

Ansty's Natural Drainage System

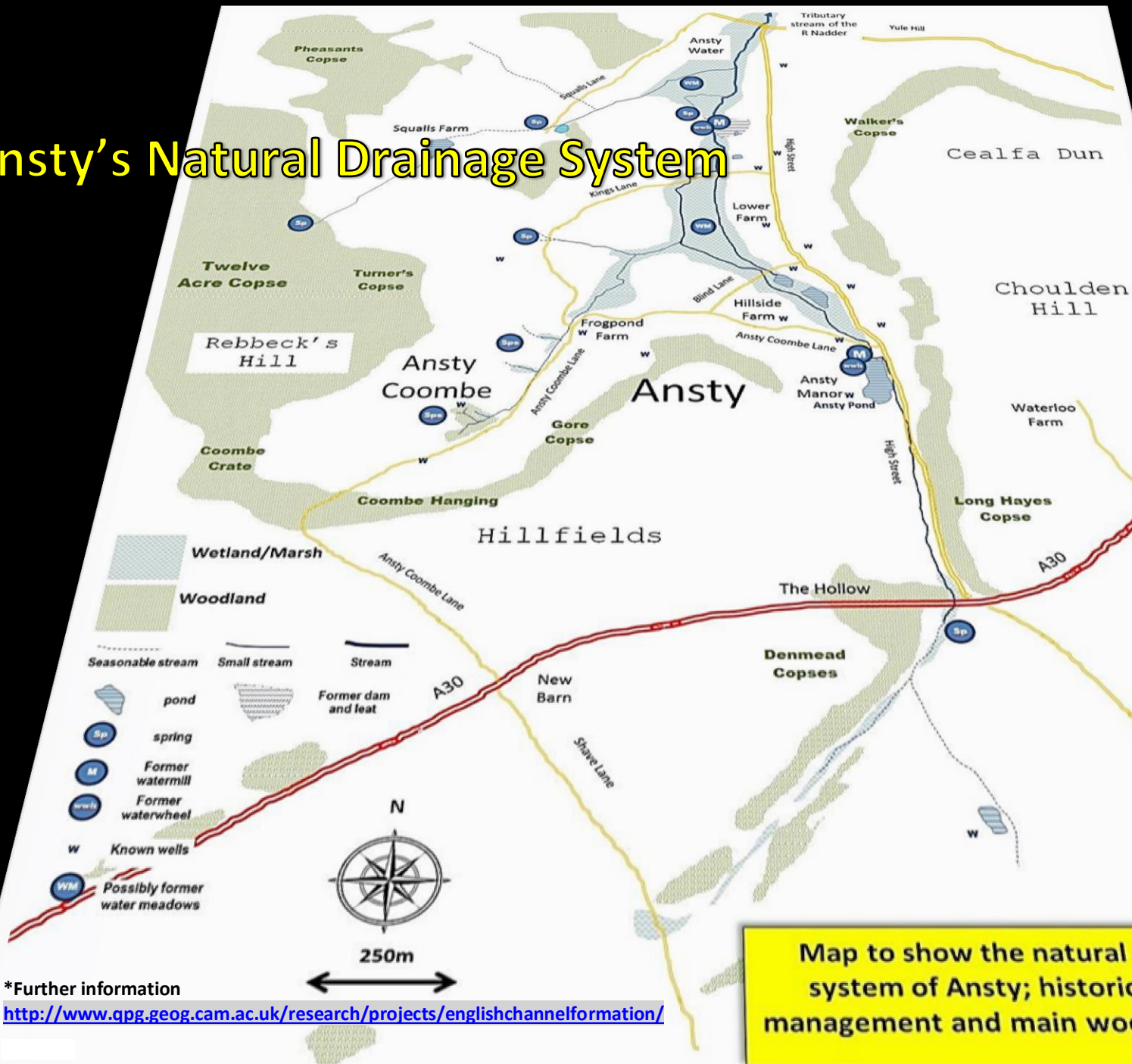
Water has long played an important role in the village of Ansty. It has shaped the landscape; provided a reliable source of water for drinking, washing and watering crops as well providing the power to turn mill wheels.

Historically, the copious springs of the whole of our locality had the capacity to flood too causing many problems for travellers journeying from London to Exeter especially during wet winters.

Local names suggest the watery nature of Ansty: Ansty Water, Frogpond and Ansty Pond.

Read on and discover some of the interesting facts about Ansty's watercourses.

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*Further information

<http://www.qpg.geog.cam.ac.uk/research/projects/englishchannelformation/>

Ansty village is sited in a valley containing a north flowing stream which rises in Denmead Copses. Ansty is a classic 'spring line' settlement. The source of this water originates in the higher chalk downlands half a mile or so away to the south.

