

Hoowood Land in Stowupland owned by a Great Ashfield charity.

Nicholas Firmage, a London merchant by his will dated 20th of February 1621 gave land in Hackford, Norfolk and £300 to be invested in land to finance a lecturer to preach sermons in Great Ashfield Church, for ringing the great bell for each sermon, and for the purchase of bell ropes. The £300 was laid out in the purchase of 44 acres of land called Hoowood or Howood in Stowupland. This land was in the vicinity of Mount Pleasant Farm overlooking Stonebridge Lane. It consisted of 6 fields with a barn. These fields still form a discrete unit surrounded mainly by larger fields. Today Stowupland is devoid of large areas of woodland, but the name of this land indicates there was once a wood on this site.

Documents regarding this charity have been preserved at Bury St Edmunds record office which trace the land back to 1537 when William Woodhouse of Ingham in Norfolk acquired this land along with the manor of Thorney Hall from the recently dissolved Ingham Priory. After several changes of ownership it was purchased by Richard Draper of Stowmarket a grocer and tallow Chandler. The deed of this sale in 1613 makes it clear that much of the wood had now been cleared as the property is described as *“land pasture and wood ground lately being all wood ground and now converted into arable and pasture 44 acres and one little tenement thereupon newly erected”*. In 1628, Richard Draper sold Hoowood to the trustees of the Nicholas Firmage charity, in whose hands it remained for over 250 years. Leases amongst the papers of the charity show that it was let out on various lengths of lease to local farmers. In 1745, William Southgate took over the lease for three years at a rent of £12 19s 10d per annum from William Mulliner. Mulliner was a Stowmarket butcher and raised cattle at what is now Mount Pleasant farm, but this time was known as Howgate Farm. “Gate” being used in the sense of a way or lane. Thus it was the way leading to Hoo(wood). Later tenants were in 1748 John Freeman on a lease for 50 years, in 1808 James Hearn on a lease for nine years and in 1817 James Hearn, on a lease for nine years.

The Dictionary of Suffolk Place Names defines the place name element Ho or Hoo as a heel of land or hill spur. This fits Hoowood well, being on a hill overlooking a bend in the valley of the River Gipping. The “little tenement” that was newly erected in 1613 may have been on the site of a barn which still appeared on maps in the 20th century in one of the Hoowood fields.

Neil Langridge (2021)