

a result of depopulation, great blocks of abandoned arable land had been put down to pasture in the area, and even today one can recognize these in distinctive local names of late origin such as Wills Pastures<sup>1</sup> (the name of a small extra-parochial district of 149 acres, between Wormleighton and Hodnell). The families, Catesby and Spencer, were clearly on very friendly terms, entered into many transactions<sup>2</sup> together, and were later to be related by marriage. For example, it is interesting to find in an undated letter,<sup>3</sup> thought to be pre-1486, that John Catesby of Althorp in Northamptonshire, requests 'Master Spenser of Hodynhill' to sell him 300 wether hoggerels<sup>4</sup> to help stock his farm. At the time of his death in 1497 John Spencer had extensive leases<sup>5</sup> of land in Napton, Lower Shuckburgh, Burton Dassett, Ascote, and Wormleighton, all close to Hodnell, as well as more distant holdings in Stretton-under-Fosse east of Coventry (Fig. 4). Apart from Napton all these parishes appear to have been affected by depopulation in some degree before 1497 or very soon after, though John Spencer does not seem to have been responsible. Instead he was probably very quick to take advantage of any leases being offered on enclosed tracts of former open field now put down to grass. From the list of his holdings given in the *Inquisition Post Mortem*<sup>6</sup> it is clear that he usually held messuages as well as land in the respective parishes, though many of the homesteads had probably already been abandoned. In Burton Dassett he held a virgate of land from Sir Edward Belknap in 1497, but we know that Belknap proceeded to enclose 360 acres of arable land here in 1499 and destroyed 12 messuages, later putting down a further 240 acres to grass.<sup>7</sup> The entry for Chapel Ascote refers simply to 20 virgates of land without reference to messuages, which had probably already been removed. Mention has already been made of the holding in Wormleighton of a messuage and 3½ virgates in socage.

John Spencer of Hodnell had a brother, William, who lived in Radbourn and probably farmed in a similar way to his brother. William's son, who was also called John (henceforth to be called John Spencer I to distinguish him from his uncle) was destined to set in motion a great advance in the fortunes and social standing of the family. Before his uncle's death in 1497 John Spencer I was farming the manor of Snitterfield on the edge of the Avon valley west of Warwick (Fig. 4), and about this time he married Isabel, daughter and coheir of Walter Graunt of Snitterfield,<sup>8</sup> which no doubt brought important additions to his estate. On the death of his uncle he moved to Hodnell to look after the extensive grazing business until his cousin, Thomas, came of age. His female cousin, Joan, had married William Cope, Cofferer to the king, who was granted the manors of Wormleighton and Fenny Compton in 1498, so John Spencer I quickly acquired powerful friends and relatives, and was in a good position to obtain grazing lands of his own in the vicinity, first by lease and

<sup>1</sup> *The Place-Names of Warwickshire*, p. 149. Wills Pastures may have been identical with Hodnell Pastures first mentioned in 1603. A family by the name of Willes lived in the area during the early seventeenth century.

<sup>2</sup> For example, the will of William Catesby, Esquire, drawn up 25 August 1485, showed that John Spencer was then owed sixty pounds and possibly more. See W. Dugdale (1656), p. 586.

<sup>3</sup> Early Spencer Papers, Box 8.

<sup>4</sup> A wether was a castrated ram; a hoggerel was a sheep between one and two years old.

<sup>5</sup> *Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem*, Henry VII, ii, item 245.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 160-1.

<sup>7</sup> See W. Dugdale, (1656), p. 409; also M. W. Beresford, *The Deserted Villages of Warwickshire*, p. 88.

<sup>8</sup> F. L. Colville, *Worthies of Warwickshire* (1869), p. 706; also J. H. Round, *op. cit.*, p. 187.