

PRIMARY RECOLLECTIONS

A short series of personal recollections and memories about life in Ansty Village back in those 'black and white' days of the 20th century and before, when most Wiltshire villagers still clearly displayed their long established agricultural roots stretching back thousands of years. Ansty was always a very conservative village which for hundreds of years was dominated by the Arundells of Wardour: the old feudal way of living still firmly etched on the life and soul of Ansty's inhabitants until 1946 when the whole village was put up for sale. Rapid change was to follow and most of us living here today really have no idea of just how the kernel of the village, that very DNA essence of long established families made Ansty a bonded, self-contained and mostly sustainable community – well before sustainability became the modern 'buzz word'.

Number 1 - Leslie Parsons



Leslie Parsons at work c 1991. Picture from an excellent two part article in the Salisbury Journal (1991) entitled [‘Down Your Way’](#) with words by Alison Kidd and pictures by Roger Elliot.

When Barry Williamson was a boy in Swallowcliffe, Les Parsons of Ansty was a local master thatcher. Born and bred in the village, his family had lived in Ansty for many generations.

At that time Les, now in his early 70s, was living in a small stone cottage on the High Street, Ansty.

When Barry called to see him in 1997 Les had had a stroke and was not able to get out much. Barry talked to Les about the 'old days' and returned several times in 1997 to hear Les recall Ansty village life as he remembered it when he was a boy in the 1920s + 30s. Barry recorded some of these interviews along with pages of handwritten notes. Barry also produced a map (based on an old OS map) which shows the cottages in Ansty that Les referred to.

The audio tape and notes are now held at the Wiltshire and Swindon Archive centre. Current local villager Billy Scanlan, who now resides in Leslie's former Ansty home, has typed out Barry's handwritten notes – reproduced below.

Mr. Williamson also drew up a map locating (by number) many of the locations Les recalled back in 1997.

Transcribed Interview with Les Parsons, Thatcher, 1997

Ansty Water Farm [1] – Parsons were there, Ernest Parsons up to about 1937 and then he moved to Squalls Farm and it was his son Archie who stayed there till 1970. It wasn't a big farm, about 30 or 40 acres, just the fields round the farm, Ansty Water Farm itself, up to 1891 it was called Moles Farm and there was a Henry Parsons there, Ernest's father and before that a family called Moger and some of the fields they called Mogers. Ernest Parsons was also a quarry foreman, you see they were only small holdings and they all had a second job – it would be been the quarry along Tisbury Row – a lot of stone was taken from there to the yard where Parameters are now in Tisbury and worked there into lintels and that sort of thing and sent off by rail.

There used to be a family, I forget the name, and they had several quarries – there used to be one at Wardour, one on Lady Down, it used to be half a crown for a big stone lintel – there was also a limekiln at the one along Tisbury Row, they used to burn lime there –

Ansty Water itself was a ford, there wasn't a bridge and that cottage [2] beside it, the windows were level with the road, the downstairs window, because the road was built up after the bridge was put in and the ford was done away with and now the cottage has been demolished – yes, there was a tin hut attached to the cottage and a chap named Norman used to live in there, he used to do the paper round, the cottage was demolished in '35 – there was three cottages, that one, one at the Maypole [3] (there's just the garden left now) and one in the Coombe – they were all demolished – they were only one up and one down – they weren't safe and the Council condemned them.

My uncle lived at the cottage when I was a boy – it was rented by Hansford – he used to rent half a dozen cottages for the workman, he was the blacksmith and wheelwright, he had the wagon works at Ansty [4] – Jimmy Alford was the blacksmith and my grandfather Sidney Alford was the wheelwright – the cottages at the pond he had one of those for the carpenter, lever and two or three up in the Coombe – he had quite a few

men working for him, they used to saw their own timber up in the timber yard, he had a steam engine.

A Mr Hansford lived at the Royal Oak in Swallowcliffe and his father had it before him and then back in the 1920s they lived at Spilsbury Farm, one part of it was thatched and they lived in one part and Felix Parsons lived in the other, he had the farm, he was Ernest Parsons' brother, the one at Ansty Water Farm and another Parsons had Squalls Farm, there were three of them all farming, my grandfather had Lower Farm [5], he was William Parsons – the Parsons came here back in 17 something.

