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26 Church Street  
Ribchester, Lancashire:  
Heritage Assessment

August 2019

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## **26 CHURCH STREET, RIBCHESTER, LANCASHIRE, PR3 3XP:**

### **HERITAGE ASSESSMENT**

#### **1 Introduction**

- 1.1 This heritage assessment has been produced to inform and support a listed building consent application to Ribble Valley Borough Council (RVBC) for alterations at 26 Church Street, Ribchester. It has been commissioned by the owners and applicants, Mr & Mrs Bennett, through their agent Judith Douglas Town Planning Ltd, and site visits were made by the writer on 1 and 13 August 2019.
- 1.2 26 Church Street is a designated heritage asset, as a grade II listed building, and lies within the Ribchester Conservation Area. The property's rear boundary also adjoins the scheduled monument of Ribchester Roman Fort (Bremetennacum).
- 1.3 The NPPF (paragraph 189) states that: *"In determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance."*

#### **2 The site**

- 2.1 The application site lies on the west side of Church Street, at the northern end of a terrace of houses, south of a small public garden next to the junction with an un-named road. It comprises a three-storey house fronting directly onto the highway footpath, with single-storey rear wing, and rear garden. Its NGR is SD 65002 35238.

#### **3 Heritage designations**

##### **Listed building**

- 3.1 The house is listed, together with the adjacent 25 Church Street, under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended for its special architectural or historic interest. It appears as entry 1147461 in the National Heritage List for England<sup>1</sup>. It was first listed in 1983, and is at grade II. The identifying description reads:

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<sup>1</sup> <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1147461>

Pair of weavers' houses, part of a row, late C18th. Squared sandstone with slate roof. 3 storeys with plain frieze and stone gutter brackets. Windows have plain reveals. Each house has a door to the left with plain stone surround and triangular moulded hood on shaped stone brackets. The attic to No.25 retains its sashed window with glazing bars. No.26 has a tunnel entrance to the left with plain stone surround with semi-circular head, projecting key and imposts. A 1st floor window has been inserted over the tunnel entrance.

### **Conservation area**

- 3.2 The Ribchester conservation area was designated in 1973. Conservation areas are designated under the provisions of Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended; a conservation area is defined as *"an area of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance"*.
- 3.3 An appraisal of the Conservation Area was produced in 2006<sup>2</sup>, and this notes that it *"consists of the village core centred around a small triangular area, on one side of which is the White Bull Inn, and Stydd, a rural area north-east of the main settlement which contains two churches and 18th century almshouses"*.

### **Scheduled monument**

- 3.4 The Ribchester Roman Fort is scheduled under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 as amended, as it appears to the Secretary of State to be of national importance. It appears as entry 1005110 in the National Heritage List for England<sup>3</sup>, although the NHL does not have a detailed description of the monument, which has a number of discontinuous locations in and around the village.

## **4 Historical background**

- 4.1 Ribchester was a major settlement in the Roman period, as a consequence of its location at a fording point on the Ribble, and was the site of a fort and associated *vicus*, although their occupation seems to have ceased fairly abruptly at the end of the period. It was an insignificant place during the medieval and early post-medieval periods, but during the second half of the 18th century, its economy began to prosper with the proliferation of hand-loom cotton weaving. As a result, there was considerable investment in houses to accommodate domestic weaving, particularly along Church Street and Water Street, but the boom was relatively short-lived and had peaked by 1840, as the industrial revolution

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<sup>2</sup> The Conservation Studio, 2006 *Ribchester Conservation Area Appraisal*

gathered pace, because of Ribchester's distance from other centres of production and main transport routes.

- 4.2 The continuous terrace of houses on the west side of Church Street, at the north end of which 26 stands, forms a heterogeneous row of weavers' cottages of different dates, but contains two date-stones of the 1790s, and the whole row is thought to have been constructed in a short spate of building about that time.
- 4.3 The Ordnance Survey map of 1847 (figure 1) shows the house at the north end of the row with a rear wing, a feature shared by most of the other houses in the terrace. A detached outbuilding, likely to have been a privy, is located at the west side of the plot, and appears to have been shared with the neighbouring dwelling.



