

## 2.1 Setting the Scene

This part of the Conservation Area focuses on the heart of the original Anglo-Saxon settlement where the first Totnesians lived – within the smaller of two oval-shaped enclosures whose defensive boundary is still followed by North Street, Rampart Walk and South Street. The town's most significant monument, the castle, is a focal feature, as too are the Parish Church and Guildhall nearby that occupy the site of a former Priory. In this part also is the site of North Ford; a 13<sup>th</sup> century suburb that straddled the boundary between the Borough of Totnes and Dartington Manor, on the line of the passage below North Gate, Lower Collins Road and Barracks Hill beyond.



- By the time of the Conquest, Totnes was the second largest and richest town in Devon (after Exeter) so the building of the Norman castle soon after must have caused great disruption to people and property. The artificial mound ('motte') is one of the largest in the country, and along with its associated horse-shoe-shaped enclosures ('inner and outer baileys') which straddle the line of the Saxon defences, it was built to protect the new lord from the townsfolk, as much as the town itself. The mound occupies the highest point of the Saxon burh, so not surprisingly the stone keep built on top in the early 1200's (and thoroughly rebuilt a hundred years later [artist impression above] ) is a striking landmark. Originally the mound (at first with a 15 feet square timber tower at its crest) would have dominated the town, but as the great ditch around it was filled, and the streets below it built-up, its visual presence became more and more obscured. So much so, in fact, that today in this part of the Conservation Area, its domineering impact can only be readily appreciated from Castle Street, particularly at the North Street junction [right].



- Also within the oval, St Mary's Church is likewise a major landmark with the four pinnacles of its tower reaching the height of the keep's crenellations. As with the keep, the buildings lining the main streets hide it mostly from view, until, with an element of surprise, it is revealed through a large gap in the High Street frontage, (the site of the former Corn Exchange/Allottery) [above]

- As well as land for the castle, another sizeable chunk of the Saxon oval, the part now occupied by the Church and Guildhall, was also taken shortly after the Conquest to build a Priory in the town. Other land just outside the oval, stretching round to the East gate, went with it too, creating a single ownership that has had a marked influence over the way the town has developed here. The absence of separately



occupied burgage plots meant there was never the need to create a rear access road like South Street on the opposite side. At Rampart Walk, therefore, the stature of at least part of the original Saxon defences is still well preserved. Near the East Gate, the Walk is characterised by what appear to be tiny cottages with little more than roof space [above]. The gaps in their roofscape, however, not only reveal the 'commanding' nature of the Walk, but also the fact the buildings have ground floors well below its level. One and a half storeys below to be almost exact, meaning they're a 'normal' 2-storeys after all. As a group, these buildings typify the way burgage plots were developed in the town, although few others had the opportunity to introduce new entrances onto a public way alongside (albeit through the roof!). As a site, the plot is a significant one, being next to the town's defences and possibly on the line of the original ditch. This accounts for it not being released for development until 1437 when the fortress conception of the town had been well and truly abandoned.

- A more recent sign of the town abandoning its 'fortress' roots is the tree planting in the castle's inner bailey and moat. This has created a parkland setting that combines with the open meadow of the outer bailey to draw the countryside into the heart of the town. It does, however, mask the town's greatest monument to a considerable extent for much of the year [below]. As the artist's impressions displayed in the castle grounds show, however, a faithful and authentic setting for the castle would be one devoid of trees, not only in the outer bailey, but the inner bailey and moat too [right].



- Probably the best known and most photographed building in Totnes is the East Gate, on the line of the Saxon defences where Fore Street becomes High Street [left]. Like many other buildings in Totnes it has had several guises, the current one dating from 1835 (with the clock faces and bell tower added later). Its embattled 'fortress-like' appearance, which gives more than a hint of the building's historic significance, was restored after a devastating fire in September 1990. It adds drama to the street scene, creating visual enclosure and the sense of entering one space and leaving another even though it spans a continuous highway.



- It is hard to imagine how much building activity went on in High Street (and the higher part of Fore Street) when the town's economy boomed through the 16<sup>th</sup> century and into the 17<sup>th</sup>. So much, in fact, that it brought about a complete transformation – which in form, if not in detail, has lasted to this day. Here, in particular, the town's merchants displayed their considerable wealth and evidenced the fact that Totnes ranked 16<sup>th</sup> (in wealth) out of all English provincial towns in 1524. The most prestigious houses were 3-stories in height, and the restored, 'timber-framed' parts of 70 Fore Street and 27 High Street give an idea of what their outsides looked like. Inside too the show of wealth continued, with the finer houses adorned with high quality wall panelling, chimney pieces and staircases, and some magnificent plaster ceilings [above and left]. Together these houses survive to make Totnes one of the most complete, and finest, towns of the Elizabethan-Jacobean age in England.



