

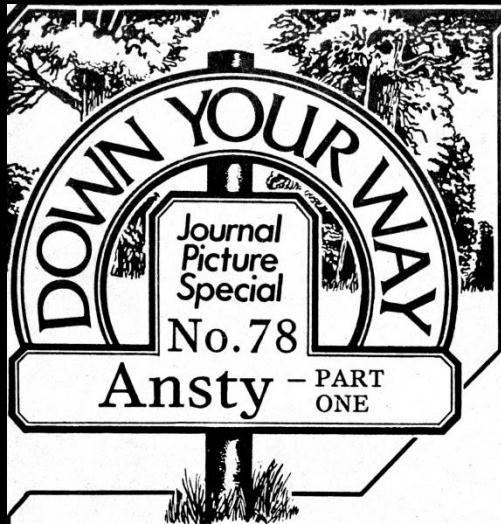
Bygone Days of Ansty

This series 'Bygone Days of Ansty' looks at the more recent past as outlined by local newspaper cuttings and other articles carefully saved and cherished by some long standing Ansty villagers and their families. The following news items were kindly loaned by Maureen Feltham of Ansty, stretching back to the 1960s.

Our first foray takes us back to March and April 1991 when local newspaper 'The Journal' (now Salisbury Journal) produced an excellent two part spread entitled 'Down Your Way' No. 78 Ansty. This newspaper produced a whole series of delightful reminiscences of many of our local villages and their inhabitants put together by Alison Kidd who painstakingly collected all sorts of recollections whilst photographer Roger Kidd produced an equally fascinating montage of photographs. This one on Ansty is truly brilliant and pictures a busy and vibrant community not so vastly different from their forbears from over one hundred years before.

In 1991, Alison Kidd captured perfectly the still once rural essence of another Ansty: the groups of families who had lived and worked here or near here for generations; the almost feudal 'hangover' still evident from centuries of Arundell rule and the Wardour Estate and the traditions that people continued to maintain (and in part still strive to do today). We get a picture of a Wessex based community. Village people proud of their self-sufficiency and self-reliance - the like of which we are never likely to see again. As Alison wrote: 'there's that serenity and peace here that are pearls of such price: it still has echoes of rural England.'

In less than 30 years since this Journal Picture Special appeared, so much has changed. The serenity and peace can still be found but those wonderful Wessex people of Ansty and the echoes of rural England now seem very distant indeed.



THERE's that serenity and peace here that are pearls of such price. I feel that it still has real echoes of rural England.

Pinch yourself. It's unreal. Fourteen miles from Salisbury and six from Shaftesbury, Ansty comes straight from Merrie England of the morris men. And indeed they dance here on May morning.

For centuries Ansty remained independent of the Bishop of Salisbury. This was the place for clandestine marriages until 1898, the "Gretna Green" of Wessex.

Here are narrow lanes, high banks and thatched wisteria cottages. Beside the road and the large pond, rises a 96-foot maypole of Douglas fir, the highest in England ("and there are eight more feet underground").

Clustered unobtrusively around it are the chunky functional 13th century buildings of the Knights Hospitallers — church, hospice and manor house beside a man-made lake — "the finest example of a Commandery of the Order of St John in England."

The Knights lived here for over 300 years — and in the 20th century in full regalia, Dames, Knights and the Grand Prior himself have revisited Ansty in all their glory.

This desirable windfall came not from their crusading valour against the infidel. It was the result of King John's excommunication. His insistence on choosing the Archbishop of Canterbury led to a papal interdict. All English churches were closed from 1208 to 1214. But not the chapels of the Knights of St John, Hospitaller or Templar.

So Walter de Turberville gave Ansty manor and "appurtenances" to the hospitallers in 1211. Thereafter when the King and Court came down from London to hunt, they could get married, baptised and buried.

The Order flourished. They kept detailed records. In their distinctive black robes with the white linen cross on the left breast, they served pilgrims white and black bread, melior and secunda beer and double rations on feast days. Some claim they founded the first hospital and school in Wiltshire.

But Henry VIIIth banished the knights, dissolved the Order and sold Ansty in 1542 for £30 6s 1d to Sir John Zouch, the highest bidder.

BY 1594 Sir Matthew Arundel of Wardour bought it for £3,250. When 352 years later, John D. Wood auctioned it, the price had risen again.

Nonetheless in 1946, many Wardour Castle tenants bought their cottages. Then the manor cost £1,000. Today Ansty's houses cost fairytale prices. Here lived Goon Peter Sellers, British Airways' Sir Colin Marshall and the Ivan Owen who created Basil Brush. ("He was such a big chap, I don't know how he got in that box," says Jack Feltham).

They now boast the only female Mercedes dealer in England, a restorer of armour, a carver of heads, Basil Spence's understudy architect on Coventry Cathedral, a judge, a popular TV psychologist, and the creator of *Emmerdale Farm*. ("She won't tell you nothing about what's going to happen. But she'll have a cup of tea like you or me").

