



Ansty Village

The village of Ansty in Wiltshire, 14 miles from Salisbury and 6 miles from Shaftesbury, Dorset, is small and secluded. In 1963 it had an adult population of 98. Although its wooded valley below the Downs lies between two main roads, less than a mile north of the A30 road from London to the West Country, and only a few miles south of the busy traffic of the A303 from London to Exeter, Devon, the village still seems to have an ancient peace.

Ansty has an historic church and an inn - The Arundell Arms, renamed The Maypole inn in 1973 - but no school, shop or garage; its' post office was closed in 1964. The nearest railway station, 2½ miles away at Tisbury, was reduced to single line working in 1967. Many of Anstys' stone cottages are thatched; the local thatcher who lives in the village comes of four generations skilled in this craft.

Ansty has a tall maypole - a larch more than 70 feet high from nearby Wardour woods. The people of Ansty march round the maypole every May Day to the old tune of 'The Oyster Girl'. The Ansty village band, whose silver instruments were handed down from father to son, was disbanded in 1972 and its instruments were sold. In recent years the annual May Day celebrations have also included the crowning of a May Queen and the traditional maypole ribbon dances performed by local school children; for this one evening in the year Ansty is crowded with hundreds of spectators.

There seems to be no record of the date when the first maypole was erected in Ansty, but it is thought to be hundreds of years ago, and old customs are revived, when, after some 25 years, the existing maypole needs to be replaced. The new maypole must be put up between midnight and the following noon so that the road is not obstructed for more than twelve hours; by the observance of this tradition Ansty renews its right to keep the maypole in the village road.

Extract from the 1988 publication by F. W Freston first published in 1963