1.1 Setting the Scene

Totnes is undoubtedly the most important historic settlement in the South Hams. It was founded as a fortified town (or burh) by the Saxon King Edward early in the 10th century to defend the southern kingdoms of England against the Danes (who controlled much of northern Britain). It developed quickly as a trading port and market centre and by the time of the Norman Conquest had become the second largest and richest town in Devon (after Exeter). It’s fortunes peaked around the 16th and early 17th centuries when its population was ‘top heavy’ with rich merchants. In a ‘great age of rebuilding’, the houses they built transformed the appearance of town’s centre and provided a setting for one of the age’s finest collections of plasterwork ceilings.

The town is strategic in its location, being at the lowest crossing place of the river Dart (by ford at first, and then by bridge) and just within the tidal limit of its navigable estuary (some ten ‘meandering’ miles from the sea). The valley of the Dart, from Dartmoor to Dartmouth, is a major landscape feature that cuts through a countryside of rolling hills. Around Totnes the valley sides create an enclosing natural backdrop [above], helping to characterise the town as ‘small’, and one still dominated by its landscape setting.

The older parts of Totnes occupy a ridge that projects out into the Dart Valley and descends to the river’s crossing point (The ‘-nes’ in Totnes actually refers to this distinctive feature). An ancient trackway followed the line of the ridge up from the crossing to avoid the tidal marshes on either side. This then ascended the steep slope out of the valley before branching west to Plympton and south to Kingsbridge. In all probability, Bridgetown Hill in the east, then Fore Street and High Street [shown above, from the church tower] and finally Cistern Street and Harper’s Hill, deviate little from the line of the trackway which, en route to Kingsbridge, soon passes Halwell and the nearby site of the original Saxon burh that Totnes superseded. On the highest contours of the ridge the oldest parts of the town, around the castle mound and church tower, rise above the neighbouring suburbs and proclaim the town as ancient indeed. The most striking landmark feature is, of course, the castle keep, which is visible from around the town and along its approaches [below].
The signs are that a much larger enclosure was also built at the time the town was founded. Both the enclosures shared the same boundary along much of South Street, but towards its east end they parted company with the larger one following the line of the Grove and Victoria Street before turning north to cross Fore Street towards its lower end. Here its circuit can only be guessed, but it seems to be picked up again beside the property known as The Priory and along the line of Belmont Terrace before visibly sweeping round the castle in the form of a large ‘ditch and bank’ earthwork [above].

Only one historic house in the Area has more than 3-storeys plus an attic, and only a very few other old buildings are as tall or taller (like one of the converted warehouses on the Plains). The vast majority are 2- or 3-storeys, and with their roof spires mostly uninhabited and their roof slopes largely clear of sky-lights and dormer windows, this helps characterise Totnes as a small and unpretentious historic town. Its skyline is therefore dominated by the towers of its two parish churches and its ‘raised-up’ castle keep [right].

The narrow tenements (known as ‘burgage’ plots) running off the main thoroughfares are very significant too. Their 18th or 19th century boundary walls are often well preserved and closely, if not precisely, follow the pattern of property divisions laid down in Saxon and Medieval times. Most of the plots were divided along their length, with domestic uses at front and subsistence behind. Some on the fringes were subsistence only, but whatever their original use, where they survive today they characterise the street scene with a distinctive pattern of mostly narrow frontages. [above]

The views from the Castle Keep give reason enough to climb to its battlements. Each gap (or crenel) between the 33 merlons (the raised parts of the parapet) creates a different focus of attention, but in every case the roofs of the buildings below – their form, alignment, materials and features - are a significant, and very conspicuous, aspect of the Area’s interest and character [above].

Although more easily appreciated from the air, street layouts and property boundaries throughout the Area (including building frontage lines) are exceptional in the way they preserve and define the pattern of the town’s beginnings and early growth. The most distinctive feature is the oval ‘drawn’ by North Street, Rampart Walk and South Street which fossilises the circuit of the main ‘ditch and rampart’ defences that were built at the time of the town’s foundation early in the 10th century [right].

While plenty of ‘re-fronting and re-fashioning’ was done to modernise the town’s appearance during the 18th century, very few new buildings entered the scene. It is for this reason that so much fabric of so many buildings in the centre dates from the 16th and 17th centuries, once ‘new build’ projects would have meant clearing the old buildings first. Rare, therefore, because of their 18th century completeness, and uncommon too for the materials used, both 36 and 47 Fore Street give an inkling of how Totnes might have looked today if ‘re-build’ and not ‘re-front’ had been the order of the day [above]. Particularly interesting is the way both are set back from the highway, not simply for the visual impact this has, but for it reverting the practice of earlier times when encroachment forward was more often sought! With both built to ‘reside in’ and not ‘trade from’, they clearly show that the town’s diminishing fortunes hadn’t affected its attraction as a place to live.

The upper floor fronts of buildings in the Area, including those in its commercial heart, nearly all retain the authenticity of their age. Most, too, are undisturbed by later additions like hanging or projecting signs, or historically incongruous alarm boxes and hanging baskets [above]. That these are largely absent is a particularly significant characteristic of the Area, as well being an aid to the enjoyment of its architecture and visual amenities. (Nearly all the hanging signs that do exist are on public houses or inns where their siting follows tradition).