The cottage opposite Ansty Water Farm [6 – No 63] – that was that was Alfred Jay when I was a boy, before that it was Stephen Edwards a general labourer.

The Next cottage was turned into a chapel [7] by the Dowager Lady Arundell between 1881 and 1891 it was No 64, there was a monthly service, the priest came out from Tisbury at the Stations of the Cross all through Lent and at Christmas, a special service, it was him from Tisbury.

The hut used to be next to the chapel – it was a 1st World War hut from Fovant Camp that was put up about 1920 something, originally Ansty and Swallowcliffe were meant to share a hut between the two, meant to be built on the boundary, but apparently after they collected the money Mr Waters gave a piece of land in Swallowcliffe and that was the original hut and Ansty was a bit disappointed it was located right on the other side of Swallowcliffe – there was a man living in Don Lewis' cottage, he was a bit put out about it too, Cook was his name, and he arranged another collection and Ansty got its own hut, the farmers hauled it over and put it up just out here so we finished up with two instead of one.

Arundell's let us have the piece of land on a quit rent, about half a crown a year so they could reclaim the land and when they decided to do away with the hut the land went back to the Arundell's again.

There were all allotments behind where Betty's (Betty Best) bungalow is – most of the village had them. Felthams, Mains, Levers – they grew potatoes, cabbage, that sort of thing. When I was a boy at Easter time they'd be full of people working – there was no need for a greengrocer. If they didn't have anything a neighbour would.

This cottage [8] where I live had the end built on about 1890 something, for the shop – it was a general shop. There used to be a bell over that door on a spring – groceries and so on – a family named Ford had it originally.

There was a cottage down the lane opposite where Chris Ridley [9] has his house now, more or less a one story sort of place.

I remember father saying when they were boys they used to go and sit with old Ned Cutt and Charlie Feltham – he was father's age or a bit older, he would go outside and put a sack over the chimney and Ned would say "Ah weather's on the change, smoke beating down" and they were smoking him out.

There was a well next to it and it still drains out into the road now and there's a stream running down by the side of the road. It was just for that cottage, we got our water from the well on the corner, I think it's still there, but now we've got the water mains – you know all the wells were tested in about 1930s and they were alright but as soon as they put the water in they condemned the lot. There was a well in Blind Lane that served all those houses – eight cottages – a bit of a tussle on wash days I think! You had to wind up the water with a winch.

Grandfather's family, the Alfords, came to this cottage during the Great War, from Motcombe. He'd been working there, he found it a bit dicey down there and he decided to take a job working for Mr Hansford – originally he came to a cottage at White Sheet for a few days and then this one became empty and he moved in.

Grandfather Parsons had been here for donkeys years – he was living at Lower Farm and his father before him – he was living in Blind Lane for a bit before, No 90, Uncle was born there and probably their Sister, but by the time they moved to Lower Farm Father was born there.

Mother's family were Dorset people. He worked for Mr Hansford till he died aged 74, about 1932. Mother was a nurse and she came back to look after grandfather. Grandmother died in the 1920s and there was no one to look after him – it was the sort of thing you did in those days, you gave up your job.

Mother trained as a nurse at St Thomas's, she nursed in Wimborne and Salisbury after she was qualified. She used to say she'd been in every cottage in the village either to lay out someone or nurse them. In those days if you wanted the Doctor you had to go to Tisbury, there was no phone, so they used to come to Mother first if you cut your hand... you'd come home from work and see a trail of blood and know that Mother had done some first aid.

Lower Farm [10] was a farm and a cottage on the end of it, in my day people named Tucker and then the Ridleys moved in for a while till they went to Ansty Water Farm.

Fry took Ansty Water Farm after Ernest Parsons, he was there till during the war and then he took Totterdale Farm which he eventually bought in the Sales. (John D Wood Auction 1946)

Ridley's brother in law was in the cottage next door to Lower Farm and he took Ansty Water Farm, Frank Ridley, Chris' father. Lower Farm had most of the land down the land and up in the Coombe. They were scattered about, the ones alongside the river were water meadows, they were with Waterloo Farm and the other one was with Davies's at Manor Farm. They could put down hatches and flood the meadows. I don't remember it in my time, but the hatch ways are still down there – two stoves with the groove in the middle to just get the board down. They did the flooding in the Spring to get the early grass. It was in father's day they used to do it – a water meadow was very useful – nowadays with manure and so on they can bypass it.

