

## FAIRFORD HISTORY SOCIETY OCCASIONAL PAPER - 2

### THE HONEYBONES OF FAIRFORD

For over 100 years four generations of the Honeybone family carried on a watch and clock making business in Fairford. Honeybone clocks are now much sought after today, particularly in the Cotswolds as they represent fine examples of local craftsmanship and a link to Fairford's past.

The original head of the Fairford branch of the Honeybone family was Richard who moved to Fairford from the family home in Wanborough near Swindon towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. Richard's father, Thomas, and grandfather, Richard, were both clockmakers who worked at Wanborough, although Richard is originally thought to have lived in nearby Liddington. Richard the elder was born in 1718 and was making clocks and watches by at least the 1740s. His son, Thomas, took over the family in business in Wanborough and when he died in 1807 two of his sons, William and Richard, and his wife, Ann, carried on the clock making business. William died very soon afterwards and control of the Wanborough business passed to his mother. Meanwhile Richard had married Jane Elizabeth Boucher and had moved to Fairford to set himself up as a clock and watch maker in premises in London Street. When his mother proved incapable of looking after the Wanborough business Richard took it on and for a few years at least maintained his own business at Fairford as well as in Wanborough. Between 1809 and 1817 Richard was contracted to maintain the Lechlade church clock. Richard's wife Jane died in 1813 and he married again, Elizabeth from Sherborne. She set up business as a grocer in Fairford, probably in adjacent premises in London Street. The couple had six children, three of whom would also become clock makers. The eldest son was Thomas who was born in 1802 and moved to Brentford near London where he is recorded as a watch and clock maker from at least 1839 to 1871. His younger brother Richard learnt his trade from his father at Fairford before moving to Nottingham where he married Amy Margetts who was a member of a well known family of clock makers from the Midlands and a clock maker in her own right. It fell to George, born in 1810, to carry on the family business at Fairford. In 1835 George married Sarah Hewer of Fairford. In the 1841 census George is recorded as being a silversmith but is listed as a watch and clock maker in the 1851 census. Trade directories of the time also list the Honeybones as jewellers as the skills and craftsmanship required for making timepieces are the same as those needed to make and repair jewellery.

