

Honeybone clockmakers in Wanborough

Clocks first appeared in China in the 8th century but it wasn't until the 14th century that they were first introduced into Europe. These early devices used weights to regulate the hands. Clock springs were invented in the 15th century and revolutionised the craft, allowing more accurate time-keeping and smaller time pieces.

By the time Richard Honeybone of Wanborough took up clockmaking in around 1740, the craft was a highly technical one, typified by the work of John Harrison and his highly accurate marine chronometers which made determining longitude at sea possible. It is not known what encouraged Richard into the business. His grandfather was a miller so it's possible the workings of the mill pointed young Richard in the right direction.

He set up his workshop in Wanborough, about a mile from the family home in Liddington, which is itself a mystery. Whereas now Wanborough and Liddington are satellites of the busy railway town of Swindon, in the mid-18th century they were farming villages where the majority of inhabitants tended to work to natural time. However, despite these unusual circumstances, the business obviously thrived as Richard's son, Thomas, followed in his footsteps. An undated note in the Wanborough parish records states "One Thomas Honeybone was a maker of grandfather clocks in this parish where some of his clocks are still in use. His workshop was in the Marsh where Mrs Fisher's house now stands".

Thomas had three sons, two of whom followed him into the family business. The elder son, Richard, set up a shop in Fairford, whilst the younger, William, stayed in Wanborough. In 1807 it appears both Thomas and William died and their workshop passed to Richard who ran both businesses until his death in 1834, when the Wanborough shop appears to have closed down.

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Extract from A D Passmore's Notebook held at WAHNS Library, Devizes

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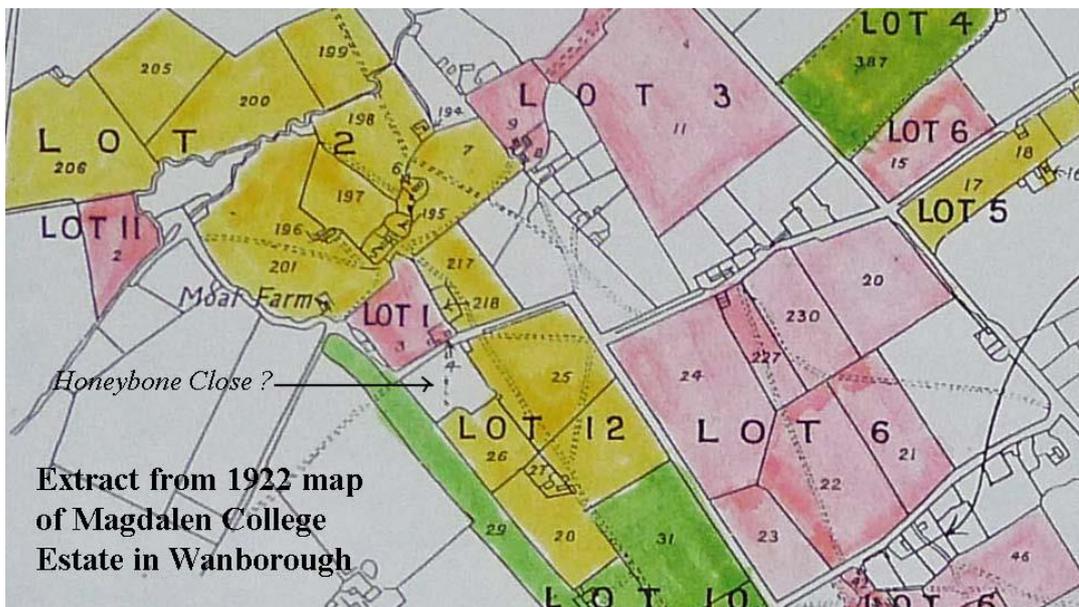
“Honeybone of Wanboro’ lived and made his clocks in the lane by Marsh Burycroft Row on the E side of the bend by the moated site and on the south side of the road, still known as Honeybone Close.”

The Land Tax returns for late 18th century list Thomas Honeybone and his wife Ann as proprietors of a freehold house and land in Wanborough (see below).

County of Wiltshire } An Assessment made in pursuance of an Act of
for the Parish of Wanboro' } Parliament past in the thirty eighth year of his
in the County } Majesty's reign by Land tax to be raised in
1798 } great Britain for the service of the Present year

Names of Proprietors	Names of Occupiers	L	S	D
Nath. May	free hold Mathhouse	0	5	2
Benja. Choules	free hold house & land	0	4	8
Tho. Shopp	free hold house & land	0	3	0
Francis Herring	free hold house & land	2	12	0
Tho. Honeybone	free hold house & land	2	6	8
Richt. Tombs	free hold house & land	0	17	8
Mr. Green	free hold house & land	3	14	4
Michael Tombs	free hold house & land	1	13	6
Jonathan Westcott	free hold house & land	0	2	6
Mr. Smith Graces	free hold house & land	0	16	6
Timothy Abbott	free hold house & land	2	5	8
George Thresh	free hold house & land	0	4	0
	free hold Close	0	1	10

The only plot of freehold land which matches Passmore's description of the location of Honeybone's premises is that shown on the map below of Magdalen College's Estate in Wanborough.



The site is now occupied by Marshlea as shown on the Ordnance Survey map below.



1886 1:2500 Ordnance Survey Map