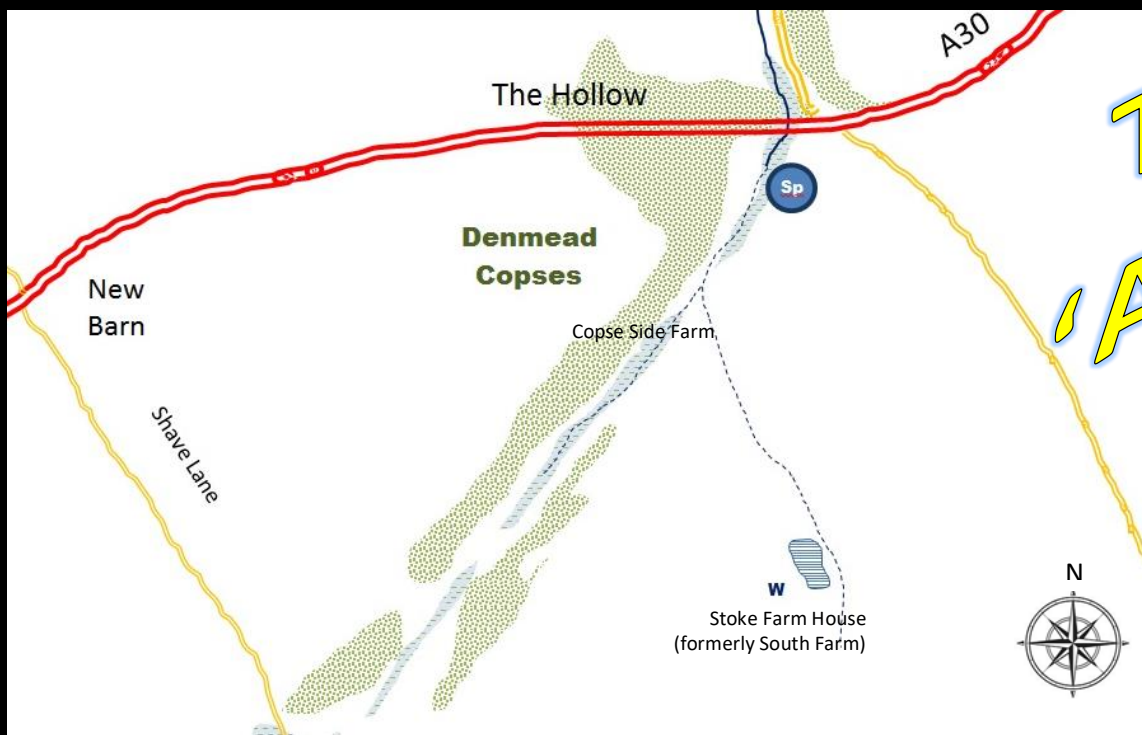
The valley is quite deeply entrenched, with a notable slope dropping down from Choulden Hill. This wooded valley was slowly carved out of a greensand rock bench, scouring down to the gault clay when the stream was a much more powerful affair, swollen with meltwater at the end of the last great ice age*. The many dry valleys on the downs are a testament to those far off times.

The Ansty Coombe hamlet is also positioned on a similar spring line with rivulets seen issuing from several points on the NW edge of the lane. Here the water source occurs at the foot of a greensand ridge dip slope. The steep, narrow 'coombe' or valley was also largely formed during the last 'big melt' about 20,000 to 10,000 years ago and joins the Ansty stream below Lower Farm on the High street. Ansty Water as it is sometimes called continues to flow northwards to join the River Nadder at Tisbury.

Most of the village lies on an active aquifer: hence both Ansty and Ansty Coombe were able to rely consistently on the local springs and high water table for their water supply. Just note the number of wells that were once active in Ansty!

The Ansty lowland area can quickly become very wet in rainy times and has been known to flood.

Map to show the natural drainage system of Ansty; historical water management and main woodland areas



The birth of 'Ansty Water'