- It is in this part of the Conservation Area that most examples of the distinctive plan form (that comprises a front block on the street and one or more detached blocks behind linked by a corridor or first-floor gallery) survive. A side passage entrance on the ground floor, that provides access to the yards and blocks behind, is often a sign of the plan's existence [above].



- That the creation of these 'Walks' was a piecemeal process is illustrated by the Poultry Walk on the opposite side of High Street, where the buildings are more obviously of different ages and their loggias not entirely continuous [above]. There is evidence too, at 16 High Street, that loggias were created elsewhere in the town, but were abandoned. Surviving in its partially exposed return [below] is a small section of archway that formed the open side of the loggia of 1585 (and which its neighbour, No.18, now blocks).



- The plan form just described is actually found in various states of preservation in every house between 29 and 55 High Street. But it's another, more obvious, aspect of their plan that makes these houses 'extra' special, and that is their upper floors are carried over the pavement on columns creating loggias beneath. Collectively the group is known as 'The Butterwalk', and today it is one of the town's most distinctive, and distinguishing, features. It actually took more than a hundred years to reach the continuous length it is today, as its creation was a gradual process with one owner taking the lead and others following suit. In the photograph to the left, the rubble-stone column on the left is 18<sup>th</sup> century while the one on the right dates from the 19<sup>th</sup>.



- The practice of creating under-cover Walks has certainly left its mark on the town's character; a mark that would have been all the more pronounced had the so called 'Exchange' or 'Church Walk' building survived [below right]. It occupied the gap on High Street in front of St Mary's but was demolished in 1878. Add to this the 'loggia-sized' porch on the Seven Stars Hotel and the single storey loggia on the Guildhall [below] (as well as the cloisters of the former priory!), it could be said that the architectural device has characterised the town's appearance ever since Norman times!



### 2.1 ... Setting the Scene

Up to around the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, gable-ended roof forms, like those to 54 and 56 High Street [right] still dominated the street scene, but as the 'classical' re-frontings and re-buildings of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries progressed, hipped roofs gradually took their place and are now the more common form (although many are hidden from view behind parapets) [below right]. Two of the earliest attempts at classical fronts are at 26 and 28 High Street, and it's interesting to see here that their designs held back from getting rid of the gables altogether [below left]. Instead, their visual impact was reduced by the introduction of heavy cornices at the level where the eaves of a hipped roof would have been, creating something akin to a triangular pediment.



The change from gable to hip was part and parcel of the 'new look' architecture that 'overhauled' the town's appearance especially during the Georgian period. Exposed timber-framing gave way to render or slate, while sliding sashes replaced mullioned windows with their early leaded panes. An early 17<sup>th</sup> century window at 27 High Street 'suffered' this fate, but the opportunity to restore it was taken during a recent programme of repair. But for the sections cut out in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century to accommodate two sash windows (beneath the two above), the entire window had survived a further 200 years under a slatework coat [left].

### Key Conservation Components Map

### 2.2 The Conservation Area

When the Totnes Conservation Area was first designated by Devon County Council in July 1969, this part was its primary focus. Occupying it are several of the town's most noteworthy features including the Castle, the Church, the Guildhall, the circuit of the original settlement and, of course, High Street, with its Butterwalk, East Gate and Merchant's Houses.

Since then this part of the Conservation Area has been extended twice by the District Council: in May 1992, to include an area of warehousing next to the railway following the listing of a pair of them [photo below], and in September 1992, to include a number of listed houses and unlisted walls on the south side of South Street near the Civic Hall Car Park.

Plan 2 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.



As might be expected, the part of the Area next to the railway is much more industrial in character, being dominated by large-scale warehouse structures built mainly of stone [above].

