

1636. The Spencers were now faced not only with the problem of declining revenues from sheep-farming, but also with the difficulty of persuading others to lease land from them. During this period of flux a large proportion of the land around both Wormleighton and Althorp probably lay under-stocked, for by now the Spencer sheep flock appears to have declined to only one-third of its former size if one can make adequate calculation from the wool weighed at Wormleighton in September 1639.<sup>1</sup> The answer lay, firstly, in a change to more mixed farming on the great home farms of the Spencers, producing grain and meat for urban markets, and, secondly, in a gradual allocation of land under lease to a new class of tenant farmer that arose later on the estates.

The leases proposed on the 1634 map do not appear to have become permanent, for when opportunity arose and policy dictated, Wormleighton and Stoneton—still treated as one manor, though forming separate parishes—were leased *en bloc* to suitable tenants who in turn may have sub-let. As the Spencers had their main residence at Althorp, with 42 men and 11 women on the domestic staff<sup>2</sup> there in 1637, the fine house at Wormleighton formed an attractive residence for wealthy tenants, both relatives and outsiders. Tenants taking on a block lease of this kind may well have sub-let land to individual farmers within the village, but it is interesting to find that no farmsteads were established outside the village apart from that near the sand-pits (Fig. 6). Thus, a century later, when a new map<sup>3</sup> of the manor of Wormleighton was prepared by John Reynolds in 1734, the settlement pattern had apparently not undergone any major change, but the subdivision of former great fields had proceeded vigorously within each of the old 'charges' of 1634 which were not shown on the new map. This suggests that more intensive use was being made of the land by leasehold farmers living in the village and in the single outlying farmstead, and it is probable that several of these small enclosures had again felt the bite of the plough. Even so, most of the larger closes were no doubt still under grass.

The changes shown on the map of 1734 were not considered sufficiently great to warrant the inclusion of a separate illustration in this account. Changes within the village itself had included the addition of a small square pool on the hill-slope immediately below the spring that still fed the old fishponds. As we have seen earlier, a sheep-dip (now called the Washbrook) was located on this spring near the foot of the hill and the Spencers ensured that it was kept in good repair for the use of their tenants' stock.<sup>4</sup> Around the old fishponds the trees had now disappeared from the former parkland of 'The Old Town' (Fig. 6) and the land appears to have been used as a large pasture, which is its function today. The disappearance of the park should be considered in relation to a great decline in the appearance of the manor-house between 1634 and 1734. By the latter date the house was only a shadow of its former self, for during the Civil Wars it had served as the headquarters for Prince Rupert and his cavalry before the Battle of Edgehill, fought in the autumn of 1642 when the crops had been harvested from the old open fields that still extended below

<sup>1</sup> M. E. Finch, p. 48.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 178, Appendix V.

<sup>3</sup> This map is housed in the Muniment Room at Althorp.

<sup>4</sup> See Spencer Account Books for 1777 where payments for sheep-washing and 'repair of the Washbrook' are mentioned.