

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. Occasionally, we go elsewhere to glean information.

This outing takes us back to nearly 90 years ago and later when local newspapers reported on several aspects concerning our very own Ansty Maypole.



Photo courtesy of Maureen Feltham

Above- This picture shows a good turn-out for the erection of a new Maypole in Ansty in May 1937. Here we see a couple of gangs of men in front of the Arundell Arms pub steadying the pole by pulling on wire ropes as it was being sunk into a hole.

Right- A transcription of a news report from the *Western Gazette* adapted from [Wiltshire Footprints](#)

New Maypole for Ansty

With the break of dawn on Whit Monday, 1937, Ansty became a hive of industry. The men, wearing working clothes, could be seen hurrying towards the centre of the village, where, for over a century, a Maypole has towered in the middle of the road. The villagers are proud of their Maypole, which, they claim, is the tallest in the country and they are jealous of their rights in connection with it. That day they were to erect a new Maypole, the fourth which has stood at that spot and young and old were eager to give all the help that lay in their power.

The new Maypole had been fashioned from one of the most magnificent larch trees on Lord Arundell's estate and was 84ft in height. On the top was placed a weather vane and a 1937 two-shilling piece was hammered into the wood. Earlier in the week the villagers had sawn down the major portion of the old

structure, leaving a stump to be removed so that one maypole should succeed the other within 24 hours.

The tree was brought from the estate on a huge timber waggon, the biggest in the district. The first Maypole had to be hauled from Wardour woods by man power alone. Always the work in connection with the Maypole and Maypole festivities has been carried out voluntarily and the people of Ansty boast that no one has ever received any payment. The four trees have all been given by the Lords of the Manor.

The tackle by means of which the Maypole was raised was lent by Mr J G Morrison, M.F.H., and was in the charge of Mr W Burt. As soon as the Maypole was in a vertical position and had been secured, for the meantime, by huge wire ropes, a tremendous cheer went up and

Mrs J Power, the wife of the village licensee, smashed a bottle of beer upon the massive base of the timber. Flags were then run up by pulleys and the men proceeded to complete the work of filling in the eight feet deep hole with concrete.

Once the work of the day had been concluded the villagers and friends from the surrounding district, made merry. Drinks were supplied to all, there was Maypole dancing to music by the Ansty Band, which has also existed for over 100 years and general festivities in which everyone joined in.

The arrangements were made by Mr Ernest Silas Brain (of Horwood Farm, Ansty) who thanks all helpers.

Western Gazette Friday 21 May 1937

1962

Another new Maypole is raised in Ansty

Once again, many locals from Ansty village were out in force to witness or help out with the raising of a new Maypole at the front of the Arundell Arms pub near the junction of Ansty Coombe Lane and the High Street. Like its predecessor, the wooden pole was sourced from the nearby Wardour Woods.

The new 76 ft. Maypole replaced the early one that was erected in 1937 under the watchful eye of Ernest Silas Brain (of Horwood Farm, Ansty) and his team.



1982

Maypole is 96ft record

ANSTY, the tiny village near Salisbury, which has for years boasted having the tallest maypole in Britain, can now be even more sure of its proud claim.

A new 96ft high pole was put up at the weekend to replace the previous 76ft one which after 20 years had become warped and weather beaten.

Despite driving rain and high winds, villagers in the one-time weekend retreat of Peter Sellers turned up in force to see the big event carried out.

Plans for a dance round the new pole by children from the nearby Chilmark primary school had to be called off because of the weather but a celebration lunch in a giant marquee went ahead.

Most of Ansty's 138 residents sat down to home-made soup, meat salad and apple tart, cream and gateaux paid for out of funds raised at previous May Day events.

The new pole, a debarked and specially treated Douglas fir from nearby woods, was juggled into position by two cranes on loan from a local sawmill.

But before the tricky operation got under way, the weather vane was transferred from the top of the old pole and a traditional silver coin placed on its tip.

Chairman of the maypole committee Mrs. Aileen Fisher-Rowe, who loaned her manor house gardens for the lunch, said: "I think Ansty must have been the wettest place in Britain but the atrocious weather did not dampen the spirits of the villagers. They are so proud of their pole."

