

4.1 Setting the Scene

Bridgetown is the part of Totnes that is east of the River Dart, occupying the rising valley slopes that face west towards the rest of the town. At first glance it looks to be a 19th century suburb (that expanded a great deal during the 20th) but its origins are very much older, and at least medieval, since a small borough was created here (to rival Totnes) some time between 1232 and 1247.



- When originally established the settlement was quite small and occupied only the slight rise that reaches out towards the ancient river crossing point. The open meadows to the north continue to define its linear form, but when spring tides and heavy rain conspire to flood them they recreate the original relationship Bridgetown had with its riverside setting [above].



- Where the main street begins to climb the steep valley side en-route to the equally historic settlements of Berry Pomeroy and Paignton, both the ancient and modern routes towards Newton Abbot lead off north, and are very quickly 'out-of-town'. The former is much as it was; a lane beyond Bourton Road making dry but hilly passage past Bourton and Gatcombe. The latter, on the other hand, is 'engineered' (probably around 1810) to take a more direct line beside the tidal marshes of the Dart, hugging the quarried and well-wooded hillside that characterises this part of the suburb [above]. Indeed the woodland is a very significant landscape feature which, along with the Dart, draws the countryside right to the heart of the town [below].



- The expansion of the suburb during most of the 20th century has been away to the south of the main street across the valley slopes that associate visually with the rest of the town to the west. Away to the north, however, it seems that the spread of development was consciously checked before it spilled over into the Bourton Valley [left]. As the photograph also shows, when the villa development off Bourton Road was continued, the route of Jubilee Road was chosen, not Bourton Lane, with the villas sited to face the town from the crest of the tree-lined ridge.

What makes the Bridgetown part of the Conservation Area distinctive is the transformation it underwent during the 19th century, heralded by the construction of the new bridge. Any semblance it may have had of being the poor neighbour of Totnes was soon lost and, looking the most fashionable of places to live, it was incorporated into the borough in 1834.



■ As well as creating variety and interest, some of Bridgetown's characteristics tend also to separate the suburb into a number of distinctive parts - particularly the ones relating to the form buildings take, their usage and the way they're arranged. The part that focuses on the ancient core is doubtless the principal one, comprising the narrow band of buildings facing the main street on its curving approach to the Bridge. They are mostly in rows or terraces, and with a substantial number 3-storeys in height, the street's appearance is very much urban and town-like [above]. Although now largely residential, the surviving fronts of former shops, the shops that continue to trade, the squeezed-in site of the church and the 'back-of-the-pavement' location many buildings have, strengthen the street's urban qualities and point to it once being rather more of a commercial and social focus than it is today.



■ Although transformed during a period when the use of materials and the style of architecture was fairly restrained (with rendered finishes, multi-paned sashes and classical detailing creating much cohesion and harmony), in Bridgetown there is no shortage of variety in the way new buildings were sited and designed. As a result, street scenes are full of interest, being characterised by broken building lines, changing building widths and building heights ranging from 2-storeys to 3 plus an attic [left]. Designs too range from the completely symmetrical [above] to the quite informal [below], while the host of architectural features they display are quite random in their distribution.



■ Redundant shop-fronts are several, but their authentic character is nowhere better preserved than in this 'purpose-built' terrace at 28-31 Bridgetown [above]. They clearly evidence the suburb's 'commercial independence' during the 19th century, but once the bridge tolls were scrapped on the last day of October 1881, this must have begun to quickly disappear.



■ Although the main street is almost continuously built up, building lines on both sides are much more staggered than along other main streets in the town. The pattern has its roots in the way the extensive re-building works along the street were carried out during the 19th century. Existing buildings that were re-fronted (or otherwise left as they were) remained on their 'back-of-the-pavement' line [above]. New buildings intended for commercial use followed this line too [above right], but the many 'desirable villas' that were introduced were nearly always set back a few feet to allow space for a forecourt [right].



■ The setting back of Seymour Terrace is unusual because it's accompanied by the construction of a raised terrace that turns what would have been ground floors into basements [above]. Perhaps this arrangement was preferred to the alternative that would have required steps down from the highway to the front doors. Fortunately, the terrace railings serve a safety purpose, which is probably why these weren't also removed along with the others from elsewhere in the area.

■ The cast iron railings that would have 'protected' all the forecourts have mostly gone leaving only the low stone plinths into which they were fixed. A few have been reinstated, while those at Seymour Court and Seymour Terrace survive [right] to illustrate the 'spearhead' designs that were probably common to them all (and have indeed been used for the new railings at 'Bridge Terrace', just across the river and at Devon Place further up the main Street).



