

# *A short visual appraisal of Ansty Village through time.*

Ansty Village has a long and rich history, stretching back way before the Domesday Survey. Ansty's main roots can be traced back to Saxon times but like everywhere else the brutal Norman Invasion of 1066 saw the introduction of the feudal system which laid the foundations of Ansty and its landscape setting for centuries.

At the time of the Domesday Survey the old Saxon 'manor' of Anestige (Ansty) was held by one Walter Waleran, who also held the nearby Wardour Estate. Waleran was thought to be in charge of all the local Royal Hunting forests for William the Conqueror.

Centuries later the nearby Wardour Estate and its rich deer park took over Ansty when it was sold to Sir Matthew Arundell in 1594. The entire village then belonged to the Arundells' Wardour Estate for next 352 years until as recently as 1946, when most of the estate including Ansty Village was sold off to meet punishing death duties instituted after WW2.

You can find out much more about the history and geography of Ansty Village [here](#).

Occasionally you can find a few picture gems of your local area on the internet or from old postcards or personal photos that highlight just how some things stay the same whilst others change beyond recognition! Most people are fascinated by how their town or village looked in the past when compared to the here and now. A single picture can impart as much information as a small book if you peruse it carefully!

Well, below we have a few pictures that can tell us an awful lot about the changing character of Ansty Parish and its setting within the landscape. The village has indeed changed a lot if you compare the demographics of folk who live here now with those of say 150 years ago. The many small 2 up 2 down stone cottages belonging to labourers do not exist anymore. For centuries, Ansty village was a largely close-knit agricultural community but after the great sell off in 1946 and by the 1970-80s, Ansty gradually became a pleasant backwater for retirees from elsewhere.

Today the picture is changing once again with younger people and second homers moving in as houses came up for sale. The new incomers tend to be younger, more mobile and more affluent and are often able to work at home. There are also a few more children here than just 20 years ago! Sadly, very few people living in Ansty now are able to claim they can go back several generations who had lived and died in Ansty before them.

Until recently, St James' Church still had a thriving weekly congregation along with other church-based activities but today most village folk only attend on a very few specific occasions. In the 1950s and 60s there used to be a local pub, a recreation 'hut' and a thriving silver band, along with several village trades people.

The annual Ansty May Day event probably represents the only tradition that has endured for centuries here and still does; perhaps sanitised somewhat from Victorian times but still harking back to the old ways of perceiving things and celebrating them. It still has the power to pull the village community together. Long may it continue!

Today, Ansty Parish remains one of the most desirable villages to live in. Residents and visitors alike are enthralled with the beauty of the village setting and the wonderful, varied scenery that can be found, right on their doorstep – from the chalk downs to the south, the greensand terraces in between and the rolling hills and valleys to the north. The thatched stone cottages, greensand walls, the tall Maypole, St James' Church 'The Commandery' and the medieval fishpond all nearby, paint such a rich, vibrant and long historical tapestry.

We should remember of course that the village wasn't always like that and indeed most of the village's tight-knit community were poor agricultural labourers - mostly tenants living in small cottages right up until 1946. The only substantial buildings in Ansty – were and still are - St James' Church, the 'Commandery' and The Manor.

Let's pin up a few pictures that our website administrator has found:

# Monastic Remains, Ansty 1817

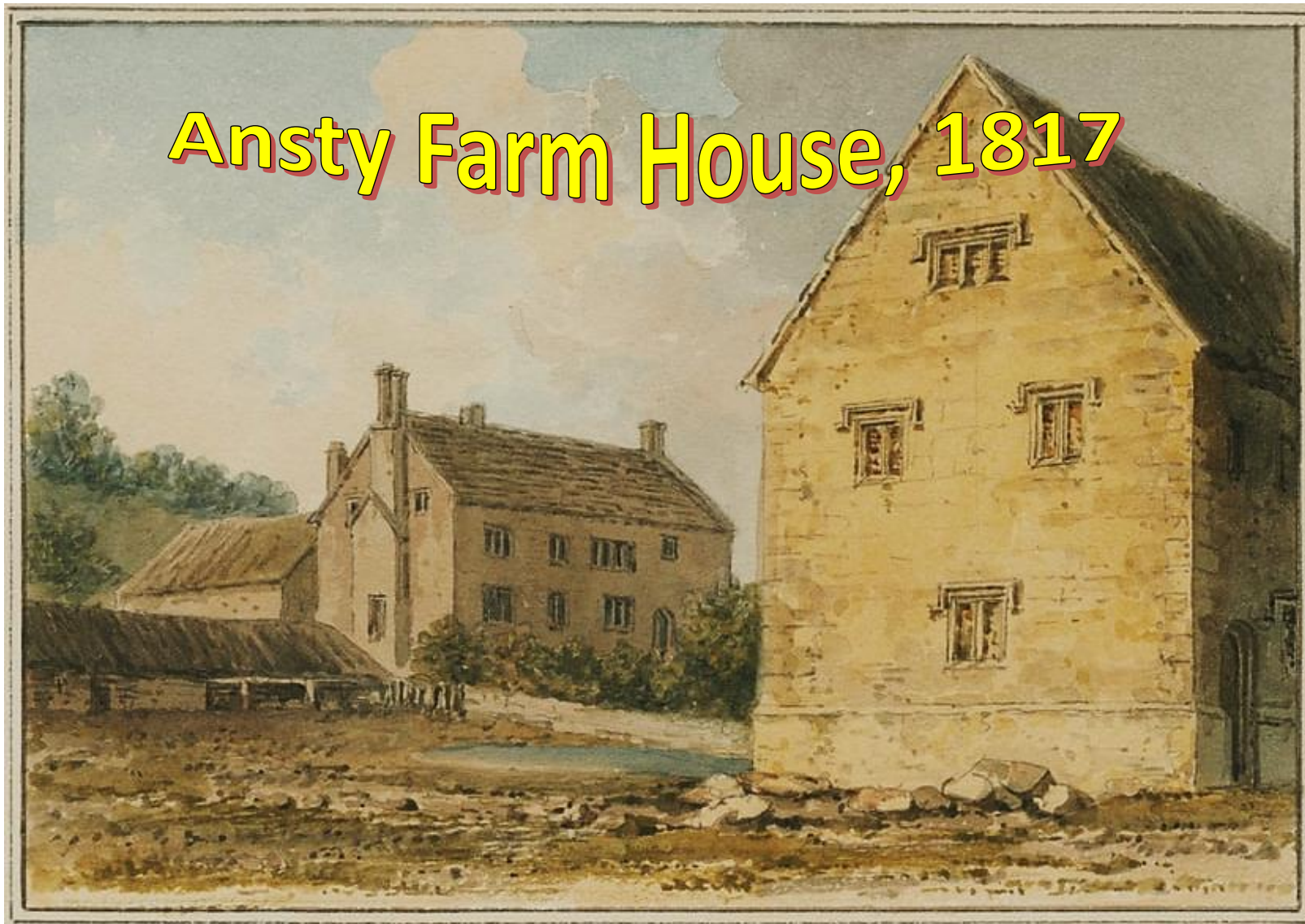


[John Buckler](#), Snr FSA (30 November 1770 – 6 December 1851) was a superb British artist and occasional architect who is best remembered for his many drawings of churches and other historic buildings, recording much that has since been altered or destroyed. On a visit to Ansty in 1817 he drew and painted these 'Monastic Remains' at Ansty – which we now know as 'The Commandery'. This grand building was built on the site of a former Hospitallers Preceptory.

From a vantage point on the Manor side of Ansty Pond we can clearly see that the view is still very recognisable today. Back then the building was falling into disrepair: the roof was leaking, and the windows broken. The manor behind this scene was still in use, and you can make out St James' Church at the far right of the painting. If you fancy a print of this wonderful picture, then click on the image for more details.