The new pole is actually 104ft high but eight feet of it is buried in foundations.

Originally it was hoped an RAF Chinook helicopter would have been made available to lift it into position. But so many of the heavy lifters went down with the Atlantic Conveyor off the Falklands that villagers decided against asking the Defence Ministry for their help.

The maypole tradition in Ansty goes back to the Middle Ages and part of the pole just replaced will live on after it has been sawn and fashioned into a village notice board.

After 20 years the 1962 Ansty Maypole had become warped and rather weather beaten. A decision was made to replace it.

Aileen Fisher-Rowe, chairman of the Ansty Maypole committee and Ansty's strongmen plus local sawmill owner Chris Ridley, with his staff and equipment all worked together to fell the old maypole and erect the new one.

Ansty's new 104 ft maypole is being slowly transported down the High Street to its site just below the Arundell Arms public house. Two local lads are helping to keep the long pole steady as they walked ahead of the crane truck driven by Chris Ridley from his saw mill just up the road.



Ansty, the tiny Wiltshires Village which has for years boasted the tallest maypole in the country, has fortified its claim by having a new 96ft high pole erected to replace the previous 76 feet high giant, which, after 20 years, had become warped and weatherbeaten.

Despite rain and wind,

villagers turned out in force on Saturday to witness the erection of the monster Douglas fir from nearby woods with the aid of two cranes loaned by a local sawmill.

It is really 104ft long, but eight feet is buried in its foundations. The traditional

silver coin was placed on its tip and the weather cock transferred from the old pole.

The plans for Chilmark Primary School children to dance round the new maypole had to be abandoned because of the weather, but a celebration lunch paid for

from funds from previous May days went ahead in a giant marquee in the Manor House grounds.

Part of the old pole has been sawn and fashioned into a village notice-board.

● The 96ft maypole being transported to the village on Saturday.

POURING RAIN couldn't dampen the enthusiasm of Anstey residents when they replaced the village maypole which has been the centre of springtime celebrations for 20 years.

The A30 past the village was closed so that Anstey's strong men, plus sawmill owner Chris Ridley, his staff and equipment could all work together to fell the old maypole and erect the new one.

At 104 ft, the Douglas Fir pole is probably the tallest ever in the village, and certainly backs the villagers' claim that their maypole is the tallest in the land.

Eight feet of it has gone into the foundations and the top is crowned by a 50p piece, a Union Jack and the weathervane off the old pole. A circlet of hooks for next May-day's ribbons has also been fitted.

