

Heritage Statement for 8&10 Church St roof essential repairs

Context:

8&10 Church St are two Grade II listed interjoined properties under one single ownership title.

The listing for no. 10 Church Street:

<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1248745>

CHURCH STREET 1. 5128 (North Side) Caversham No 10 SU 7174 11/267A
19.3.75. II GV 2. Mid-late C17 altered. 2 storeys, timber framed, 1 bay to road, with timber frame applied over plaster and 3 to east. Plaster infill. Hipped corner to old tiled roof, 3 chimneys. To street: C19 3-light casements. To east: 2 light casements on 1st floor, modern windows on ground floor. Door off-centre left. Small single-storey wing to right. Interior remains of bread-oven to right of ground floor parlour fireplace. Roof formerly thatched. Catslide to rear.

The listing for no. 6&8 Church Street:

<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1113455>

CHURCH STREET 1. 5128 (North Side) Caversham Nos 6 and 8 SU 7174 11/267 19.3.75. II GV 2. Altered C17 cottage row. 2 storeys. Colour washed brick and plaster. Small low 2 storey link block with No 4 with 2 light mullion window on 1st floor. Old tile roof with catslide to rear. 3 windows on 1st floor, outer 3 light, centre 2 light. 3 similar windows on ground floor, blocked, and one with shutters. 2 doors. Ground floor openings segmental headed. String at 1st floor level and corbelled brick eaves cornice, original window frames on 1st floor.

8&10 Church Street are a **Grade II listed building** in old Caversham, near the Thames in Reading. It was officially listed on **19 March 1975**.

The listing description is of **Group Value** since 8&10 Church Street are an important part of the wider old Caversham group of buildings and important for helping the area to retain its historic village character.

The building dates from the **mid-to-late 17th century** (so roughly 1650–1700). It is a **timber-framed** building, which is typical of vernacular buildings of that period. The timber frame is still externally visible in places with plaster infill panels. The roof was **originally thatched**, although it now has tile covering. The house has a **catslide roof** to the rear — a traditional roofline where the back slope extends lower down than the front.

For a building of this type and given the location in Caversham, the switch from thatch to tile was most probably made sometime between the **late 18th century and mid-19th century** — perhaps roughly **1780–1850**. This is when **clay tiles became cheaper and more available** as industrial production and transport improved. At this time, thatch was increasingly viewed as a **fire risk**, especially in tighter village streets. Insurance companies and local authorities often encouraged or effectively forced reroofing in more built-up areas. The area local to Caversham also had very good access to **plain clay tiles**, which became a common replacement material.

Like other similar buildings nearby, by the Victorian era, many modest vernacular cottages were “modernised” with tiled roofs, brick chimney rebuilding, sash windows and rendered walls.

The date for both 8&10 is assumed to be seventeenth century, in keeping with the cluster of other properties in this area, although several – and perhaps No. 6 and potentially no. 8 are considered to have origins in the Elizabethan period. It appears to have been common practice to rebuild vernacular structures such as this one in the same style when in need of repair. Thus, it is often difficult to date these buildings precisely.

The cottage at No. 8 adjoins No. 6 Church Street to the west, the roof of which has recently been repaired by the same Heritage builders to be used on this project, Dunne & Co. who are now known as Home Counties Restoration Limited.

Both No. 8 & No. 10 are currently being used commercially as office space by Gardiner’s Homecare Limited.

The location of 8&10 Church Street is iconic, as it sits in the middle of a cluster of historic vernacular buildings at the very centre of ‘old Caversham’, and it faces Caversham Bridge, being directly in the line of sight and, therefore, one of the first things travellers see when crossing the bridge into Caversham. Therefore, No. 8&10 Church Street occupy a prominent site within the historic built environment of Caversham; in addition to the Grade II listing, it is situated in a conservation area.

Exterior: the exterior facing Church Street and Priory Avenue is a typical two-storey timbered ‘cottage’ elevation. The roof has a steep pitch and is tile hung. As the structure consists of large beams of some antiquity, there is a pleasing undulation in the roof, both to the front, side and the rear. These buildings have in recent years been painted cream colour but were white for many years with contrasting terracotta tiles and wooden beams.

