

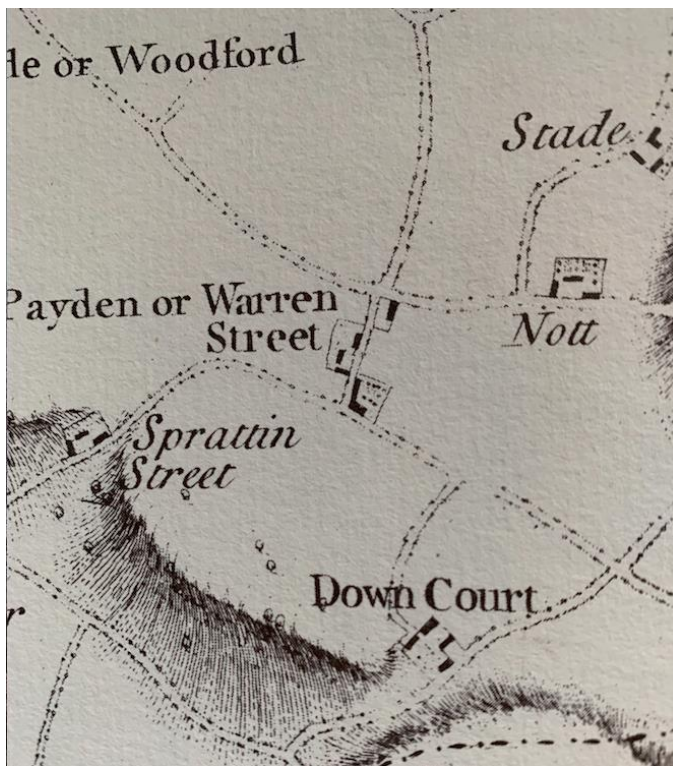
DOWN COURT

Farming and Politics

*by Richard Thomas
Henny Shotter*

The Manor of Downe, or Down Court as it came to be known, was located a mile and a half north-east of Lenham and stood on the crest of the North Downs at the top of what is now Rayners Hill. It was on the western side of today's road, opposite the main gate for the Cherry Orchard picnic site.

Today all that remains of the property is its old well, which is marked on maps, including Ordnance Survey maps, and the land is now planted with trees. A public footpath runs through the site and leads to Hubbards Hill *where there was once a windmill at Pivington Farm. The mill is identified in some literature as*¹ 'Downs Court Hill Mill'



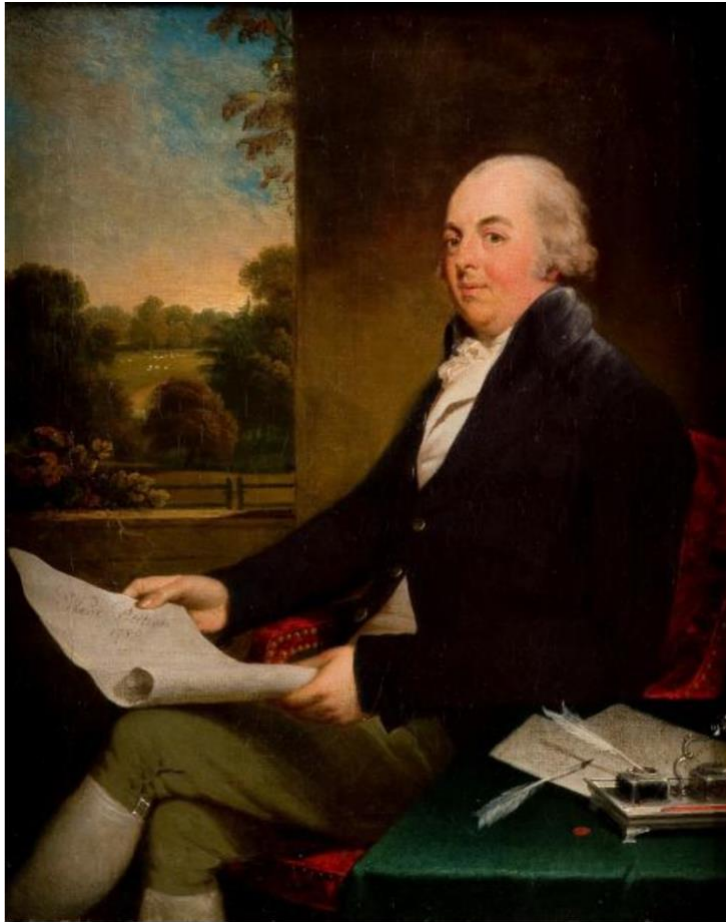
We do not know when Down Court was first built. The manor is not mentioned in the Domesday book, so we assume it is from a later date. The earliest reference is reported by Edward Hasted² when he says that in the reign of King Henry III (1216-1272) it was owned by Hamo de la Dune, who took his name from the manor. Hasted goes on to say that by 1347 it was in the hands of one Laurence, the heir of Robert de la Downe, and in 1467 John Downe is recorded as living there. He left the property to his two sons, John and Thomas.