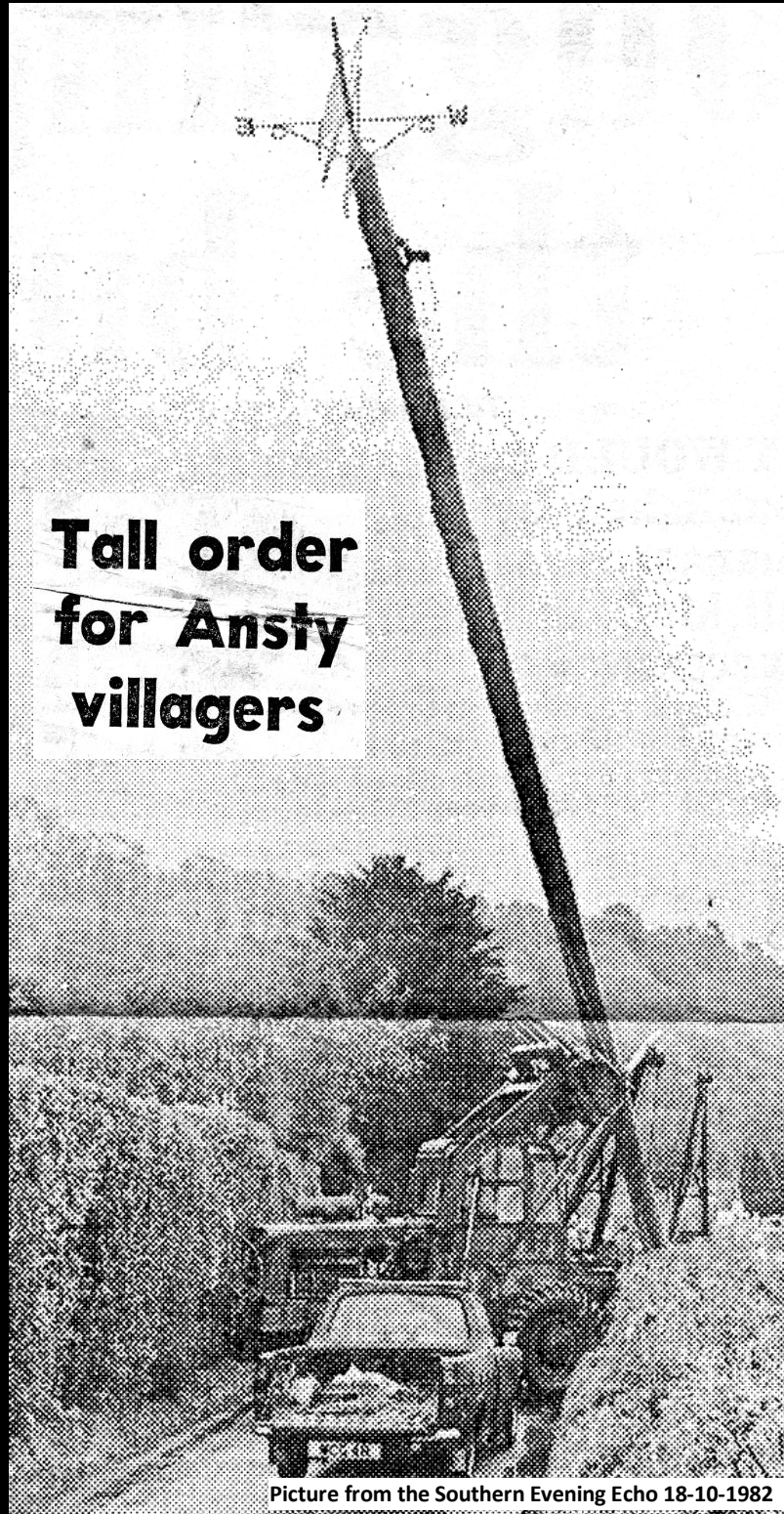
"The old pole was sound, but it looked rosey," said Mrs Aileen Fisher-Rowe, chairman of Ansty maypole committee.

"Everyone worked tirelessly on Saturday and got soaked to the skin. We had a lunch for 138 people in a marquee on the manor lawn. The only sad thing about the day was that the weather was so bad the children from Chilmark school had to cancel their dance round the maypole; they will wait until next May now."

Money for the purchase of the pole, from Fonthill Woods, and the lunch came from previous May-day fundraising celebrations.

The maypole needs to be replaced every 20-25 years, so the new one should take Ansty's annual celebrations into the next century.

Tall order for Ansty villagers



Picture from the Southern Evening Echo 18-10-1982

Making merry



Picture and words from The Times, Salisbury May 1983

ANSTY May Day celebration was the opportunity for some 500 people to witness the new 9ft Maypole being used for the first time at the village's annual event on Bank Holiday Monday.

The celebrations lasted some two hours just sufficient time between showers to enjoy the entertainment provided by Tisbury Brownie Guides who danced round the pole, Wilton Youth Band, the White Horse Morrismen, Wessex Driving Club with ponies and carriages, and the newly-formed Shaftesbury Majorettes, who were on their first outing.

It was last October that the 20-year-old pole measuring 76ft had to come down, having become worn and weatherbeaten, and was re-

placed by the new taller Douglas fir cut down from nearby woods.

The maypole celebrations in Ansty go back many years and is an opportunity for former residents to come back to the village at least once a year.

The chairman of the May Pole committee, Mrs Aileen Fisher-Rowe, said she was delighted with the success of this year's event.

Above- If this newspaper article is anything to go by our Maypole in 1983 was only 9 ft tall! It was in fact 96 ft (above ground).