# Ansty Farm House, 1817



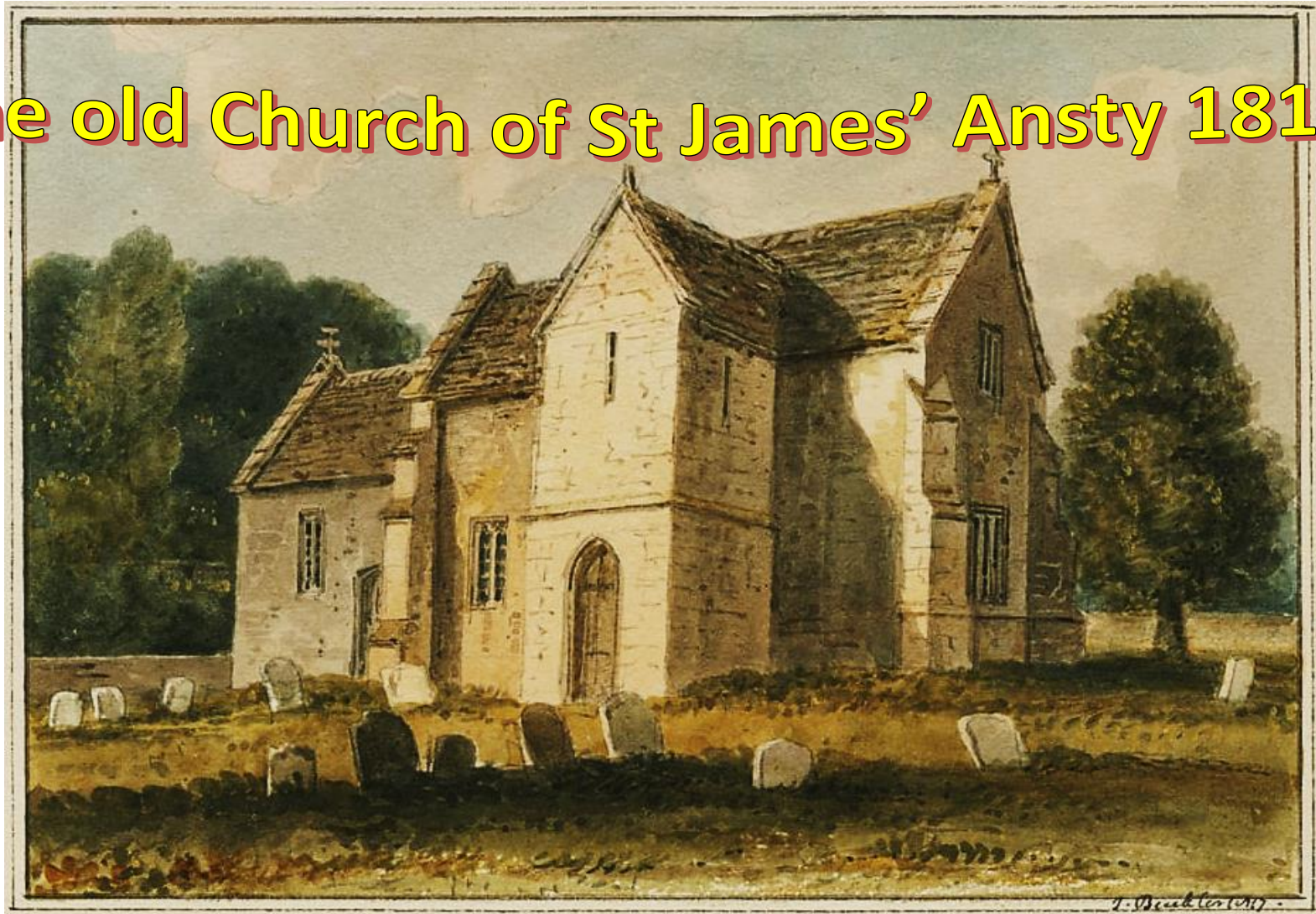
John Buckler also drew and painted the main farmhouse, or 'Home Farm' located behind the Commandery in Ansty. We now refer to this building as 'The Manor' again. At the time, this particular manor house was rented out to a succession of relatively affluent farmers, but it was still owned by successive Lord Arundells of the Manor based at Wardour.