- A feature of many elevations along the main street, and some nearby, is the parapet. This architectural device adds a touch of grandeur as well as real height, particularly when treated as originally intended; in the same finish as the main wall [right]. Their concentration along the main street tends to heighten its status as Bridgetown's principle thoroughfare, and also provides one of the more obvious visual links with the Plains across the bridge. Indeed, the parapets on the bridge itself take the link over [below right]. The parapets to Seymour Place also play a linking role by helping to integrate the terrace into the visual realm of the main street via the similarly treated corner shop [below].



- Nowhere dominant, and infrequently seen, are walls hung with slates. Only two of the buildings facing the main street have their rear elevations so clad, while at front, the Albert Inn is alone in having its upper floors completely covered...which helps considerably in signposting its whereabouts! [left]. There are other examples of slate hanging in the Area, but they're few in number and always confined to sections of elevations. Having more than most is 5 Bridgetown [below left]. It is the only other significant example in the main street, and draws attention to what is probably the oldest building along its length (dating from the 16th or early 17th century). Certainly, though, it's the only one to survive with its jettied and gabled form intact.

- Slate is the dominant roofing material throughout the Area, mostly grey-blue, not dark. This example, just renewed, is one of several that are hipped, and shows the traditional, and the most attractive, way to form them using mitred slates [below].



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Render is the most prevalent wall finish in the Area, dominating the main street (particularly towards the bridge end) and the area of suburban villas, as well as Pathfields and the west end of Weston Road. Although most are now painted, a few examples still survive in their original smooth and unpainted form, not least the two very handsome rows at Devon Place [below] and Seymour Terrace. Just discernible are the lines that were nearly always drawn into the render to give the impression of rather 'up-market' stone blocks with fine joints (usually called ashlar-lining) [right].



Their vertical emphasis, balanced proportions, and the scale and intricacy of their multiple panes, are but three of the features that make traditional timber sash windows so pleasing to the eye. Introduced mainly during the 19th century transformation they now dominate Bridgetown, and are mostly (but not entirely) recessed in rendered masonry walls. This display at 1 Bridgetown [below] is rather special as it exemplifies the three arrangements found in the Area: single sashes, paired sashes and tripartite sashes too, the latter being the ones with 'sidelights' on the ground floor - which are occasionally separated by solid 'mullions', like the central upper floor windows at 16/17 and 18 Bridgetown [right].



Key Conservation Components Map

4.2 The Conservation Area

When the Totnes Conservation Area was first designated by Devon County Council in July 1969, here in Bridgetown its focus was on the oldest parts of the suburb which were the most 'urban' in character. This included the main street as far as the Newton Abbot road junction, the quaysides on the Dart, and took in Seymour Place and Seymour Villas along the way.

Since then this part of the Conservation Area has been extended twice by the District Council: in October 1985, to include the mostly detached villas on and near New Road and Jubilee Road that comprise Bridgetown's oldest 'suburban' group, and in September 1992, to include Baring Cottages and the grave yard alongside.

Plan 4 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.



Like the water meadows to the north, the open space of the graveyard beside Weston Road and Baring Cottages helps define the settlement's original form. It also generates a more rural, 'village' character which the stone-built estate cottages close by tend to reinforce [above]. Indeed, their arched openings with brick reveals are similar to the later ones built at the heart of the estate in the nearby village of Berry Pomeroy.