Left- The new Maypole is being slowly raised.

A tall story of Mayday fun and games

By David Humphrey

CHILDREN in the Wiltshire hamlet of Ansty yesterday danced around what is believed to be Britain's tallest maypole in a curtain-raiser for ancient celebrations tomorrow.

The Mayday festivities have been held without a break since 1660 in the village, once the country home of Peter Sellers.

Beaten

The present 96ft pole went up in 1982 to replace an earlier weather-beaten one, and towers over the village's Maypole Inn.

The 140 residents of Ansty always hold their carnival-style celebrations on May 1, even though the Bank Holiday may fall on another day.

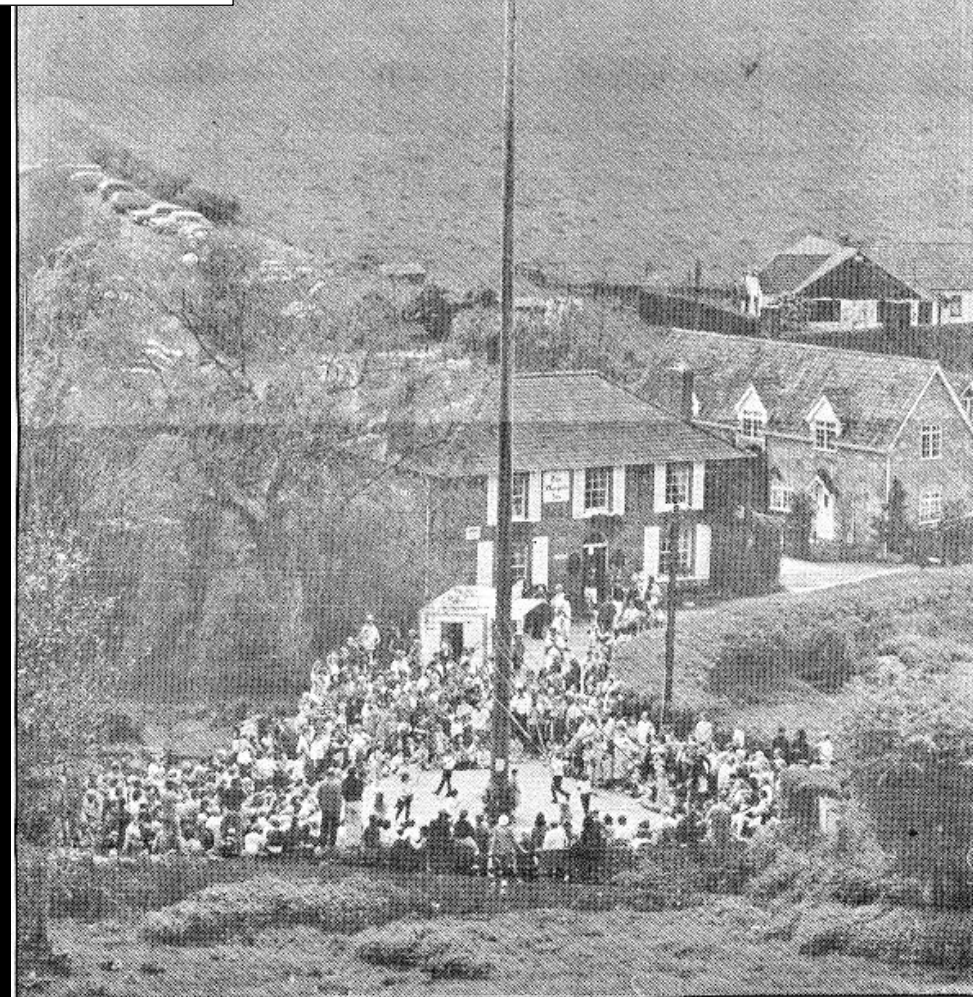
This year's May Queen, Ansty girl Alexandra Stratton, will be joined by the White Horse Morris Men and the Dorset Triumph country dancers in tomorrow night's packed programme.