### 2.3 The Listed Buildings

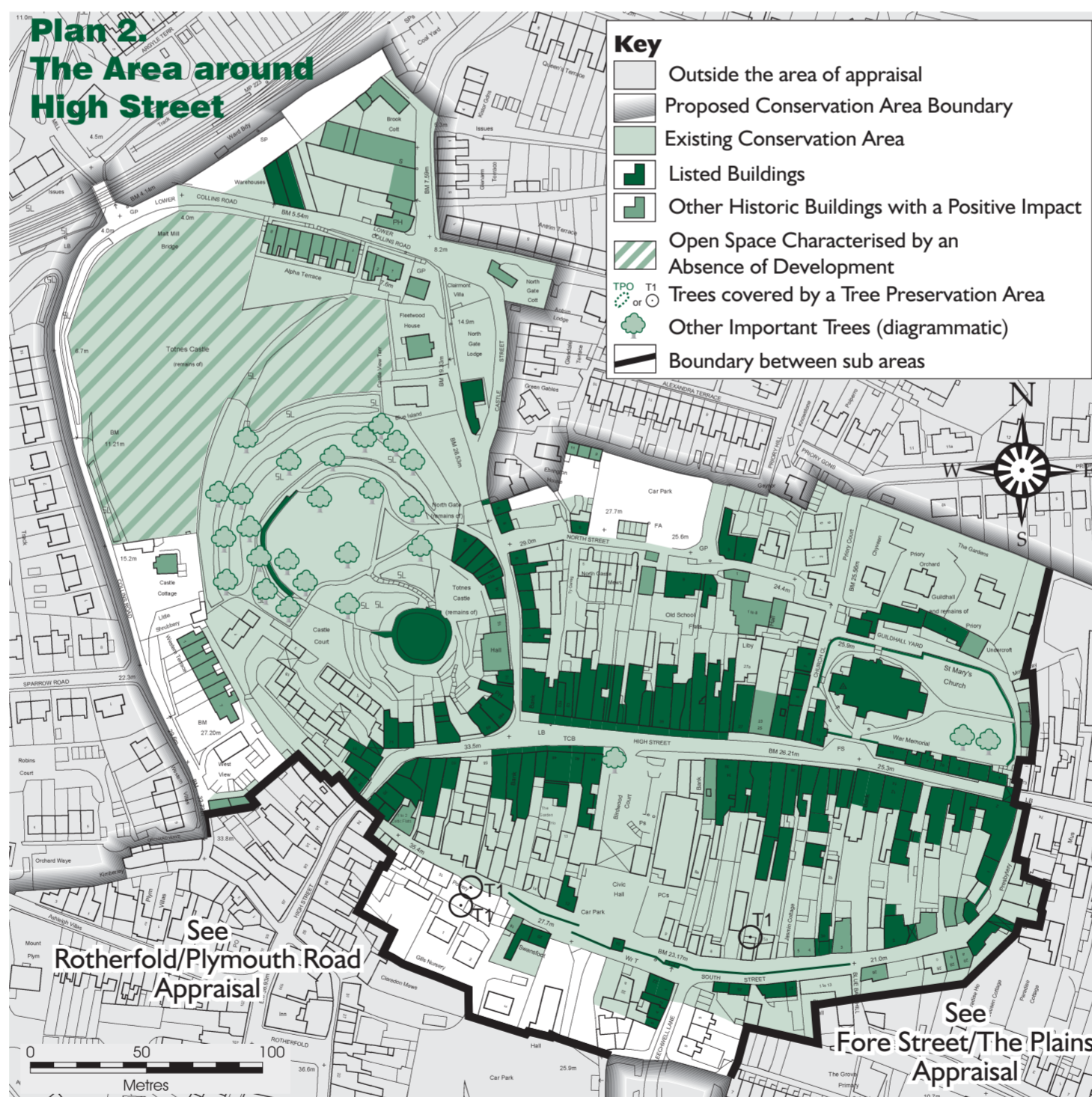
Of the 412 Listed Buildings in the Totnes Conservation Area, 131 are located here, with the vast majority (75) in High Street. (The High Street total is actually 101, but the 26 beyond the South Street junction are included in the adjacent study-area). Most of the others are in Castle Street (21) and South Street (17). 5 out of the 6 Grade I Listed Buildings in the Conservation Area are among them (The Castle, St Mary's Church, the Guildhall, the East Gate and Bogan House at 43 High Street), and 16 of the 28 Grade II\* which are all in High Street (evens: 2, 8, 10, 10A, 10B, 16, 22, 26, 28, and 32, odds 11, 33, 39, Outbuildings at rear of 39, 41 and 55). The remaining 110 are Grade II. Plan 2 identifies all the buildings that are listed, while their addresses are summarised below:

**Castle Street** – on its east side, from the High Street end, are 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6, then across the North Street junction to 8 and 9 (7 was attached to 8 but demolished to improve access to North Street in the 1950's when the car park was created). The **North Gate** is astride the street next to No.9, while just



Very much on view from the castle keep, the roofscape adds considerably to the interest and character of this part of the Conservation Area. Although mostly in continuous rows along the highway, frontage buildings tend to be roofed individually and follow the 'grain' of the plots they occupy [left]. Although a fair number have greater widths than depths (including those backing onto the church yard), most have the opposite and create a roof pattern characterised by ridge lines running back from the street. Along Castle Street and towards the middle and east end of South Street, frontage buildings are generally smaller in scale and have widths about the same as, or greater than, their depths. As a rule, therefore, ridge lines here are aligned with the street [above].