Cautionary Note

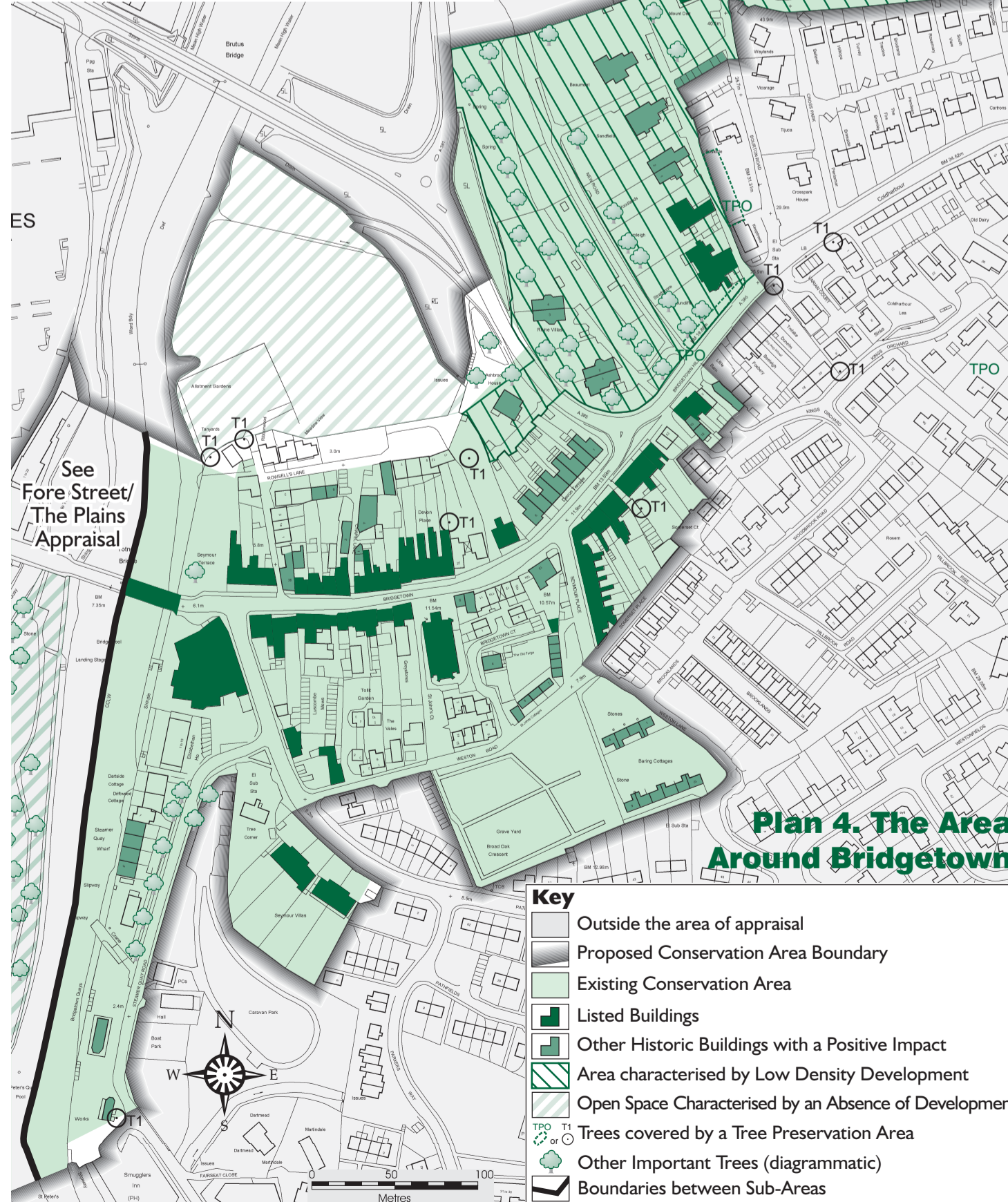
The formal designation of Conservation Areas, Listed Buildings, Tree Preservation Orders and Scheduled Ancient Monuments is a continuous process so if you need to be certain that the designations shown on the Map are still correct, please check with the Planning and Building Control (Conservation Team)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



A montage of Bridgetown's rendered buildings would doubtless come close to illustrating every kind of classical decoration and device that found its way into the vocabulary of 'small-town' domestic architecture. However, all were used in moderation, so even the more ornate facades, like that of Marlborough Lodge [above], have a quite restrained and dignified appearance. More plain than most are the houses in Seymour Place [left], showing the one that best preserves their authentic character, although the tell-tale marks above their doors suggests they all had hoods that were similar to, but not as ornamental as, the ones surviving at 3 and 4 Bridgetown [right].



On its side elevation, 1 Bridgetown also demonstrates the practice of decorating and emphasising window openings with 'architraves' [above right]. Their prominence, and that of the other two examples in the Area (including the former Ballroom windows at Seymour Court) creates a false impression that the practice was much more common than it actually was.



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Ever since its foundation, trade has been the life-blood of the town, and the river Dart its lifeline, so the quaysides that have facilitated its good fortune are significant indeed. Their creation, through a series of riverside reclamations, is evidenced in the pattern of streets and buildings, and this is no less the case on the Bridgetown side. Here, close to the bridge, the west end wall of Seymour Terrace and the line of Pathfields opposite, look to be defining where the very first quays were built - around the time of the suburb's foundation and the construction of the first stone bridge, in the earlier part of the 13th century. Interestingly enough, the cutwaters of this bridge can be traced on the river bed just upstream of the new stone bridge that replaced it [above].