Totnes Conservation Area Appraisal

Although more than half the buildings in the centre date from the town’s great age of rebuilding during the prosperous 16th and early 17th centuries, because they were nearly all ‘re-fronted’ or ‘re-fashoned’ in the less prosperous 18th and 19th centuries, they have a kind of hybrid appearance which is very appealing. It combines the form, scale and proportions of the earlier era with the polite, classical style and detailing of the later [above]. With so many fronts masking early ‘timber-frame’ fabric, however, all the buildings in the centre need to be treated with the utmost caution to ensure features like this ‘griffin’ [left] aren’t lost or go unrecorded. The ‘griffin’, in fact, is a carved bracket that once supported the corner of a Tudor oriel window (like those restored at the Museum in Fore Street) that was not quite entirely the ‘modernised away’ in the early 19th century.
Totnes came to life again in the earlier part of the 19th century, mainly as a result of road improvements and the construction of the new bridge over the Dart in 1828. The approaches to the bridge, and the river alongside, were the focus of much ‘new-build’ activity, with Bridgetown and the Plains having their appearances totally transformed [the Plains before below and after right]. At the top end of town the focus for change was Plymouth Road where several new town houses and villas were built to create both ‘urban’ and ‘suburban’ settings typical of the age.

New buildings in the town were again a rarity during the latter part of the 19th century and the early part of the 20th. Notable amongst them, however, were the former Post Office at 25 Fore Street [above] and 34, 36 and 38 High Street [middle right]. While all four were clearly designed ‘in the vernacular’ to complement the character of the street scene, the first three are actually listed in recognition of their most respectful qualities.

Historic ground floor frontages along the main shopping streets are far from being characterised by continuous glazing. Rather, the pattern of shop frontages is generally broken, not just by thick party walls and side-passage doorways that separate one building from another, but also by the mixing-in of other passage openings (like Atherton Lane, Ticklemore Street and Church Passage[right]) and domestic and other ‘non-shop’ fronts (including house, inn, bank and church). As well as creating tremendous variety in the street scene there is a sense of intimacy too that identifies Totnes as very much a small, historic, country-town.

This appraisal was completed with a funding contribution from Totnes and District Preservation Trust

To get this information in another format or language, tel.01803 861234.
A Conservation Area was first designated in Totnes by Devon County Council in July 1969. It was one of the first in the Country and included almost the entire of the town’s historic buildings, which were therefore considered important. In June we reviewed the Conservation Area’s boundaries and included within its boundary several additions, namely the Fish Market, the Woodland, and the Mill next to Safeway and the old Ticket Office on Collins Road. These additions were made on the request of the District Council and the Town and Country Planning Act 1972. The consequential Town and Country Planning (Conservation) (Amendment) Order 1973 added a number of adjacent areas including the Castle and Castle Street, the Guildhall and North Street, the Kershawled Street and part of South Street and Plymouth Road. The boundary has also been extended by the District Council on the 3rd October 1983, to include buildings added to the statutory list of Plymouth Road, Moorhouses, Wildeands, and New Walk. On 7th May 1997, a number of an area was housing along the railway following the spot listing of a pair of them; and in their ornamentation. Probably the most unrestrained examples in Bridgetown, remain un-painted. [below].

1.2 The Conservation Area

A Conservation Area was first designated in Totnes by Devon County Council in July 1969. It was one of the first in the County and included almost the entire of the town’s historic buildings, which were therefore considered important. In June we reviewed the Conservation Area’s boundaries and included within its boundary several additions, namely the Fish Market, the Woodland, and the Mill next to Safeway and the old Ticket Office on Collins Road. These additions were made on the request of the District Council and the Town and Country Planning Act 1972. The consequential Town and Country Planning (Conservation) (Amendment) Order 1973 added a number of adjacent areas including the Castle and Castle Street, the Guildhall and North Street, the Kershawled Street and part of South Street and Plymouth Road. The boundary has also been extended by the District Council on the 3rd October 1983, to include buildings added to the statutory list of Plymouth Road, Moorhouses, Wildeands, and New Walk. On 7th May 1997, a number of an area was housing along the railway following the spot listing of a pair of them; and in their ornamentation. Probably the most unrestrained examples in Bridgetown, remain un-painted. [below].

A Conservation Area was first designated in Totnes by Devon County Council in July 1969. It was one of the first in the County and included almost the entire of the town’s historic buildings, which were therefore considered important. In June we reviewed the Conservation Area’s boundaries and included within its boundary several additions, namely the Fish Market, the Woodland, and the Mill next to Safeway and the old Ticket Office on Collins Road. These additions were made on the request of the District Council and the Town and Country Planning Act 1972. The consequential Town and Country Planning (Conservation) (Amendment) Order 1973 added a number of adjacent areas including the Castle and Castle Street, the Guildhall and North Street, the Kershawled Street and part of South Street and Plymouth Road. The boundary has also been extended by the District Council on the 3rd October 1983, to include buildings added to the statutory list of Plymouth Road, Moorhouses, Wildeands, and New Walk. On 7th May 1997, a number of an area was housing along the railway following the spot listing of a pair of them; and in their ornamentation. Probably the most unrestrained examples in Bridgetown, remain un-painted. [below].

1.4 The Scheduled Ancient Monuments

There are four in the Conservation Area and each is identified on the respective sub-area Maps. They are Totnes Castle, the site of Totnes Priory, the Looingham and the remains of the Medieval Chapel of Walsand.

1.6 Other Features of Special Interest

While buildings and other man-made structures are dominant in creating the special interest and character of the Conservation Area, other features are important too, not least certain of the developed country towns - where thatched roofs are common but not the fare of the high street. Here, a few distant slate roofs, or the repair of characterful features before they fail (like copper gutters and natural slate or red因为我未发现图片或引用，所以我无法提供更多的信息。