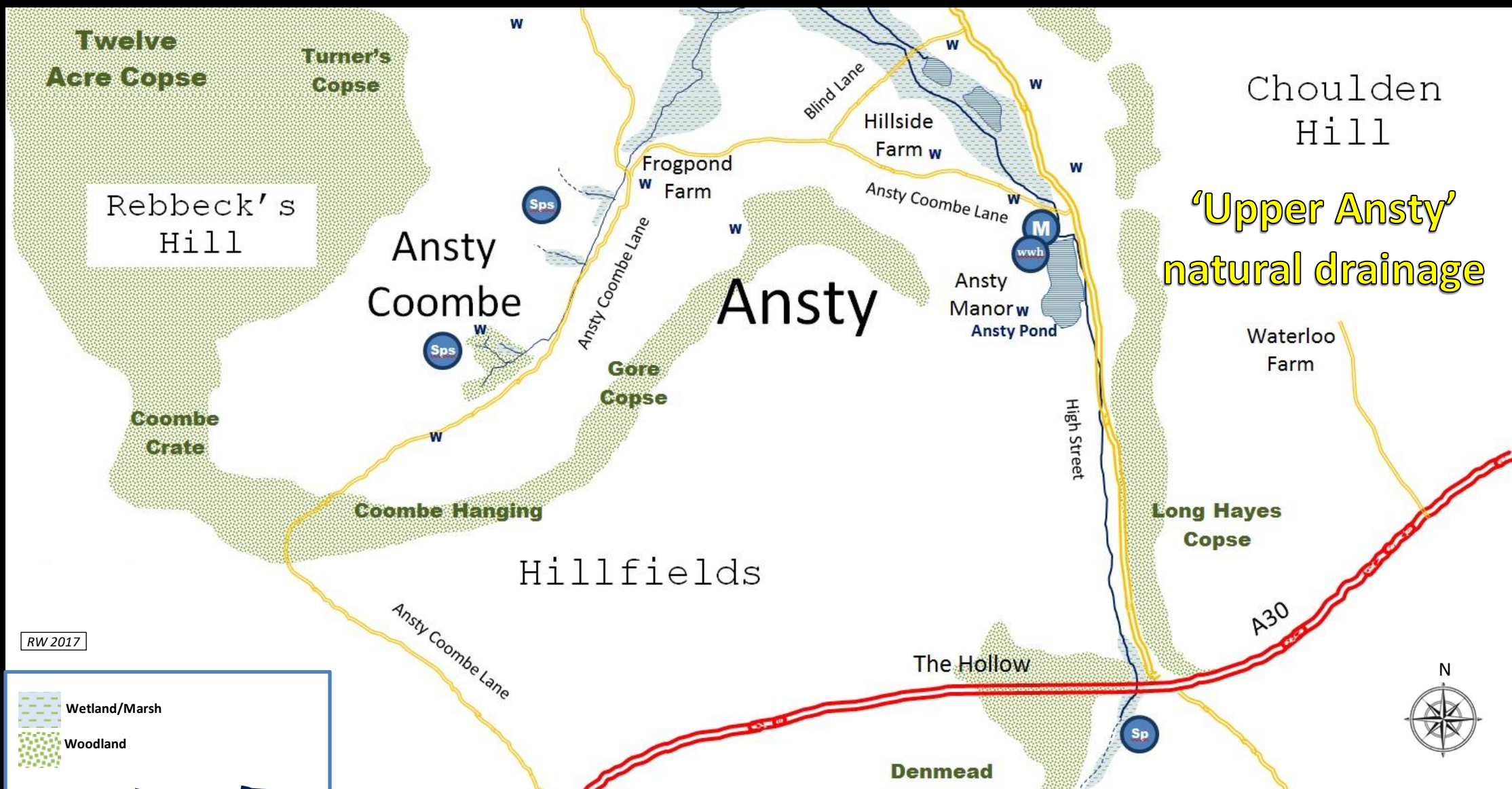
Map above- The spring just below Ansty Hollow on the A30 is the source of the village stream (fed by two 'winterbournes') that then flows as one stream north through Ansty. The spring then runs through a culvert under the A30 and flows alongside the village high street. This stream, known as Ansty Water, has always played an important part in the life and times of Ansty.

The winterbournes, one rising in the vicinity of Stoke House Farm and the other in the small valley of Denmead Copses were especially prominent during the wet winter season of 2013.

Near right- looking south west, up the winter 'bourne' valley flanked by Denmead Copses in August 2013. A wet autumn and record rainfall in December 2013 into January 2014 meant the winterbourne appeared along the entire length of this small hidden valley. There were floods across many parts of Wiltshire – including the centre of Salisbury.

Far right- near the source of the spring below the southern side of the A30.





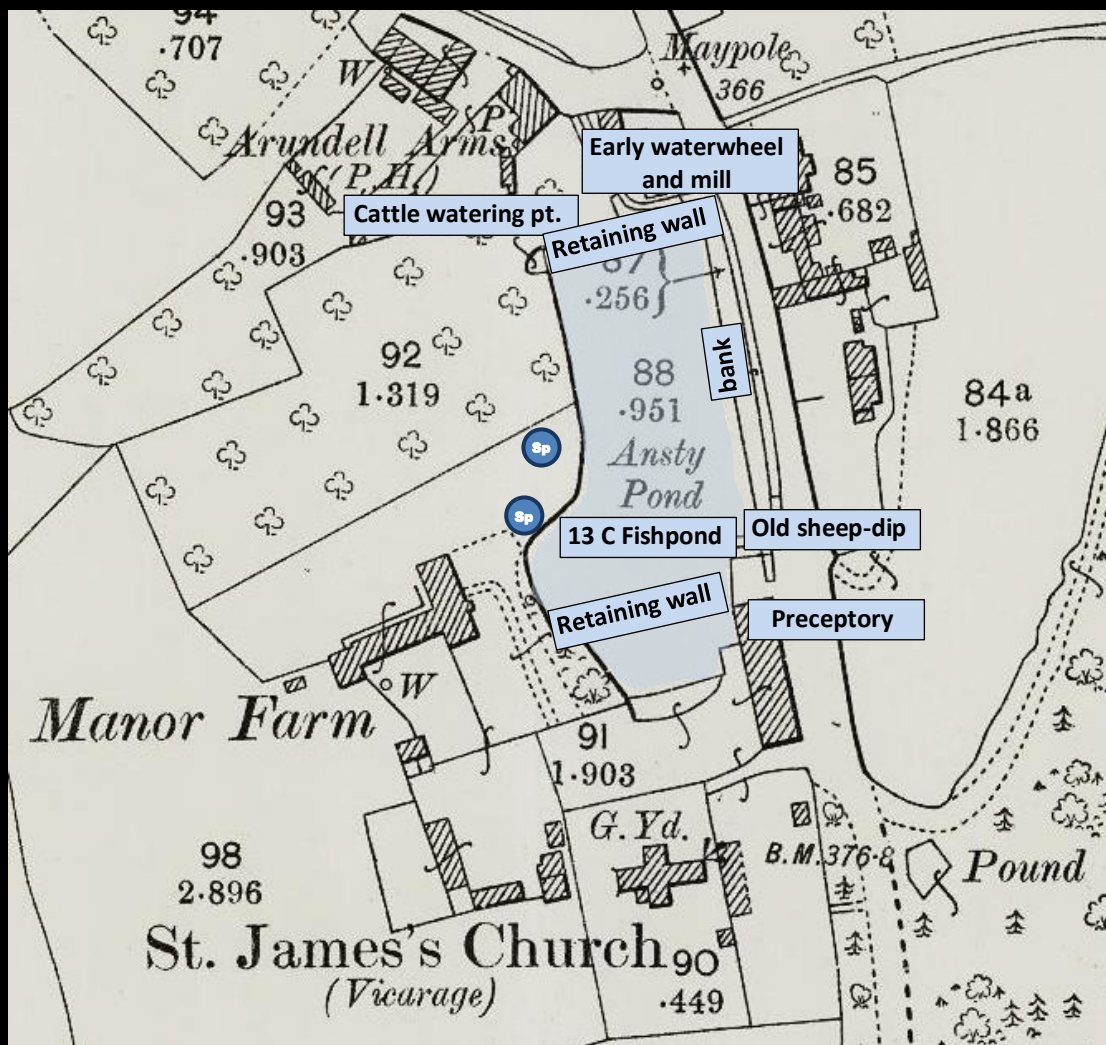
Map above- In the late 18th century the junction of the newly turnpiked road (A30) and the village 'High Street' (then referred to as plain 'Ansty High Street') was raised considerably as this area flooded readily in winter. It seems the old Ansty high street originally ran along the foot of the small embankment you can still see on the west side of the road approach into Ansty. Once in Ansty the stream flowed through the location of Ansty Pond which was originally a series of marshy springs and then northwards, still on the west side of the high street to join a similar stream flowing out from nearby Yule Hill in Swallowcliffe.

