

## 5.1 Setting the Scene

This part of the Conservation Area covers two of Totnes' medieval suburbs, created in the 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> centuries just outside the town's West Gate. The outer and inner enclosures of the Saxon burh shared a common boundary along the line of South Street, and it is where South Street meets High Street that the gate once stood [right]. The structure was doubtless rebuilt in medieval times, but in the 18<sup>th</sup> century it was finally removed as an inconvenience.

- The main, and probably oldest, of the two suburbs was called 'Little Totnes', being on land owned by the Borough. Although a continuation of High Street beyond the West Gate, it's real focus was the Rotherfold; a cattle market that originally extended from where Leechwell Street leaves High Street to where the Lamb is today. Encroachments over the centuries have reduced its size, although a group of houses was actually removed from its south side in 1967 [above].



- The other suburb was in Follaton Manor owned by Totnes Priory. It was astride Plymouth Road, but not on the alignment it has today. Then it left High Street at Collins Road (at the corner of the much larger Rotherfold), forked left where Collins Road now turns right [below], and then joined the current Plymouth Road where it crosses the by-pass. In all probability, the original line of the road lead directly from the West Gate, but this was changed when the burgage plots of Little Totnes were laid out. This new line persisted until 1765 when a turnpike was constructed along it but it must have been inconvenient even so, as shortly after it was changed to the line it has today.



- Nowhere else in Totnes is the town's ancient core, and the Conservation Area that focuses on it, so close to the open countryside. Indeed, while Mount Pleasant and Laurel Cottage are within both, their 'lane-side' setting across the by-pass is distinctly rural in character and quite unlike that of a town [above]. (Before the construction of the by-pass, of course, Cistern Street continued into Harpers Hill, and was actually known as Harpers Hill Street in years past).



- Leechwell Street is also within the ancient core of the town and the Conservation Area, but it too is soon 'closed' by a rural backdrop in which the by-pass is now well concealed. [above]

■ The close relationship this part of Totnes has with the countryside is a significant characteristic of the town's setting; not just in the visual sense but in historical terms too. It's from here that the curving ridge on which the town was originally set projects out from the steep valley side, with Cistern Street, then High Street and finally Fore Street following the line of its gradual descent to the river. The steepness of the valley side, and its northerly aspect, probably account for it remaining part of the countryside (The by-pass, after all, is only marginally more distant from the castle than the East Gate). Even the splendid views towards Dartmoor weren't reason enough, it seems, for the 'villa-builders' of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to develop the rising ground any higher than they did [right].



■ The historic core of the town begins to lose its tightly-knit, high density, development pattern before reaching the line of the Western by-pass (which is one of the reasons why so few buildings had to be demolished when the road was constructed). Along the Plymouth Road the progression from high to low density is typical of 'organic town growth', with older, tightly-knit terraced forms giving way to more recent villas in gardens [above]. The continuity of this 'organic' pattern has been fragmented, however, in the progressions along Cistern Street and Leechwell Street. Here, sizeable chunks of their original, tightly-knit, fabric, are missing; nearly all removed to allow improvements to the markets alongside. In all, as many as a dozen buildings have been demolished along the east side of Cistern Street and along both sides of Leechwell Street where No.16 has been left in complete isolation [above right]. Never intended to be exposed, its gabled ends now tend to bring a certain bleakness and disharmony to the street scene: an effect which is repeated wherever demolitions have taken place. This is the case at the Rotherfold where the demolished buildings faced Leechwell Street and Cistern Street as well as the (much smaller) square. (They actually occupied the entire expanse of the area that is now paved) [below]



■ Although not within this part of the Conservation Area, the Castle Keep is more a landmark here than anywhere else along the town's main thoroughfares. It is very much a focal feature in views along Cistern Street towards the Narrows, drawing the eye up from street level to the roofscape above..... where the preponderance of chimney stacks and pots, and the general absence of dormers and rooflights, tend to enhance the historic scene [above].