Again, the gable end of the 'monastic remains' are instantly recognisable as indeed are architectural elements of the manor house today. There is indeed a dilapidated appearance in the foreground. Later, various estate farmers used the building as a barn. You can also see part of the former medieval fishpond lapping round the back of the Commandery building. Five springs feed this pond and the whole area probably flooded more often than it does now. It wasn't until the 20<sup>th</sup> century that The Commandery was restored to its full glory. If you fancy a print of this wonderful picture, then click on the image for more details.

More reading: [The Early History of The Manor and the Commandery](#) [Ansty Pond](#)



# The old Church of St James' Ansty 1817



On his visit to Ansty in the summer of 1817 architect and painter John Buckler also drew and painted St James' Church located near to The Commandery. During the Victorian period the church was substantially remodelled, but you can still see some of the earlier architectural elements in this excellent painting. The churchyard remains substantially the same.

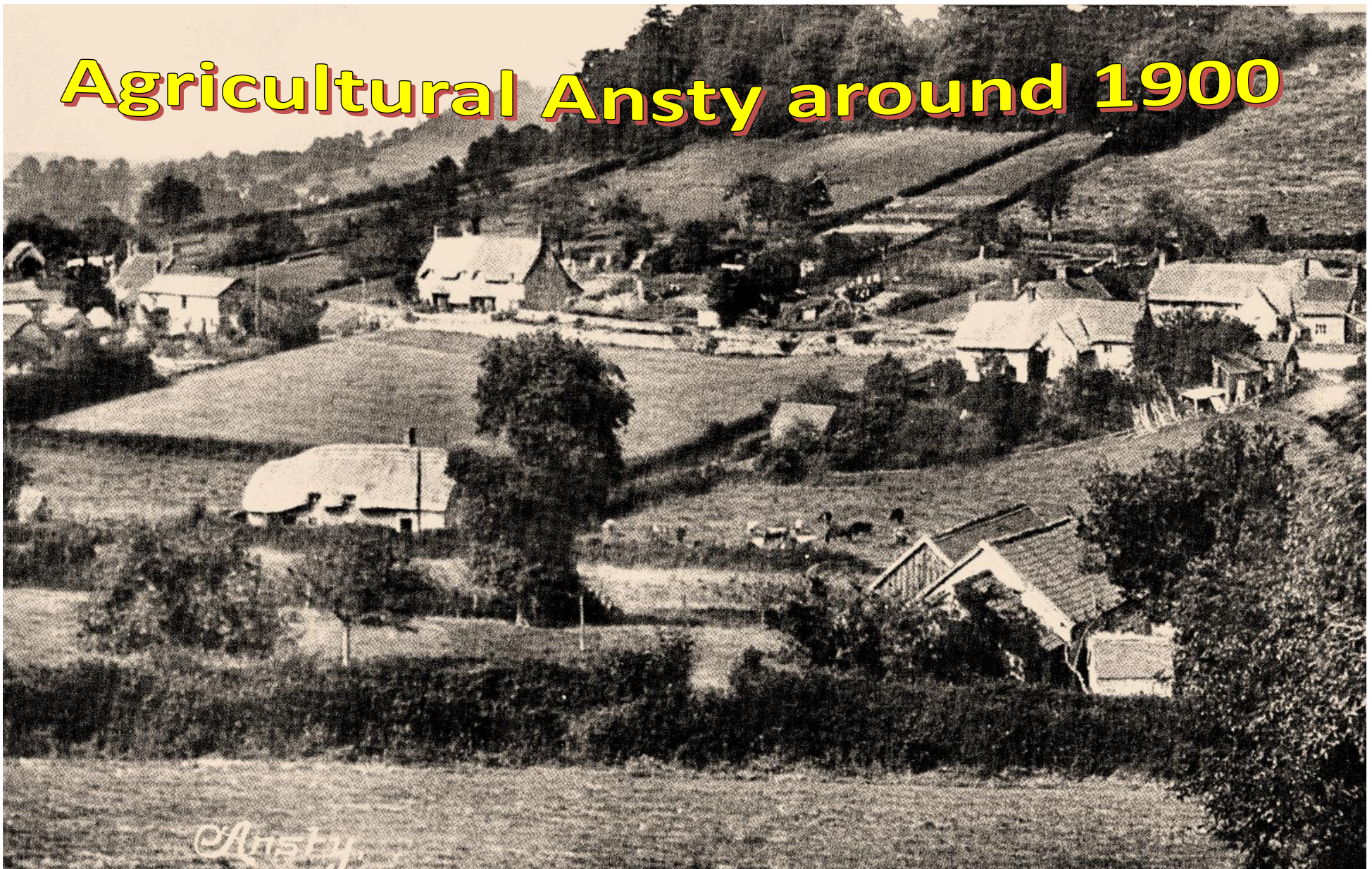
These three Buckler-drawn paintings sum up the historical 'core' of Ansty Village that makes it the wonderful village it is today. Too often though, our 'busy modern lives' just doesn't appear to allow us the time to walk and 'read' our local landscape and reflect how the village and its setting has been shaped by its inhabitants over time. More importantly, these three buildings once truly represented the strength of the self-sustaining local community of Ansty too.