Today the vertical sliding sash window dominates this part of the Area and brings with it a tremendous sense of visual harmony. Used in what appears to be every conceivable pattern (mostly multi-paned), arrangement (singly, in pairs, in threes, and in tripartite or venetian fashion) and form (flush or recessed in the wall, or in projecting bays or bows), its use is never perceived as monotonous. The three at 10 High Street are among the earliest, and best presented in the town [left].



beyond it is **North Gate Lodge** on its west side. Returning up the hill on this side is the curving path to **The Castle** which, as well as being Listed, is also a **Scheduled Ancient Monument**. Alongside the path 10, 11 and 12, with 13, 13A and 14 on the Castle Street pavement. 16 is last, being one of five buildings amalgamated at one time to form the Castle Hotel that occupied the curving High Street corner.

**Church Close** – Nos. 5, 6, 7 and 8 in a single block behind 19 High Street. Also listed, but included under High Street, is the **churchyard wall** opposite, including the gates and piers.

**Collins Road** – at the higher end, behind No.97 High Street, **Stable Cottage, Middle Cottage and Skittle Cottage**, and at the lower end a **Pair of Warehouses** immediately north of 6-8 Alpha Terrace.

**Rampart Walk (with Guildhall Yard)** – No.1 at the rear of 73 Fore Street. Nos.5 and 5A and **The Guildhall** next to them, and **Guildhall Cottage** on the west side of the Guildhall. Also listed, but included under High Street, are the walls retaining the churchyard opposite.

**High Street** – on the north side, and but for the Woolworth's building at 23/25, every building is listed between the East Gate and Castle Street, including 1, 3, 5, 7, 7A, 9 and 11. **The Churchyard Walls and St Mary's Church** are next, visible from the street because the former Corn Exchange



While most early rendered surfaces were lime-washed from the outset, later ones tended to be left in their 'natural' state. Only one of these survives with its original appearance intact, and that is at 15 High Street, on the elevation that faces the gap in front of the church. It was probably applied soon after the 'Exchange' was demolished in 1878, and still retains the 'ashlar lining' that was scribed into the surface to give the impression of fine stonework. This 'architectural device' was commonly used during the 19<sup>th</sup> century to 'up-grade' appearances, and while several complete examples survive in the Area, there are numerous traces too, suggesting it was formerly much more prevalent. A quite unusual feature of the lining at 15 High Street is the change in scale that was consciously made between the higher and lower sections [left].

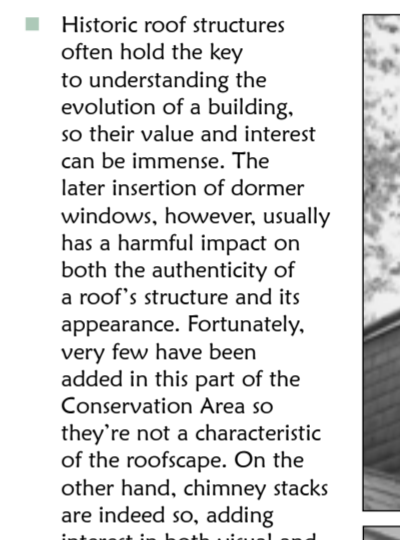
Most buildings in this part of the Area, even those with timber-framed fronts and rears, have a significant amount of stone in their construction. This isn't at all obvious in most street scenes, however, as the material is invariably hidden away in party walls or under an overcoat of render and sometimes slate. The few buildings that do reveal their stone construction are either in non-domestic use (like the church, the castle, the Guildhall and the warehouses near the railway) or are 'back blocks' like those exposed to view behind Birdwood House [above]. (A rare exception is the row of 3-storey houses on Church Close, although their origins may have been less than domestic or, like Paradise House in South Street, they may well have had their render removed).

Whether applied to solid-masonry or timber-framed walls, render is the most common finish to buildings in this part of the Area and dominates street scenes that exclude the Butterwalk. Most is smooth textured, producing a somewhat dignified, 'urban' appearance that is entirely suited to a town setting. On the other hand, the few examples of 'rough-cast', in South Street in particular, produce a more robust appearance that appears quite suited to a street where many of the houses started life as 'outbuildings' at the end of High Street burgage plots [left].



