This part of Totnes was always likely to be developed first once the inner enclosure of the Saxon burh had established itself and looked to expand beyond its bounds. Even before 1086 (according to the Domesday Book) tenements were being occupied here, along the important highway (now Fore Street) that linked the town’s main gate to the river, across land that was within the burh’s outer enclosure.

The layout of the tenements (burgage plots) followed the pattern of the earlier ones (off High Street), being long, narrow, and stretching back from the main street to the enclosing boundary. Today, the north-side boundary is disjointed and somewhat indistinct, suggesting this side of the street grew up in a piecemeal fashion, within a boundary that was maybe no more than a hedge. On the south side, however, the line of the boundary clearly survives, being fossilised in the alignment of The Grove and Victoria Street. The split levels along The Grove suggest it was indeed a significant feature; not unlike that along South Street and with a similar storey to tell [below].

The permanent reclamation of the river marshes started early in the 13th century with the building of a dam-come-road along the line of Warland (“Weirland”). This cut across two small creeks, and as well as providing a much more direct link between St.Peter’s Quay and the town (via Ticklemore Street to Fore Street instead of the less convenient route via Maudlin Road and Leechwell Street), it also created new ground. This enabled a hospital to be built as part of a new ‘suburb’ along Warland’s west side, and although built in 1270, parts of the building still survive in the fabric of number 10 and possibly its neighbours. The last significant reclamation hereabouts was when the warehouses beside the river were built; not on an existing quay, but on new ground created at the time-which means the buildings rise cliff-like from the river’s bed [shown above before conversion]. Altogether, the development of the town’s port facilities involved a considerable amount of tidal reclamation so below ground evidence of it may be preserved across a wide area between the river and the line of Ticklemore Street and Warland.

It wasn’t until the middle of the 15th century that the west bank of the Dart downstream of the bridge (now the Mill Tail) began to be ‘moved’ to where it is today. This was when a new quay was built next to the old bridge to unload stone for the new tower of St Mary’s. It was forward of any earlier made-up ground, but nevertheless only reached out as far as the corner where Fore Street starts today. This left The Plains and all the land east of Warland (including the Dartmouth Inn square) still part of the tidal marshes [above].

There were reclamations upstream of the bridge too, with The Seven Stars probably occupying the first area of quay that extended out from the natural shoreline at Mill Lane. The early shoreline actually continued more or less on the line of Coronation Road as it entered a narrow creek fed by Malt Mill Lake that was tidal to a point just north of where Antrim Terrace starts today [artist’s impression above]. Safeway’s site and most of the Industrial Estate were part of the river marshes too, so at high tide the expanse of water would have stretched to cover the ground where the traffic islands are sited on both sides of Brutus bridge!
Although Fore Street is quite steep as it passes beneath the East Gate to become High Street and enter the core of the Saxon town, it is not easy to recognise here just how pronounced the change in level between the Saxon ramparts and the ground outside could be. Nowhere is this clearer, than in this view across the ‘Somerfield’ service area [below].

While most of the town’s wealthy 16th and 17th century merchants sought and built houses in High Street, the higher end of Fore Street was also a desirable location, particularly on the south side where the burgage plots are the longest in the town and enjoy a southerly aspect. Some of the best examples of domestic architecture (and interiors) of the age can be found here, including the Museum at No.70 which was restored between 1958 and 1962 to reinstate much of its original ‘timber-framed’, ‘gable-fronted’ character [below left]. It’s use today makes it the most accessible of all the Totnes buildings that have the distinctive ‘front- and back- block’ plan form... (ten of which are actually concentrated here in Fore Street, among the thirteen numbered 48 to 72). In the courtyard at the rear, the timber-framed gallery connection at first floor has also been beautifully restored [below right].