Further reading: [The Crusader Church](#)

Visit [Ansty Village Chronicles](#)



# Agricultural Ansty around 1900

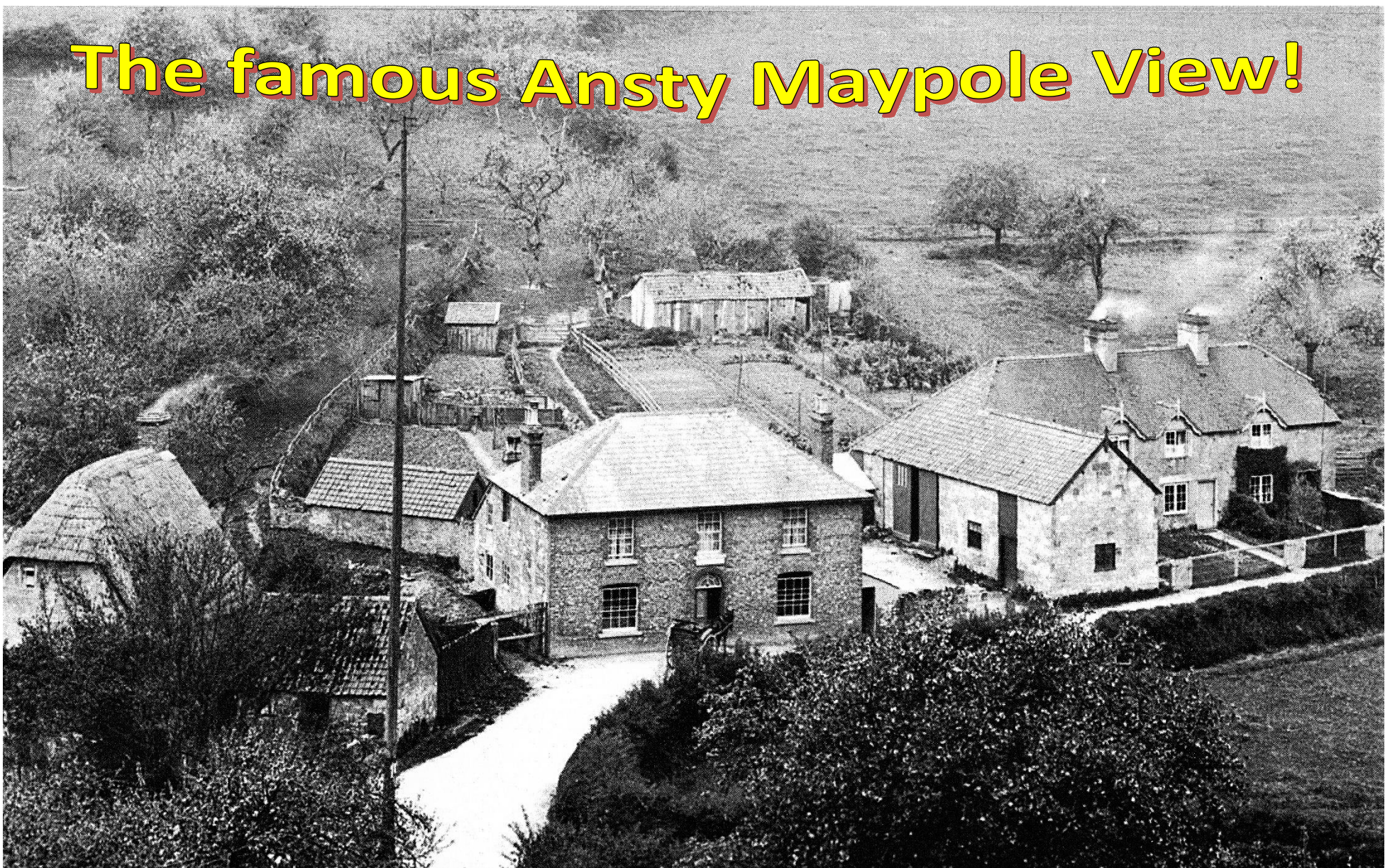


This picture was taken at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century from a field above Ansty Coombe Lane overlooking Hillside Stables looking towards Lower Farm and Fox Cottage. The walled section of the High Street is clearly visible. The thatched cottage to the left in the foreground is at the side of the quaint Blind Lane and was renovated a decade ago. In those days most of these cottages were still occupied by people who worked for Wardour Estate (who owned the whole of the village) or had some connection to the land. The population of the village was substantially higher than it is now and the growing of fruit and vegetables (allotment style), the keeping of livestock along with chickens and hens was still very common. Even today, local smallholders run some cattle or sheep on these small fields in the foreground. The village clearly looks a hive of activity and is largely kept tidy as well! The concept of 'rewilding' was never heard of as the old way of doing things was much more sustainable and in balance with nature – as it had been for centuries!

Photo Copyright unknown.



# The famous Ansty Maypole View!



This is a familiar and timeless view taken from the top of the very steep footpath that takes you from the Maypole on a nice walk to Swallowcliffe. The pony and trap outside what was The Arundell Arms public house dates it to the turn of the last century. Once again, this is a reminder that the whole of Ansty Village once belonged to the Wardour Estate. The Maypole seen here was then reputedly the tallest in the country! The cottage to the left was burnt down and the barn to the right was converted into housing in the same style as the rest of the cottages behind much later. A few newer dwellings have appeared since, replacing some of orchards that can be seen growing. Indeed, Ansty Parish had plenty of orchards at this time growing a variety of fruit but mostly apples and plums. This is another example of what we now refer to as 'eco-farming' where the village community were sustainably connected to the land and environment. This fine view at the bottom of Ansty Coombe Lane is still largely intact today – but the view from the top of the footpath is slowly being extinguished by growth of trees and other vegetation scrub on slopes below the camera.

