *Archaeology in the Field* (1953), ch. 7.

³ *The Victoria History of the Counties of England*, Warwickshire, i (1904), 249.