These two press photographs clearly display just how tall Ansty's 96 ft Maypole was. Erected in 1982 it was to remain there until a gale blew it down in December 1993.

Left-This bird's eye view of the Maypole shows children rehearsing their dance moves a week prior to the main May Day event a year or two after 1982. Right- A large crowd has gathered around the Maypole – when children from Sixpenny Handley First School danced around the tallest Maypole in Britain on May 1st 1993.



A bird's eye view of the great Maypole dance



MAYDAY message — This was the scene at Ansty on Saturday — May 1 — when children from Sixpenny Handley First School danced round the tallest maypole in Britain, all 96ft of it above ground. The scene was caught by the Journal's Roger Elliott.



Picture from the Salisbury Journal 1993
Photo: Michael Head

Ansty villagers Alan Morse, Jack Feltham and Aileen Fisher-Rowe survey the fallen maypole which was a victim of last week's storms.

Storm floors Ansty landmark

In early December 1993, disaster struck when Ansty's loftiest landmark was brought crashing down by gales which swept across southern England during the night.

This fallen Maypole which was erected in 1982 could have caused much more damage but luckily no one was hurt, although power cables and telephone wires were brought down.

STORMS TOPPLE FAMOUS MAYPOLE

Headline from Blackmore Vale Magazine
09-12-1993

1993

Tallest Maypole is felled by gale

VILLAGERS with a tall story found themselves speechless yesterday after gales brought down their beloved Maypole, thought to be Britain's highest.

The 98ft high pole in Ansty, near Salisbury — former country home of Goon Show star, the late Peter Sellers — crashed in winds gusting to 70mph.

Words from 'Western Daily Press'
09-12-1993

It fell away from houses, but a motorcyclist was slightly injured when he ran into the splintered wood.

The pole also brought down power lines causing a partial blackout

It was put up in 1982 to succeed the previous 76ft pole which had become warped and weatherbeaten.

Ansty, a mile or two from the

Wiltshire-Dorset border, has had a Maypole for at least 500 years. They are normally replaced after 20 years.

Last night villagers were wondering whether they could find a suitable replacement in time for the next Mayday less than five months away.

Celebrations are held each Mayday with much quaffing at the village's aptly-named Maypole Inn.

Poleaxed!

HIGH winds brought Ansty's loftiest landmark crashing to the ground last week.

The 98-ft village maypole — reputedly the tallest in Britain — was toppled in the early hours of Thursday morning.

A powerful gust of wind snapped the wooden pole off at its base. It came down in a neighbouring vegetable garden with its tip resting on the edge of the nearby pond.

Brian Hamshere, landlord of the Maypole Inn which he runs with his wife Pat, said the pub was lucky not to have been hit.

"If the pole had come down towards the pub it would have come clean through the roof," he said.

But, he added, the maypole had pulled down

By Ragan Beale

power cables, blacking out several homes in the village, including his own cottage next to the pub.

The maypole is the centre of traditional May Day celebrations in the village when schoolchildren dance around it.

Gusts of 78mph were recorded at Boscombe Down airfield during the early hours of Thursday morning.

Around 1,900 homes in the Salisbury area suffer-

ed power cuts as a result of the gales.

Areas worst affected included Burcombe, Hurdcott, Burgate, Godshill, Wilton, Teffont Magna and Chilmark. Homes in Laverstock and Bishopdown also lost their electricity.

In most cases power was back on by morning after Southern Electric staff worked throughout the night.

"Bearing in mind the

conditions the overhead network performed very well," said Southern Electric principal engineer Alan Good.

Money spent strengthening the overhead network in recent years had paid off, he added.

The blustery weather kept Salisbury police busy as it set off burglar alarms and brought down trees and power cables.

Among the casualties of the gales was a large section of barn roof blown off near the A36 at South Newton.

Words from the 'Salisbury Journal'

09-12-1993

Ansty's maypole is cut down to size

THE famous village maypole at Ansty will never again be looked up to as the tallest in Britain.

For a new pole going up this Saturday to replace the 98-footer toppled in December's storm will be only about half the height — measuring just 50 feet.

And the reason for Ansty being wiped out of the record books is a simple matter of safety.