Photo Copyright





## Part of the Ansty landscape in 1949 (1)

Here is an aerial photograph overlooking part of the Ansty Village parish boundary taken in 1949! Some familiar landmarks and woodland areas can be seen with Old Wardour Castle and its surrounding parkland taking centre stage in the foreground. The wide view is looking east towards the greensand bench and the chalk downs backed by Swallowcliffe Down on the right and Buxbury Hill in the far distance. Note the smooth downlands with very little 'scrubbing up' by thorns and brambles. Already the once smaller fields have been ploughed up and made into large arable fields both on the tops of the downs and below on the flat benches. This was part of the drive after WW2 to make us self-sufficient in food and not rely on imported foodstuffs so much. For a quite a while this worked, and food was plentiful and cheap. Note the newly planted conifers which looped around on what was called 'The Hanging' above the old castle – another post war effort to rely on our own timber resources. Above this woodland strip is a large field which was once an open deciduous deer forest stretching the entire width of the picture – a long standing hunting ground for the nobility – one of many in our local region. Surrounding this deer park was a ['park pale'](#) designed to encourage deer to leap in but then not escape! These forest deer parks were very well managed and gave employment to local folk. The next woodland belt marks a strip of woodland that once stretched from Walker's Copse on the Swallowcliffe boundary with Ansty in the north to Long Hayes Copse where the High St joins the A30 in the south. Those with sharper eyes might just make out Fox Cottage and Lower Farm in the Ansty valley behind. This is a familiar landscape which is still changing – Ansty Village, for example, is much more heavily wooded; the woodland belts have been reasonably well managed but the short, tufted chalk meadows along with smaller pastoral meadows have largely been lost – although there has been recent attempts in some localities to restore such landscapes. Click on the picture to discover where this great photo came from and discover more!