On the western side of Ansty more springs rise in the Ansty Coombe area combining to form a pretty roadside stream flowing NE along Ansty Coombe Lane before disappearing via a culvert under the Kings Lane road junction opposite Frogpond and disappearing onto a small meadow field floodplain before eventually joining the bigger Ansty stream. Well before the culvert was built there may well have been a ford at this junction. In the small copse between 99 and 100 Coombe Lane at least 5 springs bubble up where the local greensand rock meets impermeable gault clay. This small stream is subject to flash flooding – especially where it is forced to enter today's partially blocked culvert opposite Frogpond.

Once in Ansty, the Ansty Water stream flowed through to the location of Ansty Pond which was originally a series of marshy springs and then northwards on the west of Ansty High Street to join a similar stream from Swallowcliffe (at the foot of Yule Hill). The combined stream continues to flow alongside Tisbury Row and shortly joins the river Nadder just to the east of Tisbury.

Map below- In the 13th century the manor of Ansty was granted to the Knights Hospitallers of St John of Jerusalem by Walter Turbeville. The Hospitallers built a preceptory or Commandery on the manorial estate (alongside the Ansty stream and track). They also built Ansty's St James' Church, a hospice and guest house where they welcomed pilgrims and looked after injured knights returning from the Crusades in the Holy land. They also constructed a large pond where the springs rose immediately below the manor house and a retaining wall and bank were created to form the pond. Ansty Pond was well stocked with fish and duck, providing supplementary food for the Order and a head of water for a mill (first recorded in the 14th century) and was almost certainly located to the north of the pond to take advantage of the drop in water. A sheep dip was once located here by the Hospice/Commandery and you can still see the stone walls between into which boards were inserted to form a temporary pool for the dip.

Incidentally just across the road, opposite St. James's Church on this map the village pound is still marked. The old feudal system of managing farmland communally meant that strict controls were placed on where and when animals could graze. The village pound or pinfold was created as a place where straying animals could be locked up until their owners paid a fine for their release. This 1900 OS Map extract (1-2500) shows a summary of some of Ansty's historical connections with its natural water supply. Some Ansty folk park in it now when attending church!



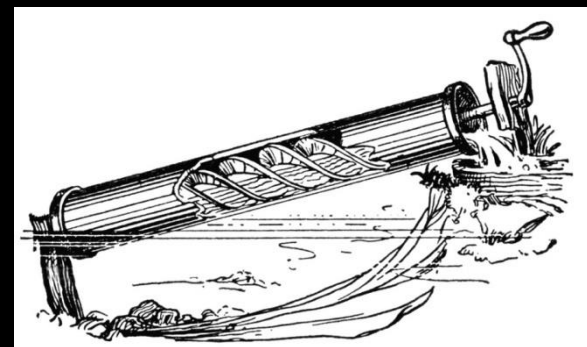
The first mention of a mill in Ansty was recorded in the Domesday Book in 1086 and was within the estate which became Ansty Manor. The Domesday Book is a manuscript record of the "Great Survey" of much of England and parts of Wales completed in 1086 by order of King William the Conqueror.

The water mill was later recorded as still being part of the Manor in 1338 and continued to exist until the 18th century and perhaps a bit later. In the 1338 survey a rental for one watermill of 30 shillings was mentioned but does not identify the location of the mill.

The Manor mill was last expressly mentioned in 1761.

