

The tendency for younger people in Wormleighton to look beyond their own village for many services as well as for employment has been further encouraged by drastic changes in local administration. Thus, the village school, which had 42 scholars on the register in 1907, could only muster 12 in 1949. As a result the school was closed, and Wormleighton children now travel by 'bus to attend the primary school in more populous Fenny Compton and the secondary modern school in the former market town of Kineton, the latter over seven miles away. But the closure of the school brought one small benefit, for Earl Spencer kindly gave the building to the village for use as a much needed village-hall for meetings and social functions. The services of teachers resident in the village had meant much to the social life of the community, and the reliance of the latter on their resident vicar now became even greater. But in 1954 a further blow was to fall, for in that year for reasons of economy the ecclesiastical parishes of Fenny Compton and Wormleighton were joined in a united benefice with a joint vicar resident in Fenny Compton. Wormleighton vicarage, which was now sold, became a private residence, and the community lost yet another key figure. In recent months there has been some slight redress, for two teachers from Fenny Compton have now come to live in Wormleighton. Contact between Wormleighton and the 'outside world' is maintained by motor car and a skeleton 'bus service, and it is only in the last few years that the attractive character of the village and its interesting story have caught the attention of a small number of visitors. At the week-end an increasing number of motorists penetrates the seclusion of the village street, while with the coming of pleasure craft to the Oxford Canal summer visitors tie up for the night near the wharf where barges once off-loaded.

Even today, with some 150 folk in the parish, of whom about 110 live in the estate village on the hill, Wormleighton probably has fewer people than lived in the earlier village down in the valley in Domesday times. The acreage of arable land is also probably considerably less today than it was then, while the corrugations of ridge and furrow on the present fat pastures remind one of great changes in land-use through time. It is not surprising that the severe disturbances associated with the depopulation of 1499, the sweeping changes from arable to pasture, the quick regeneration of the village on a new site with a different way of life, and the close dependence of the new community for so long on a distant lord have left structural weaknesses in the social and economic life of Wormleighton today. By contrast the neighbouring parish of Fenny Compton, physically similar but for long held by several rival lords, managed to escape depopulation, maintained its open-field husbandry until very late and, apart from minor set-backs (notably the general exodus from the land in the latter half of the nineteenth century), continued strongly in being to return a parish population of about 500 today. Innate strength and stability over many centuries have therefore secured for Fenny Compton a size and status somewhat above that of Wormleighton today. That this should be so between two contiguous parishes of similar extent cannot be satisfactorily explained in physical terms alone. Emphasis must be placed on their contrasting historical geography, so many aspects of which are tangibly incorporated into present landscape features, notably into field patterns and village morphology, but which at the same time still have a more subtle expression in the character and outlook of the very folk themselves.