Although timber-framed fronts were ‘fashioned’ out of existence during the 18th and 19th centuries, a few attempts were made to reintroduce their appearance (for purely decorative effect) in the earlier part of the 20th century. None really gives a very convincing portrayal of local traditions, however, including that applied to 20/22 Fore Street [right - middle] which, ironically enough, is one of the few early buildings in the town that seems to have been built entirely of stone!

As elsewhere in the Conservation Area, brick was used only sparingly. A few late examples are secluded in The Grove, but it’s in Fore Street and on the Plains where the most historic, and probably the town’s best, examples are to be found. Most impressive of all is the Mansion House at 36 Fore Street [below] which, like the similarly aged (late 18th century) examples at 47 Fore Street and 8 The Plains, had its brickwork ‘tuck pointed’ at some time to smarten its appearance. (“Tuck pointing’ was done to mask the use of less-than-perfect bricks. The joints were first finished flush using a mortar that was coloured [with brick dust] to match the bricks. Then precise bands of white lime putty were applied to give the appearance of narrow mortar joints between perfectly-made bricks [below right].
Render is easily the most common finish to elevations in this part of the Conservation Area, occupying most, and dominating many, street scenes. When applied to the more ‘socially ambitious’ houses (especially during the 18th and 19th centuries and particularly along the main streets), its texture was nearly always smooth. This was to create the appearance of dressed stone, and many examples still have their original ‘ashlar-lining’ intact or renewed (the lines scribed into the render to imitate coursed stonework). The rendered panel on the side elevation of 65 Fore Street clearly illustrates this architectural device [right] although what makes this example extra special is that it survives in its original ‘unpainted’ form.

Textured, ‘rough-cast’ renders are much less common. The few examples that do exist in the main streets appear to be modern replacements of smooth finishes (and tend to look out of place in their ‘town-centre’ setting). Those in the ‘side streets’, however, are more numerous, and the thoroughly practical appearance of the finish gives many of the cottages an authentic, ‘rustic’ character that suits their age and status [above]. Looking less compatible, however, are the few examples of Pebble-dash, whose introduction in the 20th century followed a short-lived ‘national’ fashion. This didn’t really respect local traditions, although it’s interesting to note the wide variation in the pebbles’ size [both right]. The architectural embellishment of rendered elevations in this part of the Conservation Area is generally restrained. Most, in fact, are plain, while those that do have decorative features are quite unpretentious in their appearance. The terrace of four on the Plains exemplifies this, and also that restrained colour schemes, which minimise contrast, tend to best preserve their dignified appearance [right].

Stonework elevations are more common in this part of the Conservation Area, figuring prominently in important views of the town’s ‘industrial quarters’ – like this one of the riverside warehouses from the bridge [above] and this one ‘channelled’ along Mill Lane towards the Town Mill [right]. Elsewhere the numerous gaps and set-backs along Fore Street and Warland add to these examples by exposing side elevations that display their rubble-stone construction. Local volcanic tuff in various shades of brown typifies older buildings, while later 19th century ones are mostly built of ‘not-quite-so-local’ pale grey-pink or grey-blue limestones which have a more rounded form.
3.3 Setting the Scene

- Other than at the top end of Fore Street, gabled fronts are an uncommon feature in this part of the Conservation Area. Most of the buildings here date from the early 18th century, although the ground floor frontages vary a good deal and tend to set out in an asymmetric way. A proportion of properties have stone or brick walls to the ground floor and brickwork above. The top end of Fore Street is one of these (left). Much wider front widths are common, especially below Lloyd’s Bank on the north side where a number of buildings have limestone fronts (right). The way buildings are ranged along the street width, with room in Fore Street itself back from the pavement and many with gap between here building off its own front, tends to set the streets apart. A number of buildings have more than one story and therefore there are more building of 2-mast height, and between the two set back the street is more open, and in south to more wider, the feeling of entrance towards its lower is a far less tight (below).

