

gardens, and closes pressed into use for the penning of stock but a rectilinear grid of new closes grew up around or alongside them. Before 1491 Rous<sup>1</sup> complained that the depopulators 'enclose the area of the village with mounds and surround them with ditches', the like of which can clearly be seen on the lost village site at Wormleighton today. Thus the rectilinear ground patterns seen on the left of the four small fishponds in the aerial photograph (Plate 6) appear from field work to belong to this group, the ponds themselves then being convenient watering-places for cattle and horses. The long branching pattern of what appear at first glance to be sunken roads or old water-courses that once led from the right of the ponds on Plate 6 down to the stream (now to the canal) in the valley bottom also appears to be a post-depopulation feature. Although the courses, like the ponds, are dry today they were clearly not roads, for their branching heads lead straight to the ponds. Field work, including the running of levels along each course, suggests that there were indeed old water channels related to an irrigation scheme for watering meadows. Water from the spring, and also from the overflow in the north-east corner of the large square pool, appears to have been collected in a channel running along the northern edge of the large pool. From this channel, the flow into which was controlled by a small sluice, water could be released into the smaller ponds if required or could be directed into the network of small runnels. By blocking these runnels at convenient points a good flow of water across the fairly impervious surface was made possible. The small stream, emerging from a spring that fed this system of pools and channels, is today called the Washbrook and takes its name from a small stone-lined pit<sup>2</sup> that was once used for washing sheep.

Part of the higher ground around the newly established settlement on the hill-top still remained in arable use to provide grain for the community, but apart from this most of the parish was given over to pasture. Different kinds of stock were carefully segregated in great closes, while frequent movement of animals from one part of the parish to another, or even from one parish to another, ensured that no pastures were overgrazed. Such control had a strong landscape expression in the great hedges and ditches that separated the shrunken arable from the expanded pasture, one pasture from another, and grazing areas from the valuable meadowland. In his replies to Wolsey's Commissioners John Spencer I has much to say about the fine hedges and ditches some now twenty years old, that he, and William Cope before him, had constructed. He also stresses that when he came to Wormleighton there was 'noo wood nor tymber growing within xij or xiiij myle' and poor folk had to 'bren the strawe that theire cattell shuld lyve by'. To remedy this shortage of timber, which certainly presented a serious problem in many parts of the Feldon at this time, he had set acorns 'bothe in the heggerowes, and also betwixt the hegges adioynng to the old hegges that William Coope made before'. It is interesting to notice that on two occasions he refers to his great field divisions as 'doble dyched and doble hegged' with trees set between. This was no exaggeration, for these great double field boundaries

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit.

<sup>2</sup> This small pool was not shown on the map of the lordship of Wormleighton prepared for Lord Spencer by Richard Norwood in 1634 (see Fig. 6),

but appears on the estate map of 1734 made by John Reynolds. Both these fine maps are kept in the Muniment Room at Althorp and I am indebted to Earl Spencer for allowing me to consult them.