

who married Sir William Mountfort of Coleshill in Warwickshire.¹ So the manor came in due course into the hands of their grandson, Sir Simon Mountfort, who had the misfortune to be attainted for treason in 1495, all his lands being seized by the king. Although there is no direct evidence that the manor in Wormleighton had suffered considerable neglect following the death of Sir John Peche in 1386, it is very probable that this was so. As will be seen later, the manor-house is thought to have been in a very dilapidated condition towards the end of the fifteenth century, presumably because it no longer served as a major residence for an important family; indeed, it may well have sheltered only a bailiff or an ambitious tenant farmer at this time. Similarly, if one compares the recorded population of Wormleighton in Domesday times with that at the end of the fifteenth century, the settlement must have declined by over half even before the final depopulation occurred in 1499.

After Wormleighton came into the hands of the king in 1495, part of the manor, comprising 10 messuages, 200 acres of arable land, 40 acres of meadow, and 200 acres of pasture,² appears to have been granted for a time to a John Spicer. A prominent grazier of Hodnell (Fig. 2) by the name of John Spicer held 1 messuage and 3½ virgates from John Spicer in 1497, and it is not unlikely that most of this land was in pastoral use then.³ In the account that is to follow of Wormleighton's historical geography during and after the depopulation we shall be closely concerned with the Spicer family over a period of more than four centuries extending to the present day. At this time they were prosperous freemen farmers⁴ who appear to have taken full advantage of the opportunities that depopulation had offered elsewhere of first renting and later purchasing abandoned arable, pasture, and meadow land in the Feldon. As their fortunes grew through the accumulation of land and stock, so their social standing rose through marriage ties with the local nobility and gentry. In 1498 William Cope,⁵ who had married the daughter of John Spicer of Hodnell and who was Cofferer to the Household of Henry VII, was granted the manor of Wormleighton by the king at an annual rent of 20 marks (£13, 6s. 8d.), having previously rented the manor from John Spicer.⁶ He promptly set about purchasing all the lands and tenements of minor lords in Wormleighton, including those of Sir Edward Raleigh.⁷ Having gained control of the entire parish he proceeded in 1499 to destroy 12 messuages and 3 cottages, converting 240 acres of arable land to enclosed pasture for animals and driving 60 persons from the land.⁸ If one includes a further 6 messuages

¹ W. Dugdale, *The Antiquities of Warwickshire*, 2nd edn., revised by William Thomas (1730), i. 515.

² Warwickshire Feet of Fines, 1345-1509, iii, no. 2767 (1498-9), *Dugdale Society Publications*, xviii, pp. 212-13.

³ *Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem, Henry VII*, ii. 245.

⁴ J. H. Round, *Studies in Peerage and Family History* (1901), pp. 285-9.

⁵ William Cope seems to have held land both from the Crown and from various individuals in several parts of southern England. In 1499 he was appointed steward of the lordships of Henley-in-Arden and Tan-

worth in Warwickshire (see *Calendar of Patent Rolls, Henry VII, 1494-1509*, p. 168). In 1503 he took possession of great parks in Guildford and Henley, Surrey (*ibid.*, p. 339).

⁶ I. S. Leadam, *The Domesday of Inclosures 1517-1518* (1897), ii. 485 (Earl Spencer's MS. of c. 1519). See also Spencer MSS. 1670, 1677, and 1685.

⁷ *Ibid.* ii. 656.

⁸ *Ibid.* ii. 403-4; see also Public Record Office, *Miscellanea of the Exchequer 164/10/7*. William Cope was associated with other depopulations, for example, at Irchester and Knuston in Northamptonshire (*vide* Leadam, i. 287).