Below right-- At the north end of the pond (in 2007) was a track where a horse and cart with an open barrel in the cart came to collect water for the cattle. It has been suggested there was once a box in the pond with an auger and riddle (similar to an Archimedean screw) and as the handle was turned the water flowed into the barrel. The trough in the picture could easily have been a barrel. This engineering idea might even have been brought back by knights returning from the wars in the Holy Land.

Left- OS Map extract showing Manor Farm and Ansty Pond as it was in 1900 with added historical evidence of the estate's use of the watercourses.



Sources: Ansty. A Wiltshire Village Story 2007. Ansty and its water. Liz Knight

<http://maps.nls.uk/geo/explore/#zoom=18&lat=51.0367&lon=-2.0646&layers=176&b=1>

http://www.outofoblivion.org.uk/vill_pounds.asp

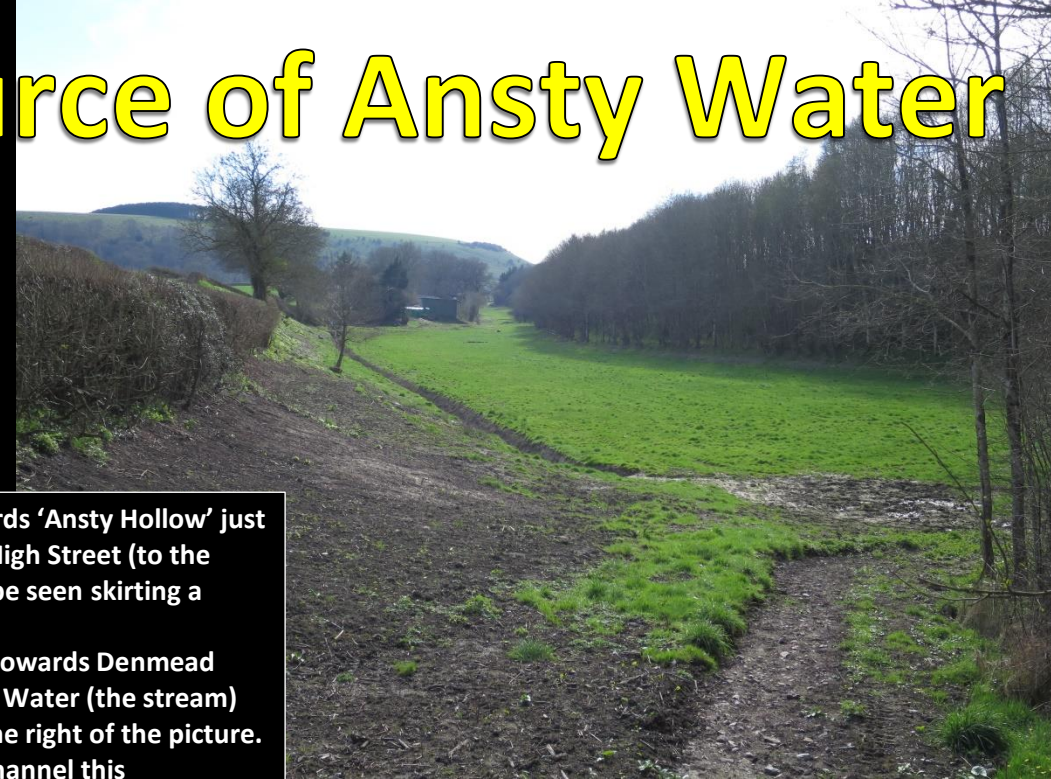
The source of Ansty Water



Above left- View looking towards 'Ansty Hollow' just beyond the junction of Ansty High Street (to the right). Denmead Copse(s) can be seen skirting a narrow field strip.

Above right- Moving closer in towards Denmead Copse(s) is the source of Ansty Water (the stream) which runs under the A30 to the right of the picture. In 2017 work was in place to channel this intermittent stream.

Below left- the Ansty stream emerges from a culvert and flows north down alongside Ansty High Street.
Below right- The stream flows mainly alongside Ansty Pond which is itself fed by several more springs. Here the Ansty stream is almost in spate after a sustained period of rainfall in December 2017.



Ansty Pond



1980

The beautiful Ansty Pond was constructed in the 13th century by a group known as the Knights Hospitallers of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem. It was a fishpond and formed part of a complex of buildings which once housed a Commandery of the Order.

2017

In late April 2009 part of the copse half way up the lane were felled. The estate who owned it said they were 'coppicing'. It didn't look quite like that but it did give an opportunity to work out where all the springs were even if they were blocked by debris!