■ The mix of 2- and 3-storey building heights; the changes in road levels, and the sizes of the spaces between and around the buildings, mean roofs have a significant presence in this part of the Area - and, of course, from the Castle Keep they truly dominate the scene [below]. Their appearance and form adds considerably to the interest and character of the Area. For the most part their ridge lines run parallel with the street, but nevertheless there are significant numbers at right-angles (particularly in High Street and the north side of Plymouth Road), which nearly all have hips facing the street [right].



■ Fronts with gables, on the other hand, are largely absent from this part of the Conservation Area, with the Kingsbridge Inn displaying one of the very few examples of this essentially 17<sup>th</sup> century or earlier form [above]. The Victorians, in particular, reintroduced it as part of their Gothic Revival style of architecture [above right], but again examples are few. It's likely that gabled fronts were once more numerous, particularly on High Street where several buildings date from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, but as in other parts of the Area, when these were re-fronted or refashioned in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries the gables were replaced with 'classical' hips. Exposed timber framing disappeared too, along with the integral mullioned windows - although this one in the narrows managed to survive. [below]



■ While 3-storey buildings continue to dominate in High Street, and are emphatic in dominating the south side of Plymouth Road up to Mount Plym, this part of the town's historic core is otherwise characterised by a preponderance of quite modest buildings of 2-storey height [above]. Historically, it may be the proximity of the livestock markets that gives reason for this, or else the more prestigious nature of sites elsewhere, but certainly it appears this area had more of an artisan population than one brimming with prosperous merchants.



■ The hybrid appearance that combines 16<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> century form with 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> century finishes and detailing continues into this part of High Street, with examples in Leechwell Street too. The jettied floors at 82 and 84 High Street are a sure sign of 16<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> century origins [above] and a former 'timber-framed' appearance not unlike that of the Museum at 70 Fore Street.



■ Side passage entrances are a common feature of frontages in High Street and in most cases evidences the 'gallery-with-back-block' plan so often followed by Totnes merchants in the 17th century. As a result, shop frontages tend to incorporate passageway doors as well as shop entrance doors, so display windows are generally not continuous and quite modest in scale [above]. Moreover, even before reaching the Rotherfold, High Street has already begun to gather a more solid, domestic ground-floor character on account of the appearance of the existing and former pubs; the Bull Inn [below left] and the former Plymouth Inn [below right]



■ Although many have been altered since their insertion, most of the historic shopfronts in the Area still retain much of their authentic character. Perhaps the most unusual are at 86 and 88 High Street. Both are bow fronted; 88 following the shape of the projecting window above it [right], and 86 on a continuous curve between the party walls [below].



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.

## 5.1 ... Setting the Scene



The rendered elevations which dominate this part of the Conservation Area are generally quite plain in comparison to other parts. Eaves cornices, string bands, ashlar lining and rusticated quoins are indeed present, but not in any great number, while there are just two examples of 'parapetted' roofs (A common feature in Bridgetown and on The Plains). All the more remarkable, therefore, is Haytor on Plymouth Road, which displays one of the most impressive 19<sup>th</sup> century fronts in the town. [above] Its 'temple-like' classical design includes a (triangular) pediment 'supported' by two pairs of pilasters above a rusticated ground floor. That it formerly 'housed' the register office of the Totnes Union probably accounts for it having a very dignified, 'public-building' kind of image.



Most rendered elevations are smooth in texture, and while the vast majority are also painted, that to 17 Cistern Street is rather special in that it still retains its original, un-painted finish. [above]. Fortunately rough-cast and pebble-dash renders are few; the former because its rustic appearance tends to look out-of-place in most town settings, and the latter because it was applied in response to a national, 20<sup>th</sup> century fashion, and tends not to reflect local characteristics.