The cottages [11] opposite Lower Farm, we used to call them the Barracks – lots of boys in there Jays Nos 66, 67 and 68, three cottages joined together and Jays were at one end, the middle one the Clarkes and this end No 66, the Pikes. Most of the men worked on the farms and in the stone quarries. They had their own well and another one at Peacock Cottages.

Then you come to the Levers – always known as Letterbox Cottages [12] because it had the letter box in the wall VR, Victoria Regina, it was two cottages, Fred Parsons lived at the top end and when he died it was sold and the Levers bought both sides. There were lots of Levers – Ethel, Minnie, Kate – there were six girls – as they got older most of them went to work in service down in Bournemouth or in the cafes down there. There were two

boys, Herbert and Bert. Missie used to work for Mrs Mounty in Swallowcliffe.

Next to them is the cottage called the Rookery [13] – three cottages there – that was the Sullivans this end, then the middle one Jack Parsons and the far end with the door this side of it was Guards and the Taylors before that – the Sullivans came from Sutton – he worked at Chilmark, when I remember them in the 30s many were on the dole or they got a job at Chilmark, the RAF base started in 1937, they gave lots of work, before that there were lots on the Labour Exchange.

The Peacock cottages [14], No 74 and 75, so called because of the peacock shape outside. They were some of the newer cottages, then Maypole Cottages [15] there were two there, No's 76 and 77 I think – the numbers got mixed up with a lot of them. Mullins lived there, Charlie Mullins, he was the last person born on the top of the Down at the cottage in the clump, it was demolished about 1920, the bricks are still lying around in the trees up there – probably a cottage for the keepers – they used to get the water hauled up by the people that got the milk from Palmis Farm on the other side of the hill – the milk wagon used to bring the water up in a churn from the pond out there. They had a well out there, but of course in the dry period it used to run dry.

Every cottage in Ansty was rented and they paid rent to the estate. The only ones that weren't were the Pub [16] and the three cottages there that belonged to the brewers [17] – they'd been sold to the brewers by the agent. I think there was a lot of trouble about that at the time – I don't think the Dowager Lady Arundell knew much about it. People paid their rent once a quarter, they used to take a room at the pub and send the agent out to check the rents – a chap from Tisbury named Lush.

Just by the Maypole was Ansty House [18] with Charlie Lever – I think his ancestor built it and also the pub and they had a life in those things from the estate. He had a farm, he used to rent Frogpond Farm [19] and I remember seeing him come round in a little pony and trap he used to have a log business – Cyril Feltham and Doug Lever, he had them sawing wood and they had an old lorry, one of those Two Fords and Cyril used to drive it and they went round Knoyle with these bags of logs – there used to be a clock in the workshop at the end of the house – they lived there for donkeys

years, his grandfather was a builder and he built part of Tisbury street from the paper shop on up, that was his work.

When the Spencer's moved out of Lower Farm up here and we had it for a while, Jim found the brass plate that used to belong to him my uncle George married Annie Lever and he must have taken the plate down to the Farm and ...

The cottages next along – that was two cottages [20], Frank Lever lived there then and Edgar Lever and the far end was rented by South Farm for a labourer and then by Hansford for a workman – they got their water from a tap in the wall by the pond – a lead pipe was meant to go right across to the spring head but when they looked at it it was full of holes – I think it was water that needed treatment even in those days.

Manor Farm [21], there was a fellow named Rees there at the end of the 30's and before that the Brains – Stuart Brains aunt – Rees was an Air Force officer and he got called up again and so Davies came in about 1937 and took over – he came from Bishopston on the other side of Salisbury – his father had a big farm there – the children Bob, Teddy, Michael and Rosemary – Rosemary is living back here now with her mother.

Mr Hansford's workshop was in the old Commandery [4], blacksmith's shop one end and carpenter's the other, there was the metal plate outside for bonding the wheels, the blacksmith would make the metal tyre, then they'd have a fire outside, get it red hot and then strapped the wheel they'd made on to the plate and bring the tyre over and drop it on – the whole thing would more or less catch fire so they'd go round with buckets of water to cool it and as it shrank you could hear the whole thing grinding together – it made a good fit when it shrank.