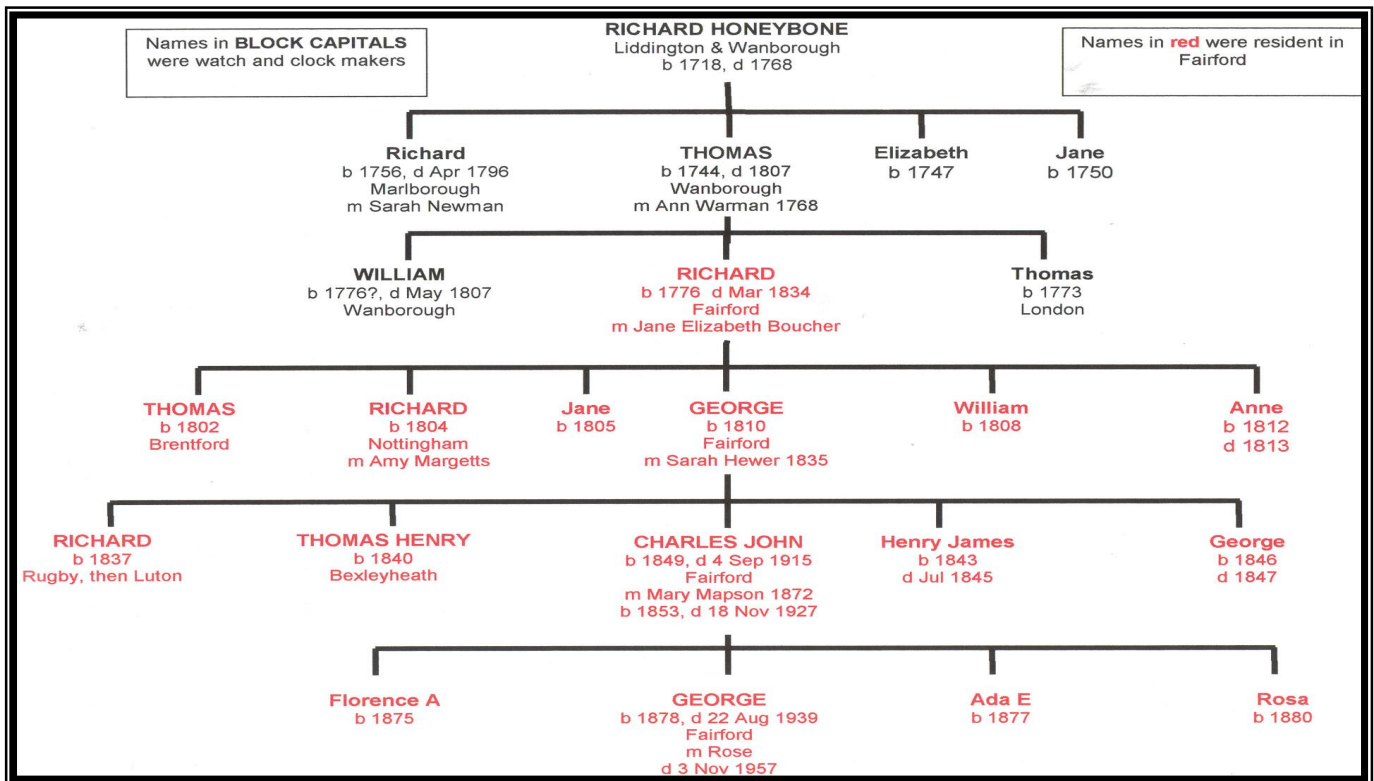


It is not known when George died but he is listed in an 1863 Gloucestershire trade directory as still trading, as indeed is his mother Elizabeth whose grocery shop was listed as late as 1870 at which date George is no longer recorded and Elizabeth was 82. George and Sarah Honeybone had five children, all born in Fairford. Two of the children died in infancy but the other three all followed in the family trade and became watch and clock makers. The eldest son, Richard, is described as a watchmaker while aged just 14 in the 1851 census. He later moved to Rugby where he had a business until about 1870 when he moved to Luton where he carried on his trade until at least 1881. Another son, Thomas Henry, moved to Bexleyheath near Dartford in Kent where his business flourished until at least 1882. The Fairford business was left to Charles John who was born in 1849 and who married Mary Mapson, daughter of a Cirencester watch and clock maker, in 1872. By the time Charles took over the family business factory mass-produced clocks and watches had largely

replaced the much more expensive hand-made timepieces. However, there was still a requirement for repairs and custom-built pieces, even though many of the products sold by the Honeybones in their shop would no longer have been made on the premises. Perhaps in order to diversify his business Charles also took to selling flies and fishing tackle to supply those who fished the rich trout streams in the area.

The last Honeybone to carry on the family business in Fairford was George who was born in 1878 to Charles and Mary. George and his wife Rose continued to run the shop which is now the bar of the Allium restaurant on London Street. An ardent supporter of local sporting events and in his youth a member of Fairford's cricket and football teams, George died in August 1939 while Rose passed away in November 1957.

It should be remembered that the Honeybones were not the only family involved in watch and clock making in Fairford. There is evidence that perhaps as early as the 1720s Thomas White was making clocks in Fairford and his son Humphrey is recorded as a watchmaker in the 1760s. The Beale family was also involved in watch and clock making and had a business in Fairford for much of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century in competition with the Honeybones. Although perhaps not in the first rank of watch and clock makers, the Honeybones of Fairford produced good quality timepieces which today fetch high prices whenever they come up at auction. The extended Honeybone family produced at least 11 craftsmen who took their trade to at least seven different parts of England but it was at Fairford that the Honeybones maintained a continuity of fine craftsmanship for over a century.



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References:

Graham Dowler. Gloucestershire Clock and Watch Makers. Published by Phillimore Publications, 1984.

The Honeybone Family History & Family Tree Resource Site at:

<http://www.honeybonefhp.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/>

Fairford Census returns and Gloucestershire Trade Directories