



Babbacombe Downs

Conservation Area

Character Appraisal



BABBACOMBE DOWNS

CONSERVATION AREA

CHARACTER APPRAISAL

Revised

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TORBAY COUNCIL

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PHOTOGRAPHS

EARLY EDITION ORDNANCE SURVEY:1: 2500 scale maps (not to scale)

- Ordnance Survey County Series First Edition surveyed 1862-1887
- Ordnance Survey County Series Second Edition surveyed 1904
- Ordnance Survey County Series Third Edition surveyed 1933

APPRAISAL MAPS

- Map One: Historic Buildings
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1 LOCATION AND ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS

- 1.1 The Babbacombe Downs conservation area lies a little over 2km (1½ miles) northeast of the centre of Torquay; situated on a relatively level plateau some 90 metres above sea level, it is essentially a 19th century suburb of St Marychurch. It lies close to both the St Marychurch and Cary Park conservation areas, with which it forms a distinct group, although nowhere does it share a boundary with them being separated by a strip across Babbacombe Road which varies between 40-100m. The conservation area marks the edge of Torquay's 19th century development nearest to the northern coastline, and consists of detached villas, now mostly hotels, and several short terraces.
- 1.2 Where undeveloped the conservation area is mainly open in character and includes The Downs, an attractive grassed area from which there are extensive coastal views; between them and the shoreline, lie tree-clad cliffs to the northeast, with the Cliff Railway, opened in 1926 providing access to Oddicombe beach. The eastern part of the conservation area is a steep combe with vehicular access via Beach Road to what was formerly a much older fishing hamlet, with a scattering of early-mid 19th century villas, one or two of which have modest cottage ornée embellishments. The whole area is much frequented by holiday visitors, especially during the summer months.
- 1.3 There are major 19th century embellishments to the natural landscape. The Downs were created as an important open space for public enjoyment, as were the many informal paths that in places climb the steep slopes by means of steps – in some cases running into hundreds – easing their way through the limestone crags. Contemporary guidebooks give an impression of how Babbacombe and its particular attractions developed, especially between the mid-19th and early-20th century when most holiday destinations were still within the United Kingdom. Just prior to the second world war Babbacombe Downs was still being referred to as 'a breezy plateau'.

2 HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT, ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT

- 2.1 Historically the land area comprising Babbacombe Downs belonged to both the parish and manor of St Marychurch. There has been human activity and settlement in the St. Marychurch area since prehistoric times. Within the parish and adjoining the southern boundary of the conservation area lies the prehistoric field system of Walls Hills; the third or southernmost 'hill' contains a remarkably well preserved complex of six complete fields as well as parts of others and has been scheduled as an Ancient Monument. The series of individual fields and their boundary banks are survivals of what was once a very much larger field system dating from the Late Bronze- and Early Iron Ages c.1200-800 BC. The urban centre of St Marychurch has its origins in the Saxon settlement from the 8th century onwards; the pre-Conquest manorial structure, recorded in Domesday, was probably established here by the 10th century. In 1086 the Domesday Book recorded two manors at St Marychurch, Babbacombe Downs is entirely contained in that of *SCÆ MARIÆ cerce* which can be identified as St Marychurch proper.

- 2.2 Babbacombe enters the historical record c.1200 as *Babbecumbe* in the Torre Abbey Cartulary; the place name form deriving from a personal name: the valley of a man called Babba. The form Babbecombe in 1467 becomes recognisably Babbacombe between 1504-15 when it is recorded in the Early Chancery Proceedings as a result of some lawsuit. In 1535 the tithe return gives the annual value of the fishery at £12 (Brixham and Kingswear together were only worth £17). In 1635 among the 20 ships and 800 crew sailing from the Torbay ports were sailors from Babbacombe.
- 2.3 The present urban topography reflects an almost entirely 19th century pattern of development. An estate map compiled in 1775 for the Carys, who had been manorial overlords since 1595, shows the whole area of what is now Babbacombe Downs consisting mainly of manorial common, a few fields of early enclosure or medieval boundaries south of what is now Babbacombe Downs Road (the ancient coastal route north), and the tiny hamlet of Babbacombe itself clustered around the buildings between what is now occupied by the Glen and Cary Arms Hotels.
- 2.4 The isolation of the original setting of the small fishing hamlet is still evident from the original Ordnance Survey 1-mile-to-1-inch map surveyed in 1809 where Babbacombe Sands and Babbacombe Bay are noted but hardly anything else. Babbacombe Road was re-constructed as a turnpike between Torquay and St Marychurch in 1824-27. In the 1840s this scatter of small cottages facing the harbour was thought of as fashionably picturesque as ‘a Swiss village...and much illustrated as one of the sights of Torbay’. Several of the earlier cottages appear to have been remodelled at about that time. Landing facilities were primitive, until 1889 boats still had to be hauled up onto the beach, the existing breakwater was built in that year, a large proportion of the cost being met by the Carys.
- 2.5 This earlier settlement contrasts with that above on The Downs where buildings and associated landscaping were only laid out as a small cliff-top resort in the mid-late 19th century. The Downs themselves were part of this former manorial common which was laid to grass and promenades with railings, shelters and a bandstand provided. While Torquay proper was grown most rapidly between 1840 and 1870, and a number of villas were built to the south and west of St. Marychurch in the early-mid 19th century, largely contemporary with those in Torquay, Babbacombe’s development is slightly later and took slightly longer. The terraces of the ‘front’ on Babbacombe Downs Road are mid-century developments. Between 1860 and 1880 a number of streets of plain terraces were built fronting or adjoining Babbacombe Road: Princes Street, St. Anne’s Road, and Victoria Place. All now lie between the designated conservation areas of Babbacombe Downs and Cary Park.
- 2.6 By the end of the 19th century Babbacombe was an established suburb of Torquay, although contemporary guide books continued to refer to its separate identity, and even comment upon the change of climate from the more southerly part of Torquay:

