

Why the name Honeywood Road?

Meet Mary Honeywood, her son Anthony and the Honeywood Charity

by Amy Myers

The Honeywood Charity has a long pedigree, dating back to the early seventeenth century when amongst other bequests Mary Honeywood left considerable lands to finance what her son Anthony duly built in 1622, ‘six alms-houses, and a house for a governor’¹ together with an annual payment for the almshouses’ residents. The almshouses and High House (now called Honeywood House and a Grade I listed building) can be seen in Lenham High Street, and on the Downs is Honeywood Farm, part of the original estate. £40 was to be divided between the six residents of the almshouses and the rest was to be ‘to the use of the governor, now vested in the minister and churchwardens, and of the annual produce of £50.’²



Mary Honeywood was a remarkable lady, chiefly known now for her having left the greatest recorded number of living descendants, 367.³ But Mary was more than just a statistic. The daughter of Robert Atwater of Royton Manor in Lenham Heath, she married at 16 and she was known for her fierce Protestant beliefs, attending the burning at the stake of martyrs under Queen Mary. Her portrait, owned by Oriel College, Oxford, shows her holding her prayer book and pointing to the Venetian glass which, according to legend, she cast to the ground in a

moment of spiritual despair, declaring ‘My soul is as surely damned as this glass will break’. It remained intact.

Mary inherited Pett House in Charing, living there with her husband and at Markshall in Essex, where she died at the great age of 93 on ‘Tewesday ye 16 day of May 1620....and

¹ Edward Hasted, 'Parishes: Lenham', in *The History and Topographical Survey of the County of Kent: Volume 5* Canterbury, 1798

² *Idem.*

³ *Honeywood Evidences*, ‘The Posterity of Mary Honeywood’, Robert Honeywood, 1612 amended 1622. This achievement is also recorded in the Guinness Book of Records.

according to her desyer was buried in Lenham Church in ye County of Kent, upon Saturday then following.⁴ Confusingly, Markshall has a memorial plaque to Mary but she is indeed buried in St Mary's Lenham. The tombstone of her grandson Robert Thompson near St Mary's Church altar refers to her lying nearby and to her remarkable record.

The Honywood charity is still active today, and has now joined forces with the Douglas charity under the joint name of The Honywood and Douglas Charity, combining their charitable objects.

Meet James Stoddart Douglas and the Douglas charity

James Stoddard Douglas born in 1793 was a distant relation of the George Douglas of Chilston Park. George Douglas remained a bachelor but had adopted a daughter, Margaret, who married James in 1830. Twenty-eight years later on George's death, James, a former Lieutenant in the Royal Navy, inherited Chilston Park, becoming a conservative MP and taking a close interest in local affairs. When Lenham's workhouse closed in? ... he founded the Douglas charity to transform it into rebuilt almshouses, where they remain today as Grade II listed buildings.

⁴ *Honywood Evidences, op cit*