- Although the buildings in Fore Street and High Street are similar in many ways, certain of them have been considerably altered and therefore tend to set out in a rather different and tend to set out to the street apart. A proportion of properties have stone or brick walls to the ground floor and brickwork above. The top end of Fore Street is one of these (left). Much wider front widths are common, especially below Lloyd’s Bank on the north side where a number of buildings have limestone fronts (right). The way buildings are ranged along the street width, with room in Fore Street itself back from the pavement and many with gap between here building off its own front, tends to set the streets apart. A number of buildings have more than one story and therefore there are more building of 2-mast height, and between the two set back the street is more open, and in south to more wider, the feeling of entrance towards its lower is a far less tight (below).

- Key
  - Park Lane
  - Town Mill
  - Black Bull Hotel
  - The Obelisk Memorial to John Wills
  - Two Granite Piers
  - Steam Packet Warehouse
  - Holman’s Warehouse
  - Wills Warehouse
  - Obelisk Memorial
  - Coronation Road – The Manor House
  - 9 Warland
  - Mill Leat
  - Mill Race
  - High Street
  - The Plains
  - New Walk

3.4 The Scheduled Ancient Monument

- The Mill Chapel of the Church of England at Warland – The site includes the gardens of 8 and 9 Warland and 10, 11 and 12, with 14 on its west side. There are a number of buildings here which are scheduled as ancient monuments. This includes the Mill Chapel, Manor House, and others which are listed below.

3.5 The Listed Buildings

- Of the 412 Listed Buildings in the Totnes Conservation Area 129 have been listed here, mainly in Fore Street (623). The Plains/New Walk (19), Warland (143) and Moorashes with a total of 18 in a single row (Moor Cottage excluded). The Museum at 70 Fore Street is Grade 1, Eleven are Grade II*, of which nine are in Fore Street (Nos 1, 3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14 and 16) and four in the north side (34-36, 40, 52, 64) and (Alder). The other two are The Royal Seven Stars (on the Plains and Warland). The remaining 97 are Grade I. Grade II is 34 and 36. They identify all the listed buildings, while their addresses are supplemented to the right.

Cautionary Note

- The formal designation of Conservation Areas, Listed Buildings, Tree Preservation Orders and Scheduled Ancient Monuments is a continuous process so if you need to be certain that the designations shown on the Map are still correct, please check with the Planning and Building Control Section (Conservation Area) at the Council.

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- The boundary of the town core endures probably extended from the Grove towards South Street, across the site of Hall and to the site of the Obelisk Memorial.

- The Museum at 70 Fore Street – The Manor House on the west side, with the Town Mill and the former Harris Bacon Factory Building on the other.

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As elsewhere in the Conservation area, slate is the dominant cladding for roofs, although there is little evidence now of the local, silver-grey variety that must have prevailed for many years. This can still be found cladding walls, however, with at least six examples easy to view. Most obvious is the group of three at 53, 55 and 57 Fore Street. [below].

In this part of the Conservation Area slate hung elevations are only common on the north side of Fore Street where just over half the buildings are so clad. Elsewhere, including on the south side, they are very much in the minority, with most of the few examples tucked away in rear courtyards, side-streets or passageways [above]. There is no obvious sign here, either, of the practice of painting slates, nor the introduction of patterns using shaped or different coloured varieties. Some of the most characterful looking slatework, however, is to be found on the ‘less important’ side elevations of buildings, like the east side of 29 Fore Street where small ‘scantle’ slates that have been carefully mortared still survive [below].

The ‘hybrid’ appearance of buildings that is common in High Street (where fashionable 18th or 19th century styling was planted onto 16th or 17th century fabric and form) is still evident in Fore Street, mainly towards its High Street end. The example at Number 52 is special because the uppermost jetty is still supported by its original ornamental bracket [above]. Towards The Plains end, and within The Plains itself, the 18th and 19th century styling which prevails here as well is mostly genuine to the buildings’ age. It’s a sign, therefore, that a good deal more rebuilding (rather than refronting) was carried on here [below].

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