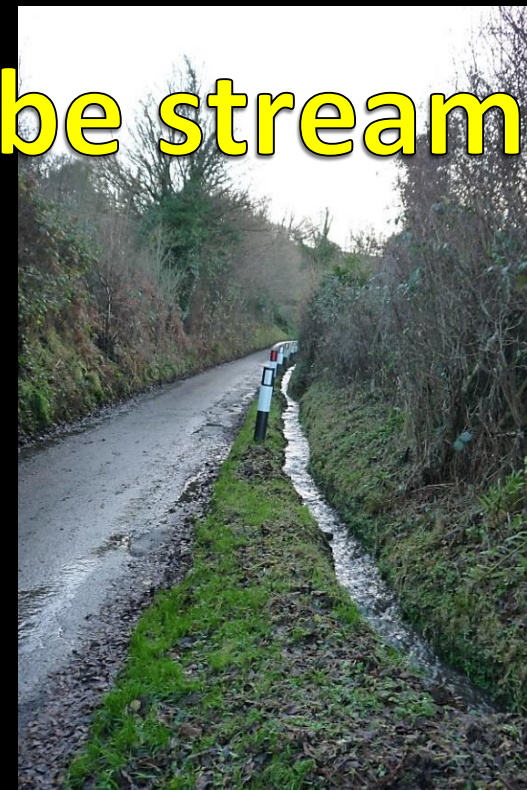
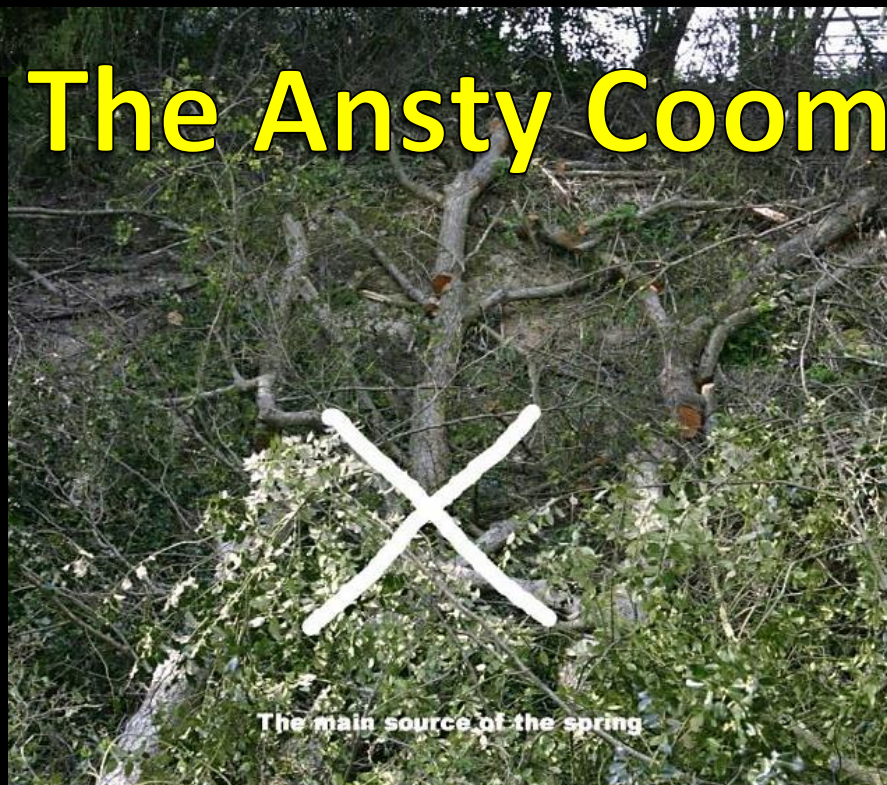
Near right- The main spring source was identified on the NW edge of the copse. It was described as a well on most maps and was the main source of water for houses along Ansty Coombe lane. At one time several footpaths converged on to this water source.

Far right- The small Ansty Coombe lane side stream. It has been known to flash flood with a notable flooding incident back in the mid-1990s. Here the stream is almost in full spate on December 24th 2013 after a very wet period.


Below- At least 4 streams were identified, although they were badly blocked by felled trees, branches and debris.

Note the narrow valley and steep sides of the 'coombe'