## Key Conservation Components Map

### 5.2 The Conservation Area

When the Totnes Conservation Area was first designated by Devon County Council in July 1969, its focus here was on the three routes that lead away from High Street towards the south and west, namely Plymouth Road, Cistern Street and Leechwell Street, taking in the square at the Rotherfold along the way. For most of its length the boundary was drawn tightly around the historic buildings in closely-knit groups that were the most 'urban' in character. On the south side, however, it did reach out beyond these to include Leechwell Lane as far as the ancient well that gave it its name.

Since then this part of the Conservation Area has been extended once by the District Council. This was in October 1985 to include the several 'suburban' villas east and west of the Western By-pass which had been added to the statutory list.

Plan 5 identifies the boundary proposed based on up-dated versions of the Ordnance Survey Plans and taking account of the findings of this Appraisal. It supersedes all previous boundary designations.

### 5.4 The Scheduled Ancient Monuments

The **Leechwell** on Leechwell Lane, a medieval holy well that was still used as a public water supply until the 1930's.

### 5.3 The Listed Buildings

Of the 412 Listed Buildings in the Totnes Conservation Area, 92 are located here, most inside the line of the Western By-pass along High Street/Cistern Street (36), Leechwell Street (23) and Plymouth Road (22). All are Grade II, and while identified on Plan 5, the list below summarises their addresses.

**Cistern Street** on its west side, at the gap where High Street becomes Cistern Street, **No.1**, set well back. **3, 4, 5 and 6** follow in a terrace, then the **Bay Horse Inn (at 8)**, **10 (Blue Coat House)** and **11. Mount Pleasant** is next, included here because Cistern Street continued to its door before the Western By-pass was constructed. On the east side the only building listed is **No.17**, on the corner with The Lamb.

**High Street** (the section from the South Street junction to the Rotherfold, where High Street becomes Cistern Street) on the west side as far as Collins Road all except the single-storey 91A are listed including **83, 85, 87, 89, 93 with 93A** and on the Collins Road corner, **97** the former Plymouth Inn. **99 and 101** are next, then across the Plymouth Road junction to **103 with 103A, 105 and 107**. On the east side, from the South Street junction to Leechwell Street, only 90 isn't listed. They include, therefore, **74, 76, 78 with 80, 82, 84, 86, 88 and 90**. Across the junction they continue with **94, 96, 98 with 100**, and the **Bull Inn (at 102)** on the Rotherfold corner.