## Part of the Ansty landscape in 1949 (2)

This is a similar aerial view to the previous one taken in 1949, but this time looking eastwards towards the chalk downs and beyond. To most residents in Ansty this landscape still looks fairly familiar – but it looks more ‘open’ in this view than it is now. Let us see what landmarks we can spot! **1** This is **Ansty Down** with chalk pit below and set at the base of the chalk pit was an old lime kiln. All still there but heavily wooded now. The chalk escarpments are scrubbing up in places. **2** **Shave Lane** which connects the A30 (at New Barn) with the **byway (3)** on the tops. **4** **Improved land** on the tops – fields ploughed out of thin chalk soil using man-made chemical fertilisers to improve cereal grain output. **5** Is **Footpath 5** which passes close to the edge of a collapsed **5a old chalk pit**. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the pit was used as a firing range. This footpath was once a bridle road that took you to the byway and then on to Berwick St John. **6** **Middle Down** – adjoining Swallowcliffe Down. **7** **Newbarn** and a former **Wardour Estate lodge** entrance. **8** **Medieval Sheaf Open Field**. **9** The old **Wardour Estate deer park**. **10** Ansty Coombe Lane. **11** **Old Wardour Castle** long time a ‘folly’ to the New Wardour Castle further south of the picture. **12** **The Hanging and Track to Ansty Coombe** through the old Pale Park Gate – not in picture. **13** **Newly planted conifers** – still a working forest stand. **14** Track to Horwood via **South Hill Copse**. **15** **Horwood Farmland**. **16** **Lane from Ansty to Alvediston** **17** **The Ox-Drove**. **18** **Ebble Valley**. **19** **South Farm** as it was known then. **20** This location has long been a **nursery, a fruit and vegetable smallholding, and now Ansty PYO**. **21** **Denmead Copses and Copseside**. **22** the **A30 trunk road** as it was then. **23** **Crockerton Firs**

Search for our ‘local items of interest’ by clicking [here!](#) Click on the picture to discover where this great photo came from! It is even better if you register!





The following pictures of Ansty taken in January 2009 came from Google street view.

This is Ansty Pond with its associated Manor House behind.





Here we have the Maypole at the junction of Ansty Coombe Lane and the High St (looking north). The weeping willow is no longer with us but the vegetable and cut-flower garden behind the low stone wall was absolute joy to see in the summer! In just 14 years tree and hedge growth has been phenomenal and so these earlier rather more 'open views' are not so apparent bearing in mind that it is winter! Other than that, this view remains much the same.





Looking south along the High St. this time towards the Commandery and St James' Church behind. The willow at the southern end of the medieval Ansty Pond is still in fine fettle. Again trees, hedges and other vegetation have grown taller and thicker since this photo was taken in January 2009.

It is an iconic view, and it is no wonder this area is designated as a conservation zone.





This Google 'Street View' image was taken in June 2011 (a wet summer!). The willow was such a landmark and added to the timeless air that still apparent in Ansty at the time. But things were beginning to change quite quickly – not helped by the Telegraph newspaper naming Ansty as 'a desirable place to live for retirees'. From then on, the village population demographics began to change with a greater influx of wealthier and more mobile folk moving here from urban areas. The village remains a beautiful place to live in, but traffic can be busier on the High Street these days and the land use has changed somewhat too. The Ansty Coombe signpost was given a new lease of life a few years ago.

*If anybody has old photos of Ansty Village, Wiltshire and would like to share them with us then please get in touch!*