

JESSAMINE COTTAGE: 241 Canterbury Road

'Jessamine Cottage' (No. 241) is the right hand cottage in a row of three old houses opposite All Saints Church. The centre one (No. 239) is called 'Primrose Cottage' and the left hand one (No. 237) was called 'Church Cottage'. The inside of the roof space used to be open from end to end of it, which makes it look as if the three were all part of one large building originally. There is a flying freehold in part of Jessamine, which lies over the top of Primrose Cottage.

The cottage was built about 1612 and was originally thatched. The rafters were later altered, when tiling was laid on the roof. In 1882, Thomas Harty Fairbank Wilson bought the cottage on a mortgage. In 1914, when Tom Wilson first remembers visiting his grandfather, Thomas, or 'Harty' as he was known, at Jessamine Cottage, there was no running water. The water was drawn up from a well in the back garden, which is still there. Later on, Grandfather piped the water from the well directly through into the kitchen, by means of a pump. Gas was eventually installed, but only for heating and cooking, not for lighting. Tom remembers his grandmother lighting a very large oil lamp in the evenings. The final bit of modernisation came when electric lighting was installed. Harty was a builder, decorator and carpenter and he had a carpenter's shop behind the cottage. He also owned the blacksmith's shop at the left end of Church Cottage, the remains of which still stands today

There was a piece of land opposite Jessamine Cottage, which lay at the foot of the old high part of the churchyard. When he came back with timber he had sawn down in Blean Woods, he and his assistant would saw it into planks over the saw-pit at the rear of the house. Then the planks were carried across the road to the piece of spare land, where they were stacked to dry out. This practice went on for many years, until during the Revd. Serres time, (1898 – 1930), it was decided to enlarge the churchyard. Without asking him, Harty's piece of land was incorporated into the new ground. He went to see the Vicar about this, but was told that as he couldn't prove ownership (he had nothing in writing, only the fact that he had used the piece for many years), so the Vicar refused to even consider paying him anything for the land. Eventually, with not very good grace, Harty conceded to the new arrangement. However, Tom Wilson was of the opinion that that particular part of the churchyard was not consecrated. It was certainly never used for burials, until about 1995, when ashes have been interred there.

On one occasion, not long after this incident, the Vicar climbed up the scaffolding surrounding the steeple, when it was being reshingled. Harty, on seeing him high up above the churchyard, called up to him, in his stentorian voice,

"You'd better stay up there, because that's the nearest you'll ever get to heaven!"

There are cellars under Jessamine and Primrose Cottages, but not under Church Cottage, as far as Tom can remember. The latter part of the building was the cow barn in the earlier part of the 19th century.