

form a characteristic feature of the parish today and have been mapped in Fig. 6. Several good examples can be seen in the aerial photograph (Plate 6), for instance the field boundary immediately to the left of the large fishpond.

Various remarks by John Spencer I confirm the impression already gained that Wormleighton's land area had been very intensively used for arable and pasture in the four centuries preceding depopulation. Not only had almost complete deforestation made timber 'a gréttér commodyte then eyther corne or grasse', but he complains that there was no intercommon remaining in the parish to provide free grazing for his tenants, a fact confirmed by the estate map of 1634. In view of our contention earlier that the clays of the Lower Lias are suitable for arable farming in favourable weather but in the long period are certainly better under grass, it is interesting to find that the same conclusion had been reached over four centuries ago by John Spencer who stressed that his manor 'was nevyr good for corne as the cuntrey will testefye'. Perhaps the most illuminating part of Spencer's statement is the description of his occupation. He pleads to be allowed to retain his hedges and enclosed pasture 'for his lyvyng ys and hathe byn by the brede of cattell' in his pastures, for he ys neythir byer nor seller in comon markettes as other grasyers byn, but lyvyth by his owne brede of the same pastures, and sold yt when it was fatt to the Citie of London and other places yerely'. Further reference to the breeding of livestock is made in a letter to the Commissioners written in the winter of *c.* 1521/2 when Spencer pleads that if he had to sell his stock in mid-winter he would lose heavily 'for he hathe no maner of fatt cattell now lefte hym at this tyme but his brede.'² This might be taken as referring only to ordinary breeding ewes and heifers, but, as will be seen later, the Spencers were also engaged in selective breeding and in the sale of breeding stock. The importance of good road connexions between Wormleighton, Althorp, and London has already been mentioned, and in the succeeding years large numbers of fat stock were to be sold in the London market by the Spencers. Discreetly perhaps, there is no mention of the sales of wool which must also have been very great at this time, as will be demonstrated later. The pleas of John Spencer I were successful, he was allowed to keep his great pastures, the family fortunes continued to increase and he was knighted not long before his death on April 15 1522.³

THE PERIOD OF INTENSIVE STOCK RAISING AND THE ACQUISITION OF MORE ESTATES

The rise of the Spencer family has been described in considerable detail by Dr. M. E. Finch⁴ for the period from 1540 to 1640, and I am grateful to her for allowing me to make use of her material in this paper. After the death of Sir John Spencer I the family's acquisition of grazing land in Warwickshire and Northamptonshire continued, aided in some degree by the Dissolution of the Monasteries in

¹ 'Cattell' in this sense would include livestock in general, but particularly sheep and cattle. John Spencer I makes this clear by quoting separate prices for beasts and sheep though both are collectively described as 'cattell'.

² I. S. Leadam, *op. cit.*, p. 488.

³ The will of John Spencer I shows that he held

certain lands in Essex as well as those in Northamptonshire and Warwickshire. To the latter estates shown on Fig. 6 should be added 1 messuage and 60 acres of arable land, meadow, and pasture in Leamington. See P.R.O., MSS. C 142/40, nos. 83 and 124.

⁴ *Op. cit.*