

28 August 2026

No. 12 HIGH STREET, MELKSHAM, WILTSHIRE: HERITAGE ASSESSMENT

No. 12 High Street, Melksham is a Grade II listed building located on the east side of High Street, Melksham, standing diagonally across from the junction with Church Street. The building is currently in use as a House in Multiple Occupation (HMO). The owner has undertaken some works internally with the aim of creating two self-contained apartments at first and second floor levels. The works undertaken are on the first floor where a stud and lath and plaster partition wall between the two front rooms has been removed with new partitions inserted to provide for three rooms across the front of the building. Additionally, alterations have been made to a former fireplace in the rear southern room, a partition has been inserted within a small later extension to the rear, and the lower part of the staircase at first floor level has also been altered. Wiltshire Council has commenced action requiring the submission of a listed building consent application to rectify or regularise the works.

Forum Heritage Services has been commissioned to examine the building and consider its significance with the aim of understanding the impact of the alterations that have been made upon the special interest of the listed building.

No. 12 High Street was listed in 1985 and is described in the list as:

Attached shop and house. Early C19. Ashlar, Welsh slate hipped roof. 3-storey, 3-window. Early C20 shop front to ground floor. Plat band to first floor, three 12-pane sashes. Second floor has plat band and three smaller 12-pane sashes. Plain vertical bands to sides of façade No windows to left return; plain square-headed door. Rubblestone rear has three 12-pane sashes to 3-storeys. Included despite C20 shop front; one of a group of three early C19 shops; group value with Nos 14 and 16 (q.v.).

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Whilst the list entry gives an early 19th century date for No. 12, an undated photograph of probable late 19th century date shows that there was a small, thatched cottage standing on the site of No. 12 (Figure 1). A building seemingly representing the present building is shown on the Ordnance Survey 1st edition 25" map of 1886, and so a date of c.1870-80 is likely.

The ground floor of the premises was not examined as part of the survey: it is in use as a barbershop and appears to be a single space across the width of the building. Whilst listed as a shop and house, an early 20th century photograph shows the building without a shop front the full width of the building unlike the shop frontage as was present on No. 14 to the north (Figure 2).



Figure 1
Late 19th century
photograph of High
Street, Melksham
showing at modest two
storey thatched house on
the site of No 12.



Figure 2
Early 20th century
photograph of High
Street, Melksham
showing No 12
without a shop front.

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It is not possible to identify at this stage the extent to which the ground floor may have been altered in terms of plan form.

At first floor level prior to the recent works there were two rooms to the front of the building, the northern room lit by two of the windows in the front elevation and the southern room being lit by the third window. The partition between these two rooms is understood to have run into the window opening in the same way that the partition wall actually abuts the window frame at second floor level (Figure 3). This relationship between the partition wall and window is aesthetically poor and it would be surprising if the partitions were originally set in this position, even in the late 19th century. Unfortunately, there are no plans available for this building which show the historic arrangement, but the fact that the partitions are of lath and plaster indicates that they are of some age. Given that the building did not have a clear commercial shop front in the late 19th century, it is possible to suggest that the building was converted to a shop at ground floor level and this may have then resulted in the reorganisation of the upper floors by the early 20th century at the latest.

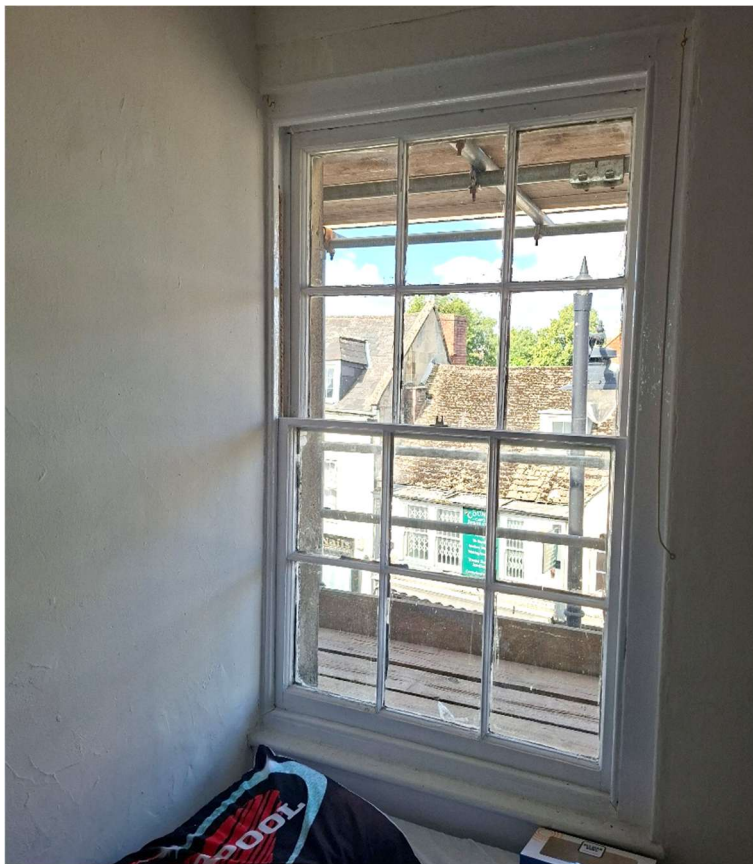


Figure 3
The relationship between the partition wall between front rooms and the central window at second floor level.