The church [22], perhaps only a dozen or 14 people would go in the old days, grandfather Alford was a Primitive Methodist from Motcombe, they used to go to church there

The Parsons were all Catholics, there was no Primitive Methodist church round here, not even in Tisbury – it was Hansford who let him have a cottage in the village, the Arundells just wanted Catholics – if you were going into a farm you had to be a Catholic and they'd want to see you at church too – that was before Tisbury Catholic church was built and people

used to go to Wardour – grandfather Parsons used to lead the choir there – he had to walk through the woods – I’d known him go across there three times a day sometimes – I don’t know whether he wanted to but he felt he had to.

The cottages by the Pond that are now demolished – Frank Ridley was in there when he was a boy, I think it was very damp – the garden is still there. It was rented by the people in Ansty House – Maypole cottages they called them.

Then up beyond the Pub, three cottages [17] there that belonged to the Brewery, there was a Davey in there and Bath and another I can’t remember. Felthams had one cottage as the Post Office... Up to about 1932 a Crump family ran the Pub then Power came – he was there till 1937 and he went to Shaftsbury to a pub there and then Best, Betty Best’s father – he used to be a butcher in Salisbury – he used to go through this way with his van and he was friendly with the Powers and he took over – he was there till almost 1960 when he built the bungalow up here – it was well used in those days – then

up the lane to Hillside, that was from the farm house [23] to Waterloo Farm, Greens lived there, there was just one building up at the top and the dairyman lived there and eventually Les Green moved into it himself and sold Hillside to Mrs Freer or Lady, as she was then, from over the hill and she made lots of alterations and rebuilt it – it’s been doubled in size – there were orchards all along the land – every farm had an orchard to make cider – that was how the thing worked for hay making and so on.

When it came to hay making help was needed but they didn’t get paid, but they used to get cider and bread and cheese in the evenings when it got dark they’d finish in the cart shed and get them... it was all operated on that sort of thing – if they wanted to borrow a cart in the winter months, a horse and faggots they had it – no money changed hands – I don’t think they could afford to pay anyone in them days.

Then it’s Blind Lane, the Maceys [24] were there, by the stream – they were there quite a few years, my grandfather was in there for a while, uncle George was born there, it was No 90 I think – I don’t know how they got these numbers. I think they just took them out of a box, they don’t seem to

run in sequence at all. Maceys used to work on the farms and at Parmiters in Tisbury – the old fellow died but Wallace Macey was a woodman, that’s Stan’s father and he married a girl from Northumberland – he was in the army, stationed in London and she was working there and that’s how they met...

Going up the road there were two cottages [25] there, Felthams with a well – they were all farm labourers, No 82, back to Ansty Coombe, Charlie Lever rented Frogpond Farm [19] and various people lived in the house for a short time – Haywards were in the cottage [26] right up in the Coombe – it was just a tiny bedroom and to get in, the door used to fold in half – at one time the Grays used to live there – there were lots of allotment gardens on the hillside – people in the Coombe and another allotment on the other side – what they called Nicholas allotments up King’s Lane – they grew everything.

Coming up Ansty Coombe there was Pear Tree Cottage [27], the Elliots were in there when I was a boy, then the one where Barry Shaw [28] is now, that’s No 97 I think and there’s another one [29] that Sammy Groves had, he bought that and extended it – it was a double cottage and that was Randalls at one end and I forget – Mrs Adda rented them during the war – up at Yule Hill in Swallowcliffe – and then there were the Hundreds, the next one [30] up, that was a little farm, Don Cox was in there – he started the first milk round in this area with a car and a few crates – that was the last one on the left and then there was a pair on the right [31] hand side 100 and 101 – in 1946 when the estate was sold, Dorby bought them – he used to have a stall in Salisbury market, he bought that and Ansty House, but there was a life in that, it was a bit of a risk buying it and he couldn’t do anything with it while Levers were there and I think he bought another pair as well, they got their water from the shute by the roadside where the spring rushes out and there was a well for Ansty Coombe Farm.