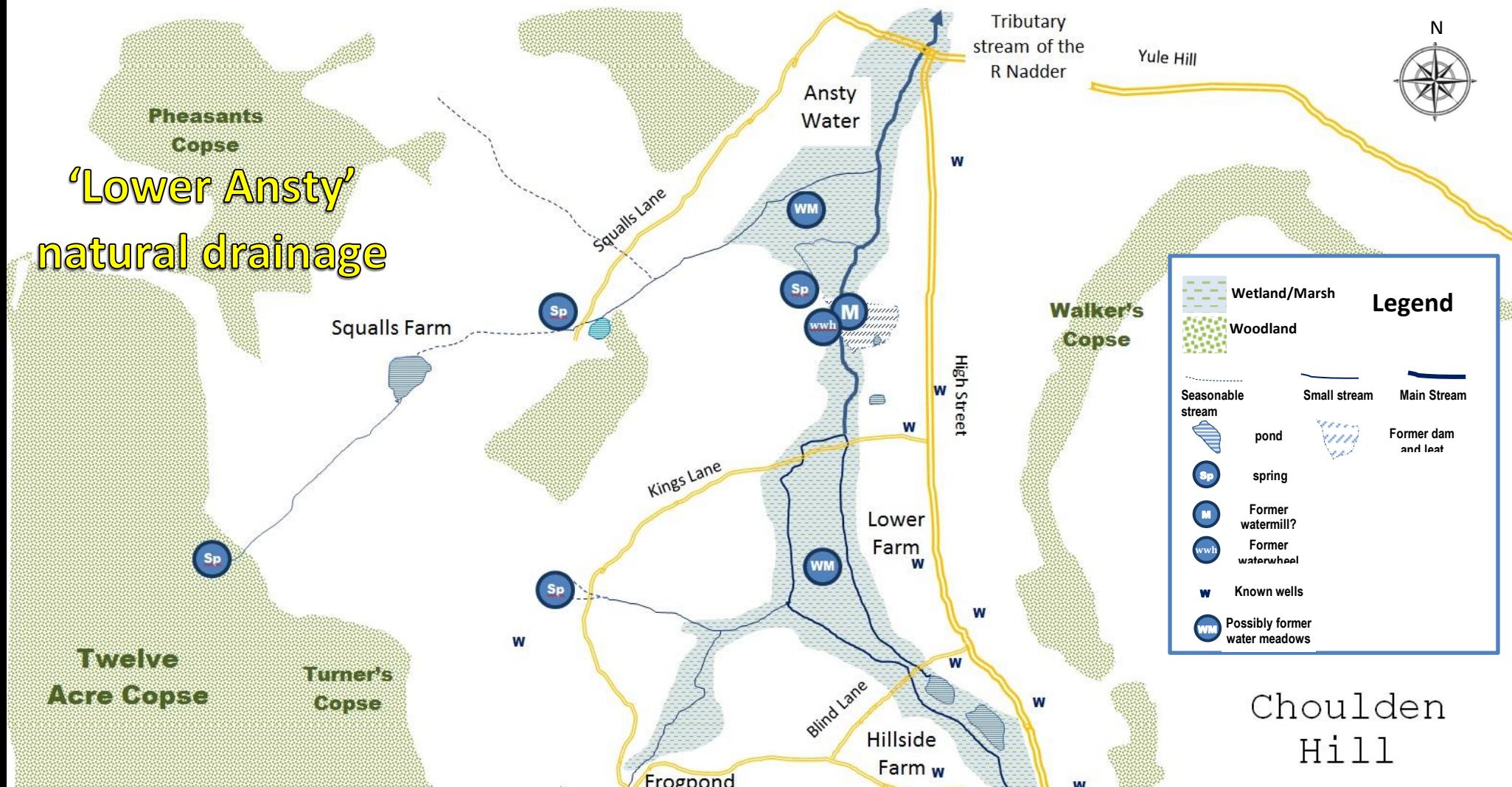
The Ansty Coombe stream



Below- Since this part of the copse in Ansty Coombe was felled in 2009 it has regenerated into a damp and dense thicket mostly of multi stemmed alder and goat willow. The English bluebells that once abounded have long since disappeared.



The Ansty Coombe stream flooded the lane along Frogpond corner on December 24th 2013 after very heavy rain. This is a fairly frequent affair. Poor upkeep of field ditches, culverts, drains and years of no road sweeping was largely the cause of this flood. Such local flooding (not helped by recent climate change) will become commonplace unless 'old style' land husbandry and proper proactive annual road maintenance is reinstated.



Above map- At the north end of the village is a location known as Ansty Water – so called because there was probably once a ford and then a wooden bridge which was built to cross the water. The stream here was inclined to flood too as it did at the foot of Blind Lane and Kings Lane – although this hasn't occurred within living memory.

A possible mill site appears to be located 250 metres south of Ansty Water where the valley bottom is crossed by an earthen dam from which a leat once ran northwards downstream. This may have been the mill described in 1594 when John Nubye and his wife Elizabeth conveyed it to a John Robert. A 1769 survey shows a John Fitz living there occupying three sections of land totalling just over 6 acres (2.4 hectares) including the house, Mill Mead, Mill Close and another Mill Mead.

There appears to be no evidence – either recorded or visible but it is just possible that some of the meadows behind Lower Farm up to Ansty Water may once have been water meadows to allow an 'early bite' of grass for sheep flocks. Pre-17th century methods simply involved blocking watercourses to flood the fields with nutrients and raise the soil temperature. Later, there might have been more precise engineering involving channels and sluice gates leading to a more efficient and carefully managed regime. Not much is known about the two ponds to the SE of Blind Lane but they must have been important at one time to Ansty villagers. Does anyone know? Much of the wetlands seen on this map is under some kind of stewardship which appears to mean doing very little with it!

<https://content.historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/iha-water-meadows/watermeadow-ih-a.pdf/>

Sources: Ansty. A Wiltshire Village Story 2007. Ansty and its water. Liz Knight

Ansty and its water wells

Not so long ago all Ansty villagers would have to go to walk to the nearest well, spring or stream to obtain water. The well digger would have been held in high esteem by the community. The knowledge of knowing the best place to locate, hand dig and line even a simple well was a skilful occupation for a reliable source of water was always important. Because the water in Ansty is never too far from the surface the well digger did not have to go to far or dig too deep to find the water.

Top Right- This simple diagram shows how a simple hand dug well works and why the water in a well rises and falls as the water table rises and falls. The water table is usually at its highest in February to March (hence the saying 'February fill-dike' when the watercourses are all full after the wet winter) and at its lowest around September (after the drier summer).