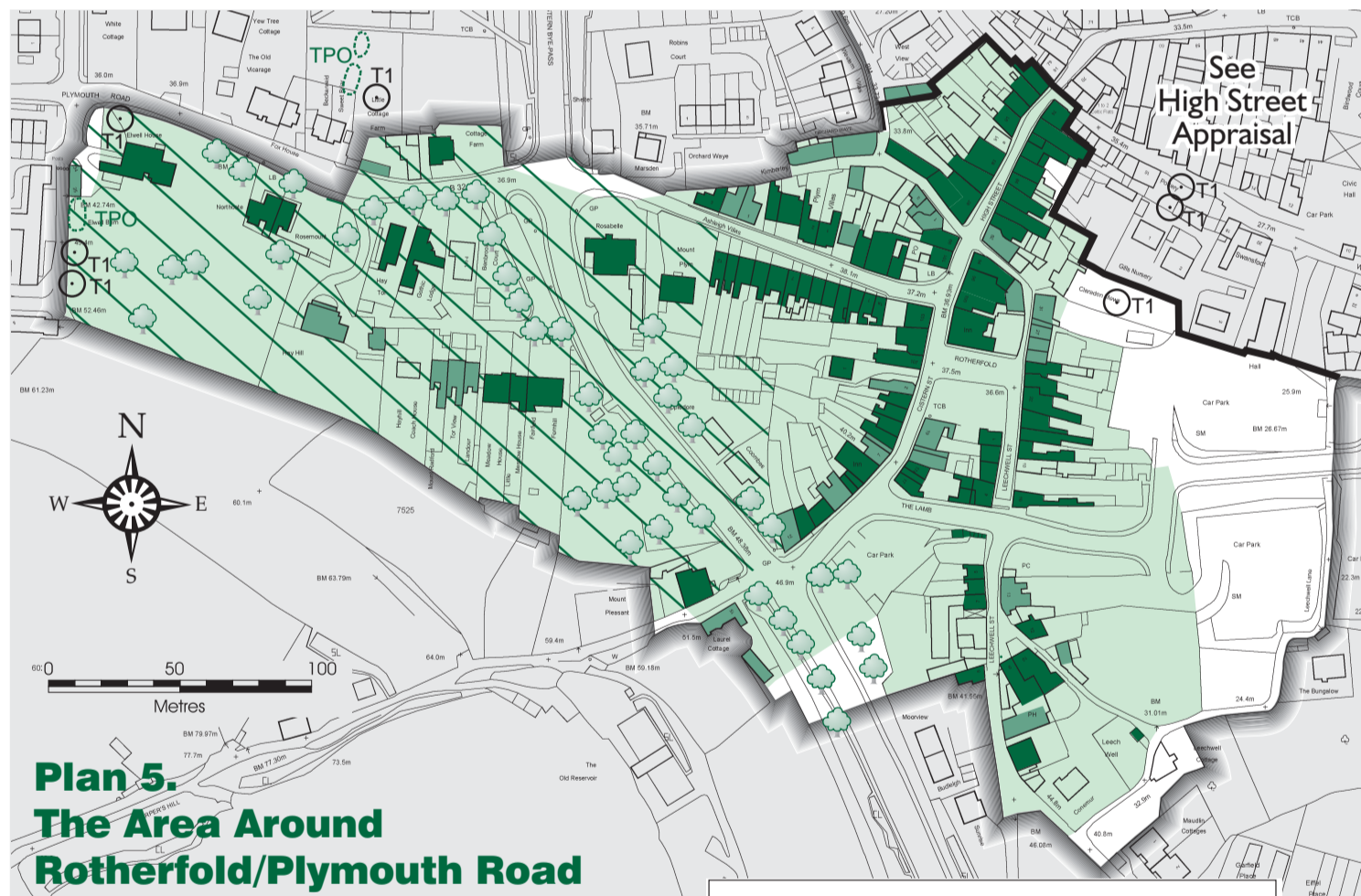
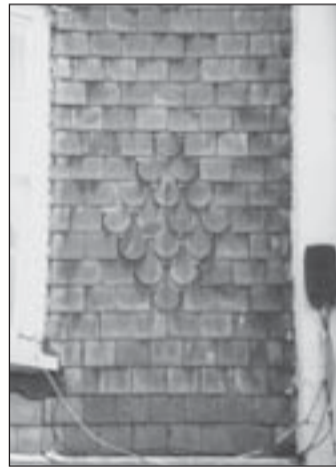
**Leechwell Lane** at this end of the very narrow, 'pedestrian only' section, the ancient spring called **Leechwell**.



While more than 200 years separate the oldest and youngest historic buildings in the Area, their general styling is essentially polite and classical, with rendered finishes and (mostly multi-paned) timber sashes dominating street scenes and creating harmony throughout [above].



Although slate is the dominant cladding for roofs [above], there are relatively few examples of its use to clad walls, and because three of the more prominent ones are painted and the rest of them dispersed, their impact is very much reduced. Nevertheless, it is this part of the Conservation Area, at 88 High Street and 24 Leechwell Street, that the town's most attractive examples of ornamental slatwork are found. Both incorporate skilfully cut, 'scallop-shaped' slates...in seven diamond-shaped panels at '88' [below] and in three string bands at 24 [below right].



**Plan 5. The Area Around Rotherfold/Plymouth Road**

This map is reproduced from the Ordnance Survey material with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. South Hams District Council, LA 079391/2005.