Thatched cottages – the hundreds were and two more nearby and Frogpond Farm and two below and Farmers Cottage, the Barracks, our own, the Rookery and many more – grandfather did the thatching originally, then father – it was all done for the estates – all the farms down here were really smallholdings so they had to have another string to the bow with big families to support – they were stonemasons or thatchers or whatever, two irons in the fire.

Where Mrs Fisher-Rowe is now [32] that was No 89, Levers were there and Leslie Rowe was the last one in there, he died up there. Mrs Brown's old cottage [33], that was a chap named _____,

Col Allen from Swallowcliffe Manor rented it in the 1930s for his groom, until he built the bungalows up by the Stainers. The cottage was quite dry and so was the Macey although the stream runs right by.

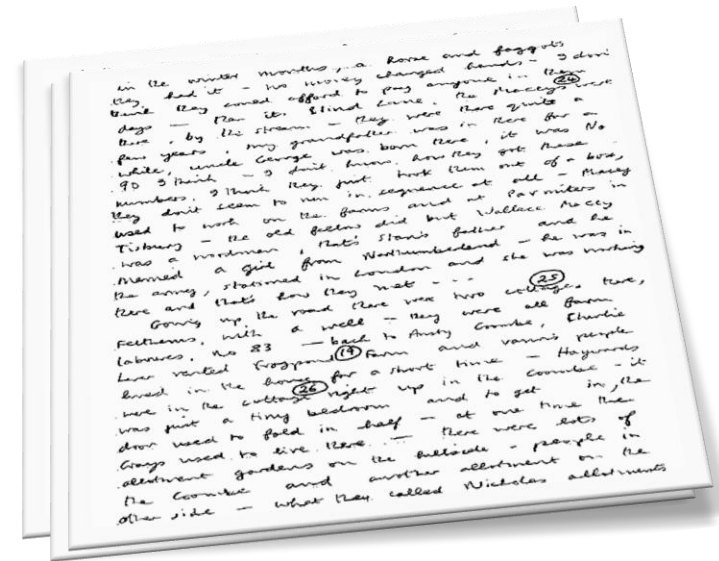
The names of the lanes – the main one was called High Street and King's Lane opposite me up to the Coombe and Blind Lane down by the Felthams and then the one going up from the Maypole didn't really have a name and of course Squalls Lane across on the other side.