Figure 1: Ordnance Survey map, 1847<sup>4</sup>

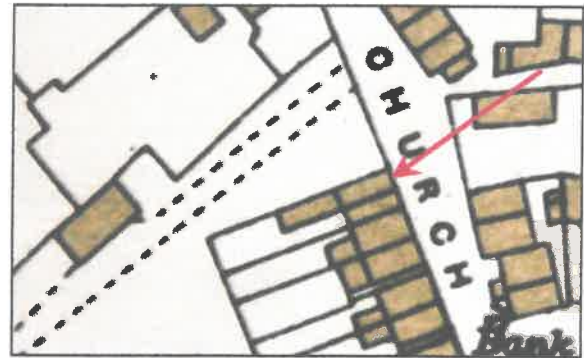
- 4.4 The available copy of the first edition 1:2500 map is poor (figure 2), but it does show an essentially similar arrangement, as does the (clearer) 1932 edition, albeit the detached outbuilding had been demolished by then (figure 3).



Figure 2: Ordnance Survey 1893<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1005110>

<sup>4</sup> Ordnance Survey 1:10560 map, Lancashire, sheet 54 (surveyed 1844-7)



**Figure 3:** Ordnance Survey 1932<sup>6</sup>

## **5 Description of the house**

### **Three-storey component**

#### **Exterior**

- 5.1 Nos. 25 and 26 Church Street form a pair of three-storey houses, which appear to have been added to the north end of no. 24, and share many architectural details with that two-storey antecedent. The front is faced with squared sandstone laid in deep courses, and although the top storey of no. 26 has been rebuilt in the 20th century (with its inner leaf of concrete block), the rebuilt work has re-incorporated the plain eaves band and shaped corbels which support the guttering.
- 5.2 The main doorways to both houses have heavy, upright sandstone jambs, over which are triangular stone hoods or canopies, borne on shaped corbels: these appear to be early 19th century additions. A third doorway, immediately next to the entrance to no. 26, has a semi-circular arch with keystone and leads to a shared through-passage ("tunnel").
- 5.3 All the front window openings to no. 26 have been enlarged slightly at top and bottom, and have modern sills and lintels, contrasting with the original ones to no. 25, which retain their deep stone dressings. The window frames have modern, small pane casements. Although the listed building entry describes one of the first floor windows as having been inserted, this seems highly unlikely.
- 5.4 The north gable and rear of the house have painted cement render, concealing the stonework, and the two windows in the former are likely to be 20th century insertions. The rear has a ground floor window to the side of the wing; this

<sup>5</sup> Ordnance Survey 1:2500 map, Lancashire, sheet 54.14 (surveyed 1892)

might have been a doorway historically. There is a first floor window with modern dressings, and the position of a blocked second floor window over it, evident externally as a pair of vertical joints.

- 5.5 The roof of the three-storey house is blue slate with tile ridge, coverings which are likely to be contemporary with the modern rebuilding of the front wall at second floor level, and to have replaced original stone slate and stone ridge. A chimney stack at the north gable has been removed, probably at the same date: the pair of flues it served can be seen inside the house.

### **Ground floor**

- 5.6 The ground floor formerly comprised a front and a rear room, once separated by a thin masonry wall, but removal of the wall in the 20th century means that these now form one large space, with only a small 20th century vestibule to the front door. The chimney breast and a plain fireplace recess (intended for an iron range) survive in the gable wall of the front room, but those in the rear room have been removed, their absence permitting the insertion of the modern north window.
- 5.7 The ground floor room has a concrete floor approximately 100mm thick, overlying earlier asphalt. Overhead, slender oak beams carry the first floor.
- 5.8 The present open-tread staircase to the first floor is mid to late 20th century. It replaced an earlier staircase (details unknown), formerly situated against the south wall, whose removal has left a scar in the plaster and infill within the concrete floor. To judge from these, and the position of the former wall in relation to the parallel ceiling beam to the rear, the stair was entered from the north, and underwent a quarter-turn before continuing up towards the rear of the house.

### **First floor**

- 5.9 The earlier staircase from the ground floor would have entered the rear of the first floor through the aperture now covered by the raised boxing for the modern staircase.
- 5.10 On the first floor, the cross-wall dividing front and back has been partly removed, and a number of modern partitions have been installed to create the present arrangement of three bedrooms and bathroom, though there may have been some historic partitions in addition to the masonry wall. There would formerly

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<sup>6</sup> Ordnance Survey 1:2500 map, Lancashire, sheet 54.14 (revised 1930)

have been a stair up to the second floor, but it has not been possible to identify its position.

