

over half a century without public outcry both in Warwickshire and elsewhere. The complaints of John Rous in 1459 probably had little immediate effect, but by the end of the century the State was compelled to take notice of the evils of depopulating enclosure and introduce legislation against it. Thus the general Statute of 1489 aimed at limiting depopulation, while the Act of 1515 forbade the conversion of tilled land to pasture.¹ A Bill connected with the latter complained that 'many merchant adventurers, clothmakers, goldsmiths, butchers, tanners and other artificers and unreasonable and covetous persons do encroach many more farms than they are able to occupy'.² The reference to butcher-graziers and tanners is particularly significant. Despite these moves to restrain depopulators little seems to have been achieved, with the result that in 1517 Cardinal Wolsey set up his famous Commissions of Inquiry. The greater part of the findings of the Commissions was printed in 1897 by Leadam,³ under the title of *The Domesday of Inclosures*, and one can learn a great deal from these about the sequence of events in Wormleighton following the depopulation by William Cope in 1499. When Wolsey's Commissioners inquired into the facts of the depopulation at Wormleighton, William Cope⁴ had been dead for four years so John Spencer I appears to have had some difficulty in convincing the Exchequer that he was not directly responsible. In proclaiming his innocence he disclosed many interesting details about changes that had been wrought on the landscape of Wormleighton since he purchased the manor in 1506, and these we will now examine.

John Spencer I, who by now had held the office of High Sheriff of Northamptonshire in 1511 and was to be knighted by Henry VIII soon after 1518, not only denied responsibility for the depopulation but in a letter of 1519⁵ claimed to have partly rebuilt the settlement and to have made many improvements. The new settlement had been established on the hill-top adjoining the church, the site being much drier than the earlier one on the clays in the valley. Yet there was no difficulty in obtaining water, for wells could easily be sunk into the sand and gravel capping. By 1519 he claimed to have built himself a new manor-house on the hill, as well as four houses for his servants, and the total population in 1519 was stated to be only twenty less than had occupied the settlement before its depopulation in 1499. Later the number of houses appears to have been further increased to six,⁶ and finally to twelve⁷ by 1522 when Sir John I died, the total population then being only a little less than sixty. There is abundant evidence on the ground, in manuscripts, and on estate maps (e.g. that of 1634, Fig. 6) to show that Sir John Spencer I had indeed built a new settlement of some size, perhaps almost an early 'model village', on the hill.⁸ The very range of his grazing activities required that he had shepherds, cowherds, drovers, and general labourers around him, as well as great barns for the storage of wool and

¹ For an example of both the Statute of 1489 and the Act of 1515 see M. W. Beresford, *The Last Villages of England*, pp. 104-6; also I. S. Leadam, i. 6-14.

² *Calendar of Letters and Papers of Henry VII* (eds. S. R. Gairdner and J. S. Brewer), iv (iii), no. 5750. For ease in reading punctuation has been added to the above quotation.

³ *Op. cit.*

⁴ William Cope died in 1513 (*vide* I. S. Leadam

ii. 637, footnote).

⁵ *Ibid.* ii. 485-7. Earl Spencer MS. of c. 1519. The original document is to be found in Earl Spencer Papers, Box 8, folder 15, at Althorp.

⁶ Public Record Office, *Miscellanea of the Exchequer*, E 164/10/7.

⁷ I. S. Leadam, ii. 637-8.

⁸ *Ibid.* ii. 487-9, Earl Spencer MS. of c. 1522.