The rendered surfaces that most enliven the street scene are undoubtedly those adorned with decorative features. Their numbers are few, but set amongst 'plainer' neighbours, their impact is enhanced. The two most striking examples are at 26 and 28 High Street, while the one that probably holds most interest is at 16 High Street where the initials of the owner and the date of the building's construction are central features of its decorative friezes [left].

Historic roof structures often hold the key to understanding the evolution of a building, so their value and interest can be immense. The later insertion of dormer windows, however, usually has a harmful impact on both the authenticity of a roof's structure and its appearance. Fortunately, very few have been added in this part of the Conservation Area so they're not a characteristic of the roofscape. On the other hand, chimney stacks are indeed so, adding interest in both visual and historical terms. The stack rising out of 7A High Street is particularly impressive [above right], while its earthenware pot (the smallest of the three) and two slate 'tents' are most attractive and survive to preserve local traditions.



As elsewhere in the Conservation Area, building in brick was never extensive, and was usually limited to the construction of chimney stacks, the dressing of window and door openings, and the forming of quoins in stonework. Had the 'Exchange' survived in front of the church, with its re-built upper floor of brick, the impression might have been a different, but as it is, the relative rarity of its use makes its actual use seem out of place. Indeed, of the few examples that do exist, the majority have long been painted over - like those to the front of 33 High Street in the Butterwalk [above].

The absence of kerbed pavements and front garden areas are essential aspects of South Street's character, tending to authenticate its origins (as a boundary not a highway) and its evolution (as a 'secondary access route') [above].



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**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.

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**Leechwell Lane** – at its broader, South Street end, a compact group including 1, 2, 4 and 5.

**North Street** – on its north side, where it narrows en route to the Guildhall Yard, 2 and 3, and at the opposite, Castle Street end, No.8. On the south side, 5 and 6 that comprise the Elbow Room Restaurant.

**South Street** – on its north side, No.1 (South Wall House) and the Curtilage Wall and Rear Gateway of 2 High Street already referred to under High Street. No. 2 follows, then 3A and then the Entrance Door and Passage adjoining 4 (Archway House) that leads to Jasmin Cottage and Tower View. The only other on this side is 12 (Birdwood Cottage), while within the highway are the long, retaining, 'Baste Walls' and No.10 located on them. Behind the north side frontage, and to the rears of 24, 26 and 28 High Street respectively, are Jasmin Cottage, Midway House and the Hermitage. On the south side, from west to east, are 19 and 20, 22, 25 (with 23), 26 and 27, and finally Paradise house.

### 2.4 The Scheduled Ancient Monuments

**Totnes Castle** – comprising the motte, with its shell keep on top, and the two baileys (inner and outer) situated on the north side.

**Totnes Priory** – comprising the open areas of the churchyard and Rampart Walk where the buried remains of part of the late 11<sup>th</sup> century Benedictine Priory are located.

- With slate supplies so close to hand, it's not surprising the material was favoured by many 18th and 19th century owners wishing to 're-fashion' (and weather proof) their house fronts (and rears) by cladding over the 'old-fashioned' timber-framing. Although the practice was most prevalent in this part of the Conservation Area, only on the north side of High Street, from the church to the higher end of the Butterwalk, and in the modern Civic Square opposite, can it be said that slate-hung elevations dominate the scene [right].

- Elsewhere slate-hung fronts are few and far between, while examples of decorative patterns are now quite rare. A band of simple 'fish-scale' slates survive across the width of 39 and 41 High Street as if to confirm the long history these separate houses had of single ownership [below]. 10 High Street, on the other hand, has a band of semi-circular cut slates, as well as a diamond-shaped panel of the tiniest of slates in its gable. However, the most attractive and skilfully executed example in this part of High Street must be the one at 34 and 36; the product of a late Victorian revival of a disappearing practice, designed to complement the architecture of this very fine street [right centre].



- Polychromatic slate hanging (where bands are created using different coloured slates) is now a rarity in the town, but as the sole surviving example of the 'art' illustrates [right below], the effect can be very pleasing. Not so architecturally creative, however, is the practice of painting slate fronts, although in all probability its purpose was a positive one; to improve the appearance of repaired slate-work that had been patched in the process. Nearly a quarter of the slate hung fronts in this part of the Area have been treated in this way, and as all are on High Street, their contribution towards the interest and character of the area is both significant and obvious. They appear to evidence a common approach to extending the life of the cladding beyond normal expectations. For example, the small sized slates at 54 High Street [below] suggest antiquity, and it could well be they date from the building's re-fronting which the rain-water hopper-heads put at 1813!



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