### **Second floor**

- 5.11 The second floor was a habitable room originally (as it remains in the adjoining house), but has fallen out of use, and is presently only accessible through a small trapdoor. An investigation for a larger opening which would have accommodated a staircase has not proved fruitful, but the infilling of an opening for a stair, once removed, may only have involved the insertion of a single joist across the aperture, and the making good of the ceiling.
- 5.12 Apart from any opening for a staircase, the second floor was fully boarded with wide pine boards, indistinguishable from those on the first floor, but only remaining in fragmentary condition around the perimeter of the room, where they are in very poor condition. The extent of boarding throughout the second floor is indicated by square nails standing proud in the joists.
- 5.13 The outer walls of the second floor contain a window to the east, within the rebuilt fabric, and one to the west, now infilled with concrete blocks. The west and south sides are finished with lime plaster, while the east and north walls have modern plaster; the pair of flues once connected to the gable ridge stack show within the latter. The roof timbers are all modern replacements.

### **Rear wing**

- 5.14 The rear wing comprises a narrow, low, single-storey structure, some 8.5m long, so is almost as long as the house is deep; it is believed to have been built as a workshop for cotton weaving. Domestic cotton loom-shops were usually located on the ground floor or in basements, in order to maintain high levels of humidity required for the process. In Ribchester, loom-shops are generally found to be at the rear on the ground floor in houses on Church Street, although two basement loom-shops are known at nos. 61 and 62; the high water table and risk of flooding seems to have dissuaded weavers from building subterranean loom-shops elsewhere in the village. Upper floors are not likely to have been used for weaving (as they were in woollen-producing areas), but may have accommodated related processes such as yarn preparation or storage<sup>7</sup>.
- 5.15 Map evidence leaves no doubt that the wing was present by the 1840s. In structural terms, it represents an addition to the house; however, whether it was built as a component which was planned from the outset, immediately after the

three-storey part (most likely in the closing years of the 18th century), or whether it was an extension which came some years later, is a moot point.

- 5.16 The wing is built from random rubble, which contrasts with the front of the house, although only the wing's north side has exposed stonework, the two other sides being rendered to varying degrees.
- 5.17 The roof is of blue slate, of uncertain date, but probably secondary; the ridge is the original sandstone. It is likely that the wing was originally covered with local stone slate.
- 5.18 The present arrangement of openings in the south side of the wing appears to have been altered to some degree, and the doorway has been heightened, through the addition of a small gablet in the roof. The large window to the present kitchen may have been enlarged, but the smaller window to the back room may be unchanged except for the rendering of its surround. There is also a window in the wing's west gable.
- 5.19 The wing is of three unequal bays, with two rather crude king-post oak trusses, the east one closed with lath and plaster. The masonry wall below this truss is very probably secondary, as may be the lath and plaster, and it is likely that the wing contained one large room originally. The west truss has a later softwood truss alongside, and rafters are also softwood, probably late 19th or 20th century replacements, contemporary with the blue slate covering. The ridge is the original, whole-tree member.
- 5.20 The present kitchen has an asphalt floor, the west room a concrete floor (recently a back kitchen or utility room). Investigations by the owner indicate that this concrete, and an underlying layer of hardcore, are approximately 300mm deep, and that the wall coating extends to a similar low level. The floor level has therefore been raised, perhaps in an attempt to relieve damp, although that inconvenience was probably an original intended aspect of the wing, when built as a cotton loom-shop, and lower floor levels would have provided greater head-room than at present.

## **6 Statement of significance**

- 6.1 The house at 26 Church Street is a grade II listed building, so of national importance as a building of special architectural or historic interest. It is also important because of its contribution to the Ribchester Conservation Area, and below-ground parts of the property stand within an area known to have been

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<sup>7</sup> Hodges, A C & Ridge, J F, 1997 *Ribchester: A Short History and Guide*

occupied for much of the Roman period, though there will have been much disturbance resulting from construction of the house, and post-medieval and modern occupation: no parts of the property fall within the scheduled area.

6.2 The significance of the house lies in its late 18th century date, as one of a pair within a row of cottages built to accommodate hand-loom cotton weavers at a time when the industrial revolution was gathering pace, and Ribchester was progressing towards a peak of economic prosperity. The rear wing is believed to have been a loom-shop (along with those to other houses in the row), and therefore is of particular interest, as an regionally uncommon means of accommodating cotton weaving in a domestic setting. While the house is rather plain and functional in character, some features are distinctive, and contribute particular architectural significance, including:

- the arched passage entrance, heavy stone surround and later stone canopy to the domestic doorway, and eaves band, all in the front elevation
- the general external form of the rear wing, although changes to openings in the south side are to its detriment
- the surviving ground floor fireplace
- the remains of the cross-wall separating front and rear rooms, on ground and first floor
- surviving original internal timbers, including the floorboards to part of the first floor
- the roof trusses within the rear wing.