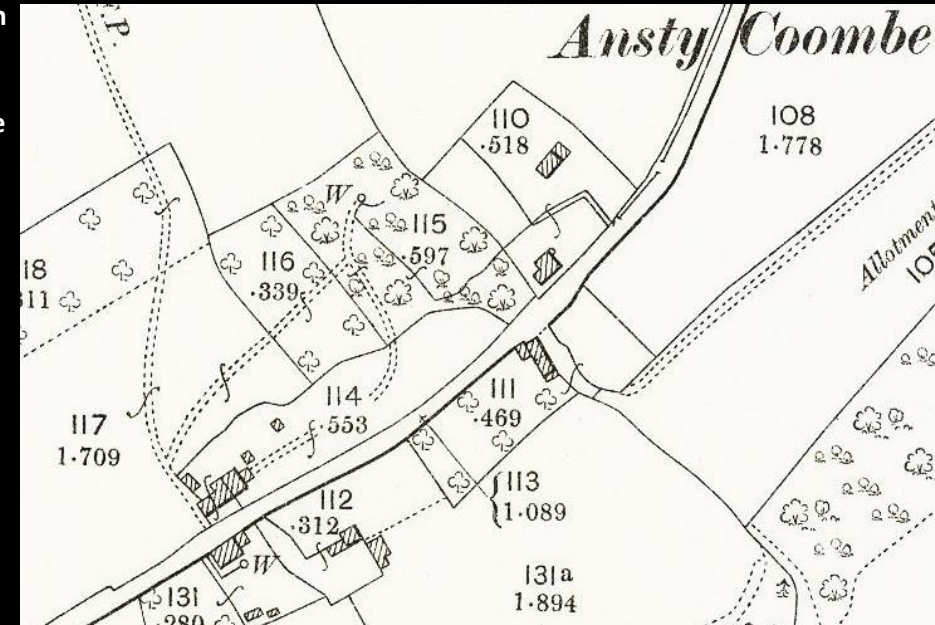
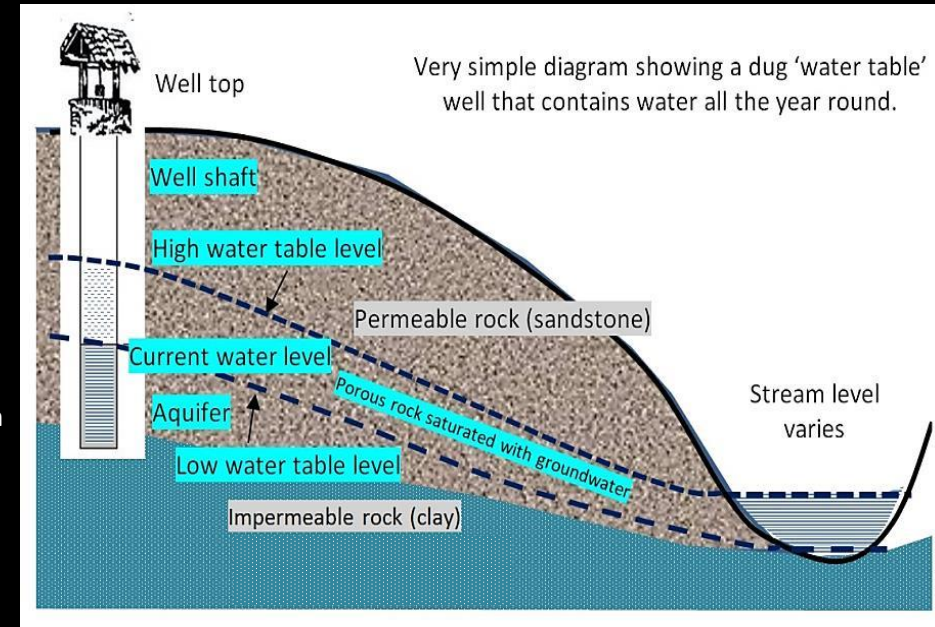
Using old OS maps the small village of Ansty had at least 15 wells. A few 'survive' to this day although they are not necessarily in use. According to Liz Knight (in her chapter on 'Ansty and its water' in the book 'Ansty – A Wiltshire Village Story' a project inspired by Tony Keating in 2007, known wells were at Snowdrop Cottage, Lower Farm, Fox Cottage, Acorn Cottage, Wisteria Cottage, Maple Cottage, Hillside Farm, The Manor and Moonrakers. This latter one supplied water to eight other cottages within the vicinity. The old Maypole Pub (formerly Arundell Arms) had a dip well. This takes the form of a tube (about the diameter of a domestic bucket) with small holes drilled in it which are then inserted in to ground and the water table below the building. The tube fills with water which can then be lifted out when required.

The only surviving well in use is at Thatchers Cottage – with a modern pump attached. Apparently the Manor house had two wells, one under the kitchen floor, which was in use until 1939

Bottom right- This 1900 OS map extract shows the main spring rising in Ansty Coombe, with at least 4 or 5 other springs in the small copse. You can see footpaths meandering across to culminate at the 'well head'. In fact many of Ansty's public footpaths had links with water sources and wells. According to Liz Knight some of the inhabitants at Ansty Coombe used the Ansty Coombe stream to do their washing and cooking as late as the 1950s.

Apparently in Blind Lane there is a spring from which the water was bluish in colour. Liz suggests this might be the result of copper compounds in it. Apparently the women of Ansty brought their babies to bathe their sore eyes. Whether this blue tinge is down to copper or sulphates gleaned from water passing over the underlying blue gault clay is subject to conjecture but some local springs do leave bluish deposits behind.

Mains water was introduced to Ansty only in 1957! Suddenly wells became 'out of fashion'!



Sources: Ansty. A Wiltshire Village Story 2007. Ansty and its water. Liz Knight
<http://www.wellmasters.co.uk/gallery/well-tops/>