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Assessment of Significance

The significance of No. 12 High Street, primarily relates to its external appearance, presenting a three-storey three-bay building of late 19th century date rather than the early 19th century date cited in the list description. This revision of dating is pertinent to the understanding of significance as according to the criteria for the selection of listed buildings, most buildings pre-dating 1850 will be listed whilst for those built between 1850 and 1914, greater selection will be necessary due to the greater number of buildings that survive and so only the best examples should be selected for designation.

No. 12 appears to have been built as a domestic dwelling, possibly originally with a shop to part of the front that has been converted to a shop occupying the whole of the ground floor level, the modern shop front being noted as harmful to the building in the list entry. The building has also lost some chimney stacks. The conversion of the ground floor is likely to have led to changes to the upper floors. Given the appearance of the building externally, where it has an early 19th century character making the listing date understandable, the building makes a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area, and so could be regarded as worthy of designation on this basis.

Internally, the modern interior to the commercial unit at ground floor level means there is no evident historic character or interest on the ground floor. Prior to the recent works the first and second floors consisted of two rooms to the front of the building and two small rooms to the rear with the principal staircase between these two rear rooms. On second floor level there are no architectural features such as cornices, and it is understood that no cornices have existed within the building at first floor level.

Only one chimney piece is present – a simple painted surround of uncertain date, and many of the fireplaces have been blocked-up. The staircase has a turned newel post and stick balusters typical of a mid- to later 19th century date. The main feature of note that both first and second floor levels is the survival of historic windows to the majority of window openings, which notably have horns indicating a later 19th rather than early 19th century date.

Whilst the exterior, notably the front elevation, is of higher level of medium architectural interest, internally the architectural interest is the lower end of medium at best. Given the extent of change to the ground

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floor and the possible re-organisation of the first and second floors as part of the conversion to a shop, the loss of features such as chimney pieces etc. the interior does not have special architectural or historic interest, and overall, as a late 19th century building, designation as a listed building is dependent upon the external appearance and the contribution No. 12 makes to the character and appearance of the Melksham Conservation Area.

Assessment of Impact

Within the kitchen at first floor level former fireplace has been altered through raising the head of the opening to allow the fitting of a cooker into the fireplace area (Figure 4). This has resulted in the loss of fabric of part of the chimney breast and the form of the fireplace. It is considered that the principle of converting the first and second floors to provide two self-contained apartments would likely to be acceptable in principle, and so one of the rooms at each level would need to serve as a kitchen: the southern rear room on each level being the smaller of the rooms is considered to be an appropriate location for the kitchen. As such, with the requirement of fitted cabinets etc. it is unlikely that a fireplace could reasonably be maintained as a feature and so commonly the fireplace would be concealed by fitted units or at least blocked. It is considered that in the present case, the height to which the opening has been raised is required for fire safety minimum height above a cooker.



Figure 4
The kitchen at first floor
level with the enlarged
fireplace opening.

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Within the now bathroom off the kitchen, the insertion of a partition wall to subdivide between the bathroom and WC has had no impact upon the plan form or the character of a significant space within the listed building.

The lower part of the staircase at first floor level from the second floor has been altered from its previous arrangement, the stair being given a 90° turn rather than continuing straight to an inner landing area. A partition wall has been inserted across the line of the staircase separating it from the inner landing area. The historic newel post and handrail have been retained, and the present arrangement is not notably a modern arrangement (Figure 5). Whilst there has been some impact on fabric, the character of the stair has been retained and the level of harm, given the revised understanding of the date and significance of the building, is considered to be minimal. It is also suggested that the alteration of the stair has created a protected staircase which is of benefit in terms of fire safety, and that this is enhancement to the safety of the building balances the minimal harm that has been caused by modification of the staircase.

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Figure 5
The lower part of the
staircase between first and
second floor levels.

Conclusion

No. 12 High Street is not an early 19th century building as stated in the list entry, but it can be shown to be a building of late 19th century date. As such, the revised understanding of the date and original use/character of the ground floor has implications for the significance of the building in terms of its suitability for designation as a listed building, and is an essential consideration of the impact of works proposed or undertaken. On the present understanding, it is considered that the building would merit designation on the basis of its external appearance due to the contribution to the character and appearance of the Melksham Conservation Area. Internally, the building has little that may be regarded as being of special interest, and its plan form may have been revised following the conversion of the ground floor to form a retail unit in the early 20th century.

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Therefore, the works that have been undertaken have had very limited impact on the special architectural or historic interest of the listed building and have not impacted on a key aspect of the building's significance.

The removal of the partition wall between the front rooms at first floor level has had an impact on plan form but, as discussed above, it is considered likely that the arrangement prior to the recent works was the result of change when the ground floor was converted to a retail unit requiring a change to the living accommodation above the shop rather than the original plan form.

In the context of this later 19th century building, where its significance is only really related to the architectural appearance of the front elevation, with little of special interest internally, it is considered that, in the words of the NPPF 2026 Policy HE5 2 c, the works have not seriously 'affected a key element of the asset's significance'.

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