Mercifully, there are a few authentic villagers, too. In some of its 61 households, if you linger, you'll be treated to steaming cups of tea and Wessex voices.

In the days when it was a Catholic estate village, says Leslie Parsons, a handful of gravel on the window would summon help in the middle of the night. Today, presumably, it would bring the police.

Many village memories have Catholic connotations. "Mr Brain, senior, of Horwood Farm, was the first-ever non-Catholic Wardour tenant farmer."

"I would remember when there was a Catholic chapel in the village opposite the timber yard ... later there was a bus to take us to mass in Tisbury."

"Wardour? There's still a link with the school. But we dursn't let our children cycle or walk through the woods to get there as we did. There are some snobs who want to be buried at Wardour Castle, but I say to myself, I'd rather not go swimming after I'm dead."

(Dare one presume the graveyard is a little boggy?).



The crowning of the May Queen in 1962.



Ansty Maypole celebrations in 1976.



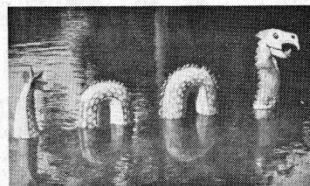
St James' Church at Ansty.



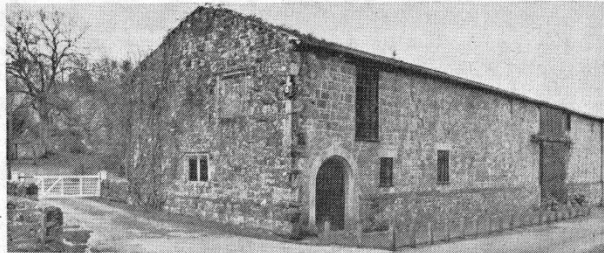
A splendid photograph of the Ansty Band of 1905 with plenty of Levers, Persons and Felthams in attendance.



Barrie Shaw writes for *Emmerdale Farm* and *EastEnders* from her secluded hideaway in Ansty Coombe.



In 1987 Ansty Pond was visited by a sea serpent. One of the exhibits from the Ansty Art Exhibition in aid of Salisbury Cathedral Spire Appeal.



The old Commandery of the Order of St John.



The Maypole public house seen from across the Pond.

DOWN YOUR WAY

Journal
Picture
Special
No.78
Ansty - PART TWO

MEN live longer than maypoles. Master thatcher Leslie Parsons has seen three maypoles go up between dawn and dusk in Ansty — in 1937, 1962 and 1982. Always the silver coins under the weathercock are renewed.

May junketings began in the 16th century when Lord Arundell's tenants brought their children to be "introduced." Cromwell stopped the revelry in 1644; Charles II then restored it.

The big day on which Chris Ridley brought the 1982 maypole back from Fonthill woods was "the wettest Sunday this century. The rain turned the concrete into porridge," says Aileen Fisher-Rowe.

Generations of Riddleys felled timber in these woods. Today the business is mainly sawing "fencing panels and home grown timber products." But it survives.

Even clogs here outlived the advent of the welly boot. Cobbler and carpenter worked in their own estate cottages, but the farrier, wheelwright and undertaker shared the medieval hospice, then known as Hansford's shop.

Beside the open fireplace in the hospice are scooped stone thrones. Long ago, because they brought news, travellers could stay here and enjoy three days' food.

Once the hospice was thatched, Leslie Parsons remembers how every area had its own individual thatching style. In those days, "I used to take round the coffins and put people in them," says John Feltham. That was in an Ansty where TB was rife and each cottage had a pig, chickens, vegetables and a well.

They can show you an ancient sheepwash and where they dug blue clay to keep the lake watertight. It's really a man-made fishpond, spring-fed, trout filled and its water level high above the road. There's a swivel trough at the pond-head for filling water barrels in dry summers.

The silver band died in 1972. "There just weren't the chaps around." Its big drum, found in London, has returned to Ansty to become John Feltham's coffee table.

MUCH has changed. Gone is the shop "at the back end of Leslie's house," the school at Blackbird's, the post office beside the pub and the sweetshop run by Fred Davey. ("You'd keep a halfpenny for church and pinch a halfpenny for sweets"). Gone, too, is the village hut from Fovant, which had no drains, where in 1953, 220 villagers celebrated the Queen's Coronation.

Wilts and Dorset buses call, but it's no longer "1/10d return to Ansty Water." At 10pm on a Saturday, they tell me, Mr Swaddling's Tisbury bus waited while you bought up cheap joints of meat at Salisbury market.

The name "Ansty" was once "Anestige" — the way up. In Saxon times the village bordered a valley track which joined the Herepath across the downs. Then this was a cattle rearing district and a hunting ground for kings. During a visit by Alfred, a courtier was brought to court for stealing Fonthill cattle.

By Domesday, when William the Conqueror gave Ansty to huntsman Waleran, the village prospered; it had two mills. Today it's tiny.