While the ages, architectural styles and materials of the villas in the north-east part of the Area are similar to those in the main street, their form, arrangement and surroundings are in total contrast and entirely characteristic of low density, 'up-market' 19th century suburbs. Without doubt the most verdant part of the Area, it comprises a diverse group of large, mostly detached, 2-storey villas that are set in secluded, landscaped gardens that keep them well hidden from roadside views [left].



Dormer windows are a particular feature of certain buildings in the Area and are clearly part of their original design. The examples at Seymour Terrace and Seymour Place are especially attractive, being similarly designed with shallow curving heads [above]. Their numbers are few, however, so that dormers cannot be considered a common characteristic of Bridgetown's roofscape in a more general sense.



Rowsell's Lane north of the main street and Weston Road with Somerset Place to the south, are aligned with the suburb's medieval boundary which by then had extended to just beyond the modern-day, 'Newton Abbot' junction. For centuries both served to provide rear access to the 'main street' plots and the stores and workshops built on them. Vestiges of this 'industrial' character still survive at Rowsell's Lane [above], but for the most part this has been eroded in both locations during the 19th and 20th centuries through conversions and the introduction of cottages and small houses which now dominate the scene.



Now converted to residential use, "Steamer Quay Wharf" [left] is the lone and much rebuilt survivor of a series of five similar stone warehouses that were built by the 11th Duke of Somerset on the quays he constructed downstream of the new bridge (on reclaimed ground that included the site of the Seymour Hotel). They reached almost as far as the tip of Vire Island (whose parkland setting was another of his creations), with the last stretch of open quay reserved, like today, for the landing of pleasure craft. Albeit in modest measure, the surviving 'ware-house' still preserves something of the industrial character that once dominated the quayside, while a little further downstream the booking office and café alongside are typical of their type and appear entirely in keeping with their riverside setting [above].

4.3 The Listed Buildings

Of the 412 Listed Buildings in the Totnes Conservation Area, 60 are located here, with all but three described in the List document as dating from the 19th century (the three being earlier). The Bridge is Grade II* (two-star), while all the others, including St John's Church, are Grade II. Plan 4 identifies them all, while their addresses are summarised below:

Astride the river Dart, linking Bridgetown to the rest of Totnes since 1828, is **Totnes Bridge**, by the Exeter architect Charles Fowler, who also designed Covent Garden in London. (The Bridge is also a Scheduled Ancient Monument)

Bridgetown - on the south side, set obliquely to take in the view of the bridge, is **Seymour Court**, formerly (and listed as) Seymour Hotel. From Pathfields up to and including **St John's Church** (guttered by fire in 1976) the entire row is listed, including **1, 2, 3 (Marlborough Lodge), 4, 5, 6, 7 (Sefton House) and 8**. The corner shop (on Seymour Place) with its adjoining house, **14 and 15** are next, followed by **16, 17, 18, 19** (Originally Pomeroy House), and **20 (Dart House)**

On the north side, in the opposite direction, are **24 (Dartvale Manor)**, the terraces of **1 to 5 Devon Place** (which was originally called Church Terrace) and **28 with 29, 30 and 31**, and then **32 (Albert Inn), 34, 35**, and nearest the bridge, **1 to 4 Seymour Terrace**.



The Seymour Hotel (now Seymour Court) was obviously sited to take full advantage of the riverside setting, not only to capture the splendid views, but also to gain the prominence needed to attract custom away from its rival across the bridge. While no longer dominating the river frontage in singular fashion, it nevertheless retains its visual prominence at the entrance to Bridgetown, and plays host to several of the architectural features and effects that characterise the classically-styled buildings that dominate much of the Area. The curved front is particularly appealing, although its symmetry was somewhat compromised, well before its conversion, by alterations to the top-right window [above].

Bourton Road - towards its north end, **Mount Dart** opposite the Jubilee Road junction is listed.

Bridgetown Hill - on its south side, numbers 1 and 2 (Seymour Lodge) only a short distance from 20 Bridgetown.

New Road - 3 of 6 houses (now 7) called Pomeroy Villas when built: an attached pair, **Duncliffe and Strathmore** and **Fernleigh** next door.

Pathfields - on its east side, **Seymour Cottage**, and on its west side (where it becomes south), two semi-detached pairs, **1, 2, 3 and 4 Seymour Villas**.

Seymour Place - Part of the same development as 14 and 15 Bridgetown, a long terrace numbering **1 to 10**, and on the opposite, north side a single cell **Lock-up** next to the Old Forge Guest House.

Weston Road - Numbers **1 and 2**, which are next door to Seymour Cottage on Pathfields but 'around the corner' in Weston Road.