



## Early History of Ansty Village

Ansty has been inhabited from very early days. The name Ansty, originally Anestige, means the way up. In Saxon times the village bordered a rough track which led up through the valley to join the ancient Herepath, on the crest of the Downs, which linked Salisbury and Shaftesbury for centuries before the lower turnpike road was made. At the north end of Ansty village, the stream was crossed in those days at the Old Wood Ford, where the track was joined by a deep cutting, the Hollow Path, that led up to the village of Swallowcliffe, or Swealewanclife as it was then called.

On a flat-topped hill north of Ansty are the remains of the earthworks of an Iron Age fort; this site, called Castle Ditches, was known to the Saxons as Wilburg (or Briton's Fort). Chaldon (or Cawdon), the hill dividing Ansty from Swallowcliffe means Calves Down, and another landmark mentioned in the ancient boundary records of Swallowcliffe was the two-acre Milking Meadow; these names indicate that cattle rearing and dairy farming thrived in the district from early times.

In these early centuries, Ansty was part of the Royal Forest of Selwood. It is said that King Alfred, who founded a monastic community at Shaftesbury, used to hunt near Ansty; in the year 890 one of his courtiers was tried for stealing cattle from Fonthill. Successive kings of Wessex, with their courts, came to Ansty and the surrounding forest for a part of each year to hunt and to enjoy the produce of the local farms - for Ansty has always had good farming land. The local outcrops of sandstone were probably used for sharpening scythes, ploughshares, swords and spears; the area known as the Red Hone on the border of Swallowcliffe is mentioned in a charter dated 940 A.D.

It is recorded that during the reign of Edward the Confessor, Ansty or (Anestige as it was then called) was owned by the Saxons Aluric and Ulward. After the Norman Conquest, William the Conqueror rewarded Waleran, his Master of the Hut, by giving Ansty to him. Ansty was then a place of some importance, for the Domesday Survey records that Anestige contained two mills; as a fief of the Crown, the village was bound to provide one knight for the King's service.

In the following reign William II (William Rufus) gave extensive estates and hunting rights, including Cranborne Chase, to Robert Fitz-Haymon, a Norman knight, as a reward for the part he had played in the conquest of Glamorganshire. One Payne de Turberville who had also fought in the campaign was granted the village of Ansty as his share of the reward. His descendant, Walter de Turberville, in the year 1211 during the reign of King John, gave the Manor of Ansty with its appurtenances and its Title Deeds to the Knights Hospitaller of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem. It is thought that the gift was made in gratitude for the Knights' services in the Crusades and also to ensure that the sacraments would be available when the Court of King John was in residence in the neighbourhood. For between

the years 1208 and 1214 England lay under a Papal Interdict and the churches were closed; but the two Orders of the Hospitallers and the Templars were exempted from the Interdict.

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