

later by purchase. Thus in the early years of the sixteenth century we find him renting land in Hodnell from the Priory of Nuneaton, the manors and pastures of Wormleighton and Fenny Compton from William Cope, the manors of Ladbroke and Radbourn from Sir John Rysley, a pasture in Stoneton from Sir Edward Raleigh and other persons, and the rectory of Radbourn from the Priory of Henwood¹ (Fig. 4).

With the quick profits derived from intensive grazing on these rented pastures John Spencer I soon acquired sufficient capital to enable him to purchase estates outright, commencing with the manor of Wormleighton and another in Fenny Compton bought from William Cope for no less than £1,900 in 1506.² In the latter part of the fifteenth century depopulation had also been proceeding vigorously in the county of Northampton that adjoined Warwickshire to the east, and opportunities for John Spencer I to acquire lands there soon arose. Moreover, after his death in 1522, there were two sons not only to establish a strong male line, but also to carry on the process of acquiring more land. The gradual acquisition of local holdings by purchase or lease up to 1633 is summarized in Fig. 4.³ From this it will be seen that a great block of land suitable for pasture and hay was acquired by the Spencers along the borders of Warwickshire, Northamptonshire, and, to a less extent, Leicestershire. Geologically the area included large expanses of impervious clays of the Lower and Upper Lias, producing long succulent grass, with shorter, drier pasture on the uplands of the Middle Lias Marlstone, Northampton Sands, and Oolitic Limestone. Clearly the opportunities for transhumance between parishes of contrasting physical and economic character were great. In 1508 John Spencer I purchased the manor of Althorp for £800 from the Catesbys.⁴ This estate had been depopulated some time previously, and it would seem that although the Spencers never had either the brutality or the opportunity⁵ to engage in wholesale depopulation themselves, they did not hesitate to turn to profitable use the fat pastures and former arable lands of abandoned settlements. Althorp was eventually to become not only a centre from which surrounding estates were administered, but also the great seat of the family. Wormleighton, too, was now to become the nodal point for vast pastures spanning the Warwickshire-Northamptonshire border, and a second family seat. As Fig. 4 shows, communications between Wormleighton and Althorp were good, and both places were near important roads leading to London. Stoneton, which was once part of the parish of Wormleighton though it is separate today, was also purchased in 1518; despite the fact that it was in Northamptonshire until 1896, it was from now on considered as a joint manor with Wormleighton, and the two are still administered partly as a joint estate today.

The severe depopulations to which we have referred above could not continue for

¹ M. E. Finch, *op. cit.*, p. 39. See especially Spencer MSS. 1698 and 1699.

² Spencer MS. 1706. A supplication of c. 1519 by John Spencer I to Henry VIII states that £2,000 was paid for Wormleighton alone (*vide* I. S. Leadam, ii. 483).

³ I am indebted to Professor M. W. Beresford and Mr. J. G. Hurst of the Deserted Medieval Village

Research Group for their help in checking depopulated settlements in the Northamptonshire portion of Fig. 4.

⁴ F. L. Colville, *Worthies of Warwickshire* (1869), p. 707.

⁵ About 1502 John Spencer I may have enclosed part of the manor of Wicken in Northamptonshire and evicted people. See I. S. Leadam, i. 285.