6.3 Features which weaken significance, and may offer scope for enhancement, include:

- the modern alterations to all front windows
- painted render to two elevations
- the inserted windows and lack of a chimney stack at the north gable
- the incongruous modern staircase
- the lack of access to and redundancy of the once occupied second floor
- the area of modern rebuilding to the front of the second storey
- the infilling to the west window on the second floor
- the entirely modern roof structure.



Photo 1: Setting: No.26 (at right), at north end of row along Church Street



Photo 2: Front elevation of nos.25 and 26 (at right)



Photo 3: Rear view (no.26 at left), with roof of wing visible



Photo 4: Rear view (no.26 at left), with rear wing in foreground



Photo 5: Front fireplace on ground floor



Photo 6: Present staircase, within former back room, ground floor



Photo 7: Present staircase, within scar of predecessor in plaster behind



Photo 8: Site of former staircase aperture, within first floor



Photo 9: Upper view of joists on second floor

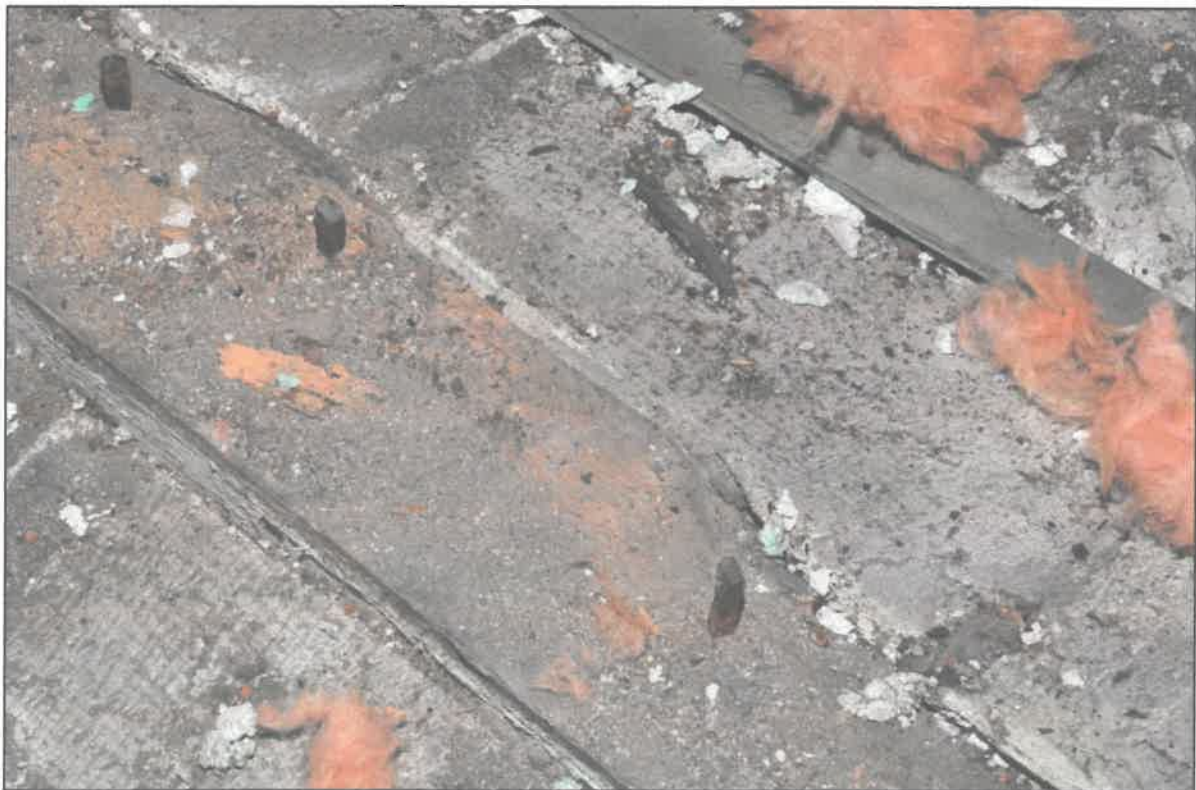


Photo 10: Close-up view of nails for floorboards, in joist on second floor



Photo 11: North gable, second floor, with pair of flues (stack over removed)



Photo 12: Blocked window, west side of second floor



Photo 13: Rear wing (former loom-shop): south side, with altered doorway



Photo 14: Rear wing : truss and cross-wall, looking east (part of former loom-shop)



Photo 15: Rear wing: west room (part of former loom-shop)



Photo 16: Rear wing: west truss, and other roof members