The rear elevation of no. 8 is more or less symmetrical with that of No. 6 next door (to the east) except for a double dormer in the roofline, as opposed to the single dormer at

No. 6. At both front and rear there is considerable undulation of the tile-hung roof, and attractive period of the property and part of its 'period charm'.

View from Church Street & then Priory Avenue



View from Priory Avenue:



Rear Courtyard:





Interiors: given that this listed consent is for essential roof repairs, with no change to any structural element internally or externally, this heritage assessment does not provide internal details beyond the evidence of water ingress that can be seen internally.

A reasonable conservation-based estimate for cottages such as 8&10 Church Street is that, subsequent to the major roof type conversion from thatch to clay tile, there will already have been approximately **3–6 substantial retiling campaigns** after the original tiled roof was installed plus countless local repairs and patching.

So in total, the roof has probably undergone something like **4–7 major roofing phases over roughly 350 years.**

This estimate comes from typical lifespans of historic roofing materials and practices. Traditional clay plain tiles can last **100–200 years** if good handmade tiles are reused and maintained. However, full retiling often became necessary because battens, fixings, nails, and understructure failed before the tiles themselves did. Historic roofs were commonly repaired incrementally rather than completely replaced in one go.

What often survives through all these phases are original oak rafters, purlins, parts of earlier tile courses and sometimes evidence of the former thatch beneath later work

In buildings of this age it is actually quite common for some roof timbers to be older than several successive roof coverings.

Interestingly with 8&10 Church Street, the roof structure may still partly reflect its thatched origins given the steeper pitch, heavy timbering and irregular roof lines.

For a 17th-century timber-framed listed building like 8&10 Church Street, the roof is absolutely critical because it is the building's primary defence against water.

Once water starts getting in, deterioration can accelerate surprisingly quickly — especially in old timber-framed structures.

The structural skeleton of the house is probably oak timber dating back hundreds of years. If roof defects allow persistent moisture ingress, you can get rot in rafters and beams, fungal decay, beetle infestation, weakening of joints and pegs and movement in the frame. Historic oak is incredibly durable when dry, but vulnerable when damp over long periods.

Water damage can destroy features that cannot truly be replicated once lost.

Buildings of this era were usually built using lime mortar, lime plaster, breathable materials. They manage moisture differently from modern houses. If water penetrates the roof and becomes trapped decay accelerates, timbers stay damp and modern cement repairs can worsen the problem.

Small defects become major structural issues. On historic roofs one slipped tile, failed flashing, blocked gutter or cracked valley can eventually lead to rotten wall plates, sagging roof slopes and spread of damp through ceilings and walls. Because the roof structure is interconnected, local failures can propagate.

They can tolerate centuries of weather — but not prolonged water penetration.

The following photographs were taken during a site visit on Tuesday 5th May 2026. This first photograph shows the front elevation of 8&10 Church Street from Church street.



Internally above the window on the right above, as shown in the photograph below we can see some water damage likely from a slipped or damaged tile.



This photograph shows the roof from the rear courtyard. A loose tile can be seen in the gully.



Internally, below the gully, the evidence of water entering during heavy rain can be seen:



This photograph shows the location of the final identified problem area. The lower roof is a more modern addition to the building and water appears to be leaking through the lead flashing at the base of the upper section of the chimney.



And here is the internal view showing the issue that needs to be resolved by roof repairs.



Summary

The proposed repair work to Nos. 8 & 10 Church Street are essential to preserve the long-term structural integrity and historic fabric of these Grade II listed buildings. The roofs form the primary protection against water ingress, and timely repair is necessary to prevent deterioration of the historic timber frame, internal fabric, and original architectural features. Granting Listed Building Consent will ensure these historically significant buildings can continue to be properly maintained and safeguarded for future generations.

John-Joe Cottam 15th May 2026.