But, the double "patriarchal" cross of the knights cuts the skyline above St James' Church. The graves — flat, pointed, leaning — are in every state of repair. Two elaborate 13th century coffins dug up in 1917 were hastily reburied.

Inside, there's an icon of St James from Paphos, Cyprus, and watercolours of Ansty in 1817 and 1908. Though it's plain building with few monuments, behind the altar hangs a blue and gold cloth used in Westminster Abbey at the 1953 Coronation. The 17th century carved pews are also recycled. They came from Seth Ward's Salisbury Cathedral.

Nine died and 35 are honoured for serving in two world wars... among them four Felthams, six Levers and three Parsons. Those names, too, have survived.

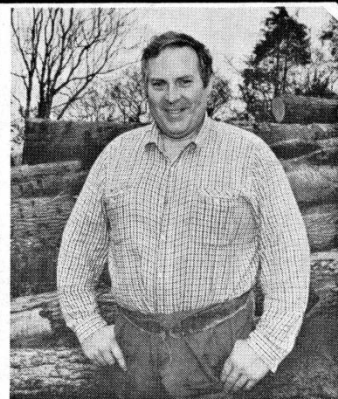
So, of course, does the Maypole Inn, the erstwhile Arundell Arms, recommended by the English Tourist Board.

Ansty's traditions live on because of a small team of workers who care. Here there's not merely a parish council, there's a maypole committee.

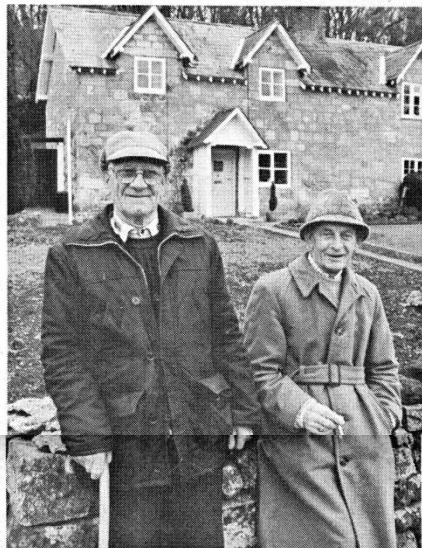
So, even in this day of anti-missile missiles, there's the Cross of Lorraine on Ansty's stout Crusader church, they sing carols in a hospice vacated in 1540 by the Knights Templar and on May Day morning they crown their May queen and dance round a maypole which brushes the sky.



Master thatcher Leslie Parsons at work in the village. His family has lived in Ansty for four generations.



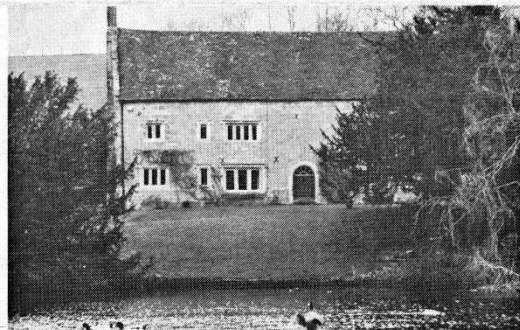
Chris Ridley has lived in Ansty for 47 years. He runs Ridley's Saw-mill.



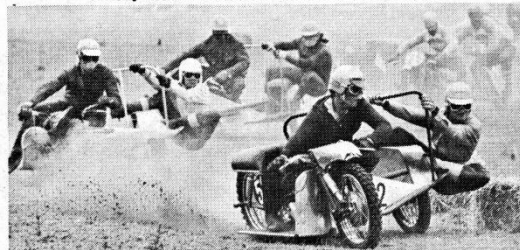
Doug Lever (left) was born and bred in Ansty. Here he is with his old mate Stan Whatley outside Doug's home, Pond Cottage.



Ex-farmer Aileen Fisher-Rowe with her dog Rowan in her garden at Shepherd's Cottage.



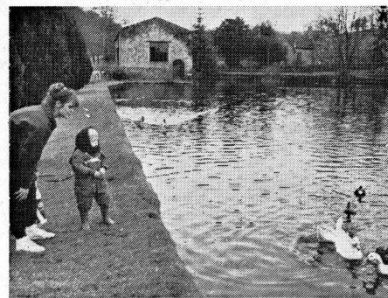
Ansty Manor House from across the Pond.



Grasstrack racing at Ansty in 1970.



Chairman of Ansty Maypole Committee Jack Feltham with his wife, Maureen, and the old Ansty Band drum. The Band was disbanded in 1972.



The pleasant pastime of feeding the ducks on the picturesque Ansty Pond and (right) the equally delightful annual traditional dancing round the maypole in 1976



If any villager or friend of Ansty has any similar items stored away somewhere such as newspaper cuttings, photos, booklets, reports or even a story to tell and you would like to add to this series of 'Bygone Ansty' we would be very pleased to hear from you. Please contact the Ansty Parish Clerk or any Parish Councillor and let them know. Many thanks!