"We had a special parish meeting where it was unanimously agreed that we should have a shorter pole," parish council chairman Alan Beale explained.

"There were all sorts of rumours going round the village before the meeting and I had been expecting conflicting points of views on its height," he said.

But the shorter poll found favour on the grounds of safety.

"I think we were quite lucky that it was 2.30 in the morning when the old pole landed and I think we were lucky where it landed," said landlord Brian Hampshire, whose Maypole pub is next door.

"At 50 feet it's reducing the risk. There are three properties nearby including the pub. We are, I think, 84 feet from it," he added.

But Reuben Chapell of the White Horse Morris Dancers, who will be performing at a special ceremony for the new pole on Saturday evening, was disappointed at the outcome.

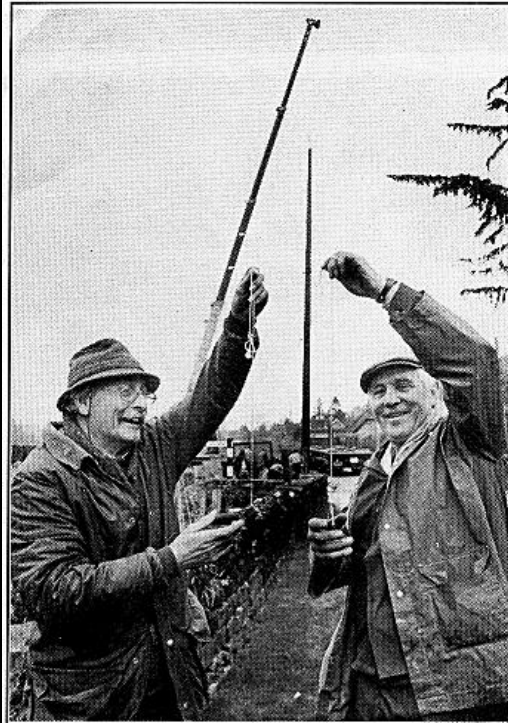
"It is short-sighted and ridiculous that part of our heritage should be mutilated for the sake of some petty concerns over insurance," he said.

"It used to be the tallest maypole in England. There's another one in the border counties which they used to claim was the tallest and now they have definitely won."

He added: "It's like saying the Cathedral spire in Salisbury can't be that tall in case it falls on The Close."

Made by the same firm which supplies poles for the electricity board, the new maypole will be treated with creosote to protect it from the elements.

It is expected that it will be at least 30 years before it needs replacing.



A new MAYPOLE for Ansty

A new maypole was erected last Saturday in the picturesque village of Ansty near Tisbury, replacing the famous pole which broke a few months ago. Michael Head's pictures show the hole being prepared for the pole (below), and John Oldfield (left) with parish

council chairman Alan Beale using a simple but effective check with a string and metal nut to make sure that the maypole is standing upright.



Maypole gains new standing

THE little Wiltshire village of Ansty can no longer claim to have the country's tallest maypole.

The old one, which stood at 98ft, was blown down in the December gales after 11 years. Villagers voted for a shorter replacement on safety grounds.

This weekend a new pole, a 50ft Scandanavian Scots pine expected to last 40 years, was put up and, in a tradition believed to date from Pagan times, the White Horse Morris Men, from

Warminster, were invited to dance beside it. But few people were there to watch because of a mix-up over the time they were performing.

Even the village pub, which takes its name from the maypole, was shut.

Afterwards more than 100 villagers and guests held the traditional celebration meal in the old hospice which is listed as an ancient monument and was used by the village commandery of the Knights Hospitallers between 1210 and 1540 during the Crusades.

Pictures and words from the Blackmore
Vale Magazine 1994



After the early winter storm (in December, 1993) that had felled the 1982 Maypole, Ansty villagers were left wondering whether a new one could be erected in time for the next May Day celebrations in 1994. They need not have worried. This time the new pole was sourced from a firm that supplies poles to electricity boards and again it was down to professionals and locals supplying the manpower to ensure that the Maypole traditions will carry on for at least another 30 years — until another one is needed — taking us to 2024?