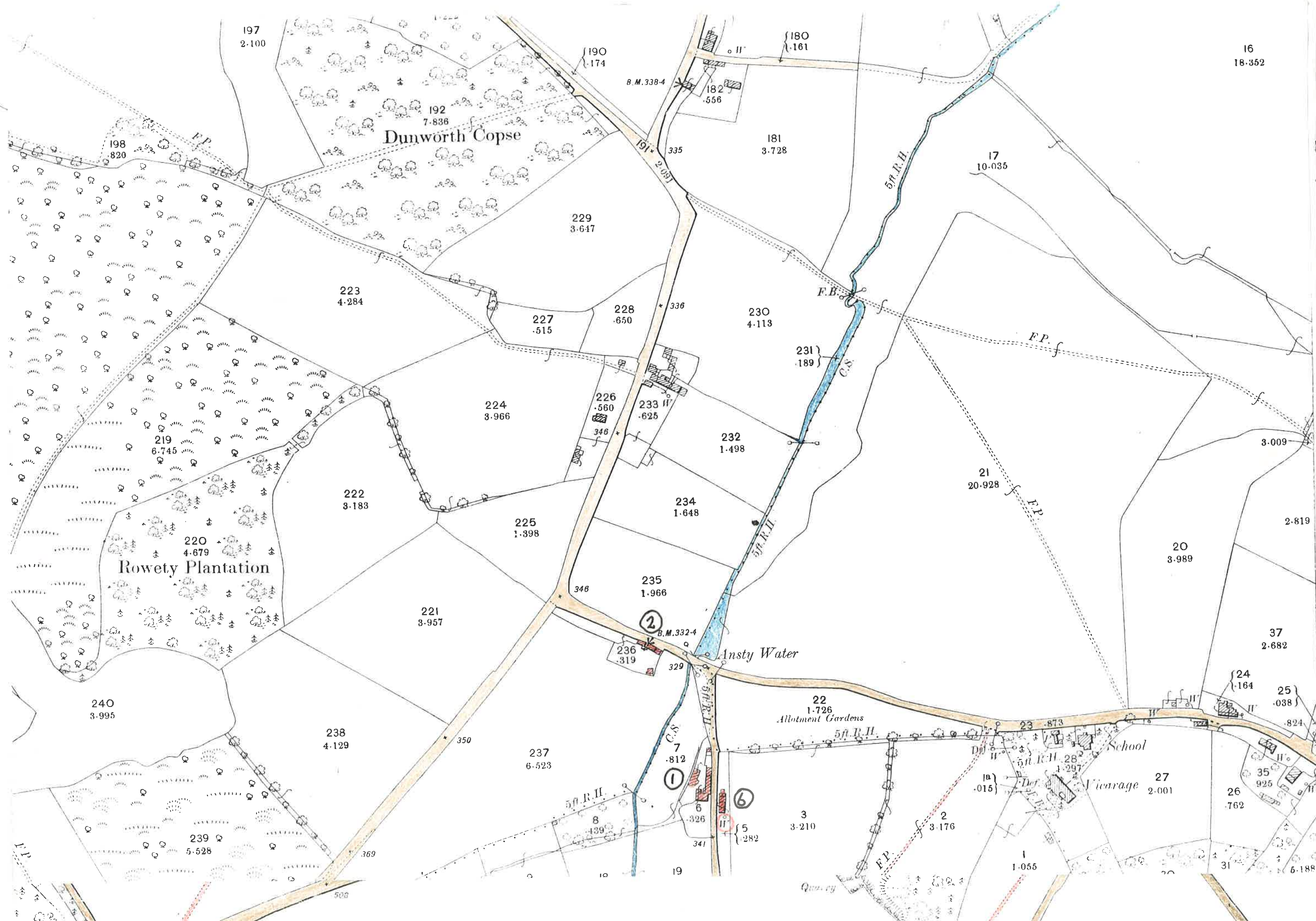
Going to school – we mostly went to Wardour but we started in Swallowcliffe until we were 7 and then father thought I was old enough to walk and he took me over one end of term time and after that I had to walk – I suppose it was 3 miles, a good 3 miles going through the woods, we used to have to change our shoes and clothes when we got to school – dry them out till it was time to go home. We had to leave home about half past seven, we never used to go straight there... home about 5 or something like that, there was quite a gang of us... we went across the allotment gardens to Squalls Farm; but you could go straight up this side of Squalls farm to the saw pit, they had a pit up there where they used to saw timber with a man on top and a man underneath, or you could cut straight across to Squalls Farm – there wasn't much in it really, then straight through the woods from the farm to Horwood Lodge and along by the saw mills and down Spicers and straight through – we took our lunch and dried out clothes on the tortoise stove in the cookery room with big guards around it – it they always kept a load of plimsolls up there so you could change into them.

No, the village didn't see much of the Arundells even after the Dowager died, she died in the mid-1930s and Gerald took over, but they used to leave it to their agents.

At Easter time children used to go to _____ and whatnot and then go up to the castle but not otherwise. I think in father's time there used to be more... I remember going to the old Dowagers funeral, all the children from the school had to go up.

Leslie Parsons was born in 1925 and died in 2009. Described as a Master Thatcher and a 'lifelong villager of Ansty', Leslie was laid to rest in the churchyard of St James' Church, Ansty. Apart from his wonderful thatching work throughout the locality Leslie left behind an invaluable treasure trove of recollections and handed-down memories (from his large extended family) representing an important part of a social history of Ansty spanning three centuries!





197
2.100

190
174

180
161

16
18.352

192
7.836
Dunworth Copse

198
820

181
3.728

17
10.035

229
3.647

223
4.284

227
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228
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230
4.113

231
189

224
3.966

226
.560

233
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232
1.498

234
1.648

225
1.398

222
3.183

220
4.679
Rowety Plantation

221
3.957

235
1.966

236
.319

Ansty Water

240
3.995

238
4.129

237
6.523

22
1.726
Allotment Gardens

23
.873

28
1.297

School

27
2.001
Vicarage

25
.038

24
164

26
762

35
925

31
6.188

239
5.528

8
439

326
341

5
282

3
3.210

2
3.176

1
1.055

138