The Ordnance Survey mapping included within this publication is provided by South Hams District Council under licence from Ordnance Survey in order to conserve and enhance the environment. Persons viewing this mapping should contact Ordnance Survey copyright for advice where they wish to licence Ordnance Survey mapping for their own use.



The historic interest of the Area is much enhanced by the survival of the Leechwell a remarkable and ancient structure built to harness what, for a town, is an essential resource: spring water for drinking and cooking [above].

**Leechwell Street** on the west side, between the Rotherfold and The Lamb, **1, 2, 3 with 3A, and 4**. Across The Lamb, but along its side, is **The Old Ticket Office including the steps, wall and railings** on its east side. Then **5, 6 and 7** in a short terrace, and **8 (Steps Cottage)** beyond it. Returning in the opposite direction on the east side is the **Kingsbridge Inn** (at 9) and the **Lamp-post in front, 10** next door, and **12 (Westhill Cottage)**. Then back across The Lamb to **16**, followed by **19** and its neighbours **20, 21 with 21A, 22, 23 and 24** which face across the street to the Rotherfold.

### 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 (Conservation Team) at the District Council.



The majority of buildings in this part of the Conservation Area were built in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Mostly domestic, they range from modest town houses [left] to quite substantial suburban villas [right] but nearly always possess a polite, classical style.



Although many historic doors have been replaced with standard, modern types, several still survive to enhance the character and interest of the Area, including this early 19<sup>th</sup> century, 6-panelled one in Plymouth Road [above]. Significantly, the semi-circular fanlight is where it should be, above the door, not incorporated in it.



One of the more attractive of the less ornamental fronts is at 11 Cistern Street [left] which was very carefully restored in recent years when its missing rusticated quoin (at right) was reinstated. A lime-based render was used, with lime-washes over, to produce an authentic and unmistakable 'softly weathered' appearance.



As in other parts of the area, brick is almost entirely absent (but for its use in constructing chimney stacks which are in any case mostly rendered). Exposed stonework is equally rare (other than in the construction of boundary and retaining walls), its presence being limited to minor buildings like the Old Ticket Office in The Lamb [above], or outbuildings like the converted stores in the grounds of the former workhouse/hospital [left].



Although less grandiose than its counter-part on the opposite, Bridgetown, side of town, the grouping of 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century suburban villas alongside Plymouth Road and the Western By-pass is nevertheless typical of its age, being characterised by relatively large houses with gardens to match [above]. While of similar age, style and materials, the terraced form and roadside setting of the nearby town houses in Plymouth Road are in total contrast. Indeed, their juxtaposition serves to heighten the distinctive qualities of both the urban and the suburban setting.



When the buildings along its south side were removed and not replaced, the Rotherfold lost a good deal of its integrity and significance as an historic town square. The massive buttresses built in their place are most unattractive, being reminiscent of a war damaged site or an area in decline, while the side gables of the buildings alongside transmit a visual message that very much diminishes the importance of the space they face [above].

**Plymouth Road** on its south side from the High Street end is the long terrace including **1A** and all the numbers from **1 to 12**. Still inside the Western By-pass are **Mount Plym** and **Rosabelle**, while beyond it, in a 'hillside' position, is the terrace including **Fernhill, Fairfield, Little Meadow House and Meadow House**. Below and closer to the highway are **Gothic Lodge, Hay Tor, Prospect House** (listed as Rosemount) and **its Entrance Gateway, Northcote** and finally within the Conservation Area, **Elwell House**. On the north side, again from the High Street end, are **Plym House, Middleton and Gothic Lodge**, then **1 and 2 Plym Villas, Bay Villa and Bay Cottage**, **3 Ashleigh Villas** and across the By-pass, **Cottage Farm**.



The most ambitious house building project of the period, dating from the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, occupies the south side of Plymouth Road and comprises a row of thirteen 3-storey town houses [above]. A glance along them used to produce an image of identical units. But this was never true, and now that they're painted in a range of colours, the idiosyncrasies of each are more readily appreciated.