

Fig. 2, which attempts to show Wormleighton in its local setting during perhaps the peak of its post-Conquest prosperity, provides a good example of the density of nucleated rural settlement in this part of the Feldon and indicates some of the principal roads and field-ways that appear to have existed at this time. In plotting these lines of communication use was made of the evidence of aerial photographs giving complete cover for the district, and I am greatly indebted to Mr. D. J. Pannett¹ for checking the information against his maps of the distribution of ridge-and-furrow patterns, old open-field boundaries, and headlands for Wormleighton and neighbouring parishes. Wormleighton appears to have been well served by routeways at this time, many of them continuing in use today. The little stone church on the hill appears to have benefited from the short period of prosperity after the Conquest, having acquired a thick-walled tower and two narrow aisles by the end of the twelfth century. The rapid succession of priests in Wormleighton, Fenny Compton, Ladbroke, Burton Dassett, Avon Dassett, and Warmington between 1348 and 1350 is probably an index of the severity of the great plague, the Black Death, in the area and similar evidence could no doubt be produced for many other parishes within and outside Warwickshire.² Conditions at the end of the Black Death must have been chaotic in many parishes where a severely depleted, half-starved, and under-stocked labour force had to cope with portions of neglected fields. Little wonder that many parishes never had a chance to regain their old equilibrium before they were beset with other physical and human problems. Little wonder, too, that lords of large manors now lacking an adequate labour force should be ready to consider other forms of land-use than arable farming, or be willing to sell land to the first bidder. And who could blame the dispirited peasants, short of plough-teams and seed corn, if they tried to sneak away to the growing towns where employment might be found in tanning, metal-working, or the woollen industry?

Professor R. H. Hilton³ has clearly demonstrated the unprofitable nature of peasant farming in such Feldon villages as Compton Verney and Kingston around 1400, when many peasants were voluntarily surrendering their arable strips to their lord who in turn often had great difficulty in finding new tenants for his surplus land. Moreover, in many vills the peasants had already commuted their customary services and renders into annual money rents and were now hard pressed to pay these fixed sums, particularly when the demand for their wage labour both by the lord and by prosperous freemen had declined sharply. The outcome appears to have been a general reduction in the intensity of arable farming under the old open-field system and a corresponding increase in the acreage under grass. The demands of the growing cloth industry for ever-increasing quantities of wool now encouraged many peasants and tenant farmers, as well as the lord of the manor himself, to graze sheep on unwanted arable land, with the result that blocks of enclosed pasture sprang up on the

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² Lists of incumbents are given in W. Dugdale,

The Antiquities of Warwickshire (1656). See also *Victoria County History of Warwickshire*, i, 145-6, for further details of the severity of the Black Death in Warwickshire.

³ R. H. Hilton, 'A Study in the Pre-History of English Enclosure in the Fifteenth Century', *Studi in Onore di Armando Sapori*, i (1957), 675-85.