Down Court in the Andrew and Drury's Map

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_windmills_in_Kent

² Edward Hasted, *The History and Topographical Survey of the County of Kent*

There is then a gap in the ownership record but by the middle decades of the sixteenth century it



had come into the ownership of the Atwater family of Royton Manor in the parish of Lenham.

In 1543, Mary, the younger daughter of Robert Atwater, married Robert Honywood (and so became Lenham's famous daughter Mary Honywood⁴), and took as part of her inheritance Down Court with her as well as other estates in the area. Down Court thereby passed into the Honywood family and was still owned by the Honywoods when Hasted was writing at the end of the eighteenth century. It was then, in 1796 owned by Filmer Honywood⁵ who had his residence at Hall's Place in Otterden. He was the son of Sir John Honywood and his wife Dorothy Filmer (daughter of Edward Filmer, Lenham).

The inscription on the tombstone⁶ of Filmer Honywood's parents encapsulate much of the spirit of the Honywod Family and Filmer Honywood himself. It is because of this that it is included in the present article:

³ A topographical Map of the County of Kent in twenty five sheets on a scale of two inches to a mile, from an actual survey by J. Andrews and and A. Drury 1769

⁴ See the article by Amy Myers : <https://www.heritagelenham.co.uk/people>

⁵ Painting by William Sharp

⁶ <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/189913333/dorothy-honywood>

'Sacred to the Memory
Of Sir JOHN HONYWOOD Bart. Of Evington in this Parish
Who in times when hospitality and simplicity of manners
Were giving way to fashion and refinement,
Maintain'd them pure and uncorrupted:
And was an eminent example of the virtues of private Life,
In Religion of serious and unaffected piety;
In Morals of strict honesty and integrity;
In Social Life of openness and freedom of conversation
Amongst all ranks of men.
His Tenants, Neighbours and those who serv'd him
Never experienced from him oppression,
But all the good offices of kindness and benevolence;
Thus did many partake of the influence of his example and the affluence of his fortunes
Others may have mov'd in an higher sphere
But no man ever contributed more
To the advantage comfort and happiness
Of the circle around him.
By his first wife Annabella Daughter of William Goodenough
Of Longford in the County of Berks Esq.
He had issue William, Edward, Annabella, Christiana, Mary and Thomasine:
By his second wife Dorothy Daughter of Sir Edward Filmer of East Sutton.
In this County Bart. He had issue Filmer, John and Mary.
He Died 26th June 1781. Aged 71.
In the same Vault with Her Husband
Lies interr'd Dame Dorothy Honywood,
Second Wife of Sir John Honywood Bart.
She died Octr. 7th 1781.
In the 70th Year of her Age.

Filmer Honywood followed in the footsteps of previous family members and went into politics. He was elected Member of Parliament (MP) for Steyning between 1774 and 1780. He then stood for Kent and was elected in 1780. He held the seat until 1796 and was re-elected for Kent in 1802 until 1806. Like his ancestors, he was opposed to mainstream politics. He was a Whig politician and voted against further finance for the Anglo-Spanish War on 10 Mar. 1796. On the other hand, he seconded a motion to secure a minimum wage for labourers on 25 Nov. 1795, 12 Feb. 1796. On

another occasion, 29 Feb. 1796, he deplored the bad quality of the bread available to the poor and recommended that they be given further relief⁷.

He remained unmarried and upon his death in 1809 Down Court came to into the ownership of his nephew.

It must have been during the ownership of Filmer Honywood that Down Court was farmed by Brewer Rayner. His gravestone is in St. Mary's churchyard in Lenham. It records the death of a Brewer Rayner of Down Court who died in 1811, aged 65. His wife Elizabeth died in 1821. They had seven sons and five daughters. He is described as a yeoman, which suggests that he was not only a tenant farmer but also owned land.

There is a second Brewer Rayner with a gravestone at St. Mary's. He died in 1871, aged 79-It seems highly likely that these two Brewer Rayners were related, but we can only guess. In the Kent Tithe Awards from 1830 we find that the land was farmed by William and James Powell who were also tenant farmers of East Lenham. The then owner was the Rev. Phillip James Honywood B.A. who was rector on the Honywood Estate 'Marks Hall' in Essex and lived in 'a neat modern residence with tasteful grounds, and 32A.'⁸

The National Archives hold a record⁹ which describes Lenham hospital as '*Sanatorium at Down Court Manor Farm, Lenham*'. It is therefore very likely that the farm operated until the early



years of the twentieth century. The land was in the 20th century bought by Andrew Barr (the first)¹⁰ who planted a wood on the land.

The Ordnance Survey map of 1832 shows a track leading from Ashford Road (the A20) up to Down Court and then on to Waterditch Lane at Warren Street. This road today remembers the name of one of Lenham's farming families. It is called Rayners Hill.

⁷ See: <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/member/honywood-filmer-1744-1809>

⁸ <https://historyhouse.co.uk/placeM/essexm09a.html>

⁹ <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C1870335>

¹⁰ See our article about 'Farming in Lenham- a look back' at