The builder of late years has transformed a retired hamlet into a considerable and fashionable town (Thorough Guide Series *South Devon & South Cornwall* 1889)

Fresh air has come so much into fashion now that ... this more bracing side, though two or three miles from any railway station, ... is quickly developing (Black's Guide to Devonshire 1898)

Babbacombe's face and edge [is] tastefully laid out with walks and gardens ... [its view] finer than from any point of Torquay ... the limestone and marble cliffs give place to the glowing red sandstone continued on to Dawlish and reflected from the other side of the Exe estuary (ibid.)

Babbacombe has its own facilities for concerts, sport and shopping, and in sultry weather it offers an agreeable change from the more southerly parts of Torquay (Ward Lock Guide Torquay & South Devon 1924).

- 2.7 A major loss has been the large mid-Victorian villa The Vine whose extensive gardens linked the Downs with the shore, with the villa prominently located between them. After its demolition the Babbacombe Theatre was built in the 1950s in the upper part of the former grounds.

3 CHARACTER AREAS

- 3.1 The three separate parts of the conservation area are defined by their differing topographical situation, all preserve a sense of discrete identity; they are shown on Appraisal Map One and can be summarised as follows:

3.2 (1) *The Downs*

A largely uniform 19th century frontage overlooks the Downs and the coastline. The buildings are mainly domestic in scale and well-proportioned, uniformly finished in smooth render with some classical ornament. Pitched roofs alternate with flat roofs and parapets. The form of development varies from short terraces to detached villas, now mostly hotels, in their own grounds. This part of the conservation area extends eastwards in a narrow strip along the southern edge of the plateau to include some scattered mid-20th century development along Walls Hill Road.

3.3 (2) *Beach Road and The Harbour*

This area consists of the early hamlet and the north-facing slopes in the small hollow above the harbour and its stone jetty. Buildings are informally grouped on the hillside above and include several picturesque cottages, a villa, and the Cary Arms Hotel on the seafront against a wooded backdrop. The curve of the coastline ensures that this small settlement is clearly visible as part of the broader sweep of the coastline.

3.4 (3) *The Cliff Paths and Railway*

Early photographs indicate that this part of the conservation area was extensively planned and laid out in the mid-late 19th century as a pleasure ground with a network of paths descending the cliffs and with far fewer mature trees than at present. The introduction of the Cliff Railway in 1926 led to a change of emphasis and the paths are now relatively little used as a route to the beach. The landscape has since largely naturalised with no buildings other than the two station buildings.

4. ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORIC QUALITIES

4.1 LISTED & OTHER KEY BUILDINGS

4.1.1 The conservation area has seven separate listing entries covering some 11 properties and a birdbath with a statue; all are listed grade II and denoted here in bold.

4.1.2 Looking northeast across The Downs is a fine terrace of five houses **Nos 49-57 Babbacombe Downs Road** which dates from late 1840s/early 1850s; these are stuccoed with natural slate roofs, hipped at their ends, and have rendered chimney stacks at ridge level with cornices. Most preserve their original four-panel doors with plain fanlights, similarly most sash windows with their single horizontal glazing bar survive. The first floor windows are set in recesses with Venetian style shutters extending across. Again most preserve their glazed verandahs but only **No. 53** retains part of its original trellis standard; the others have plainer replacements. At the northern end of the Downs is the **Birdbath** of c.1900 with a gilded miniature statue of Baroness Mount Temple.

4.1.3 Lady Mount Temple was a noted art collector who lived in the former **Babbacombe Cliff Hotel**; this large house was commissioned from W E Nesfield in 1878 by her husband. Set just under the steep edge of the plateau and situated on the south side of Beach Road opposite the Vine on the north side the pair once formed an imposing group with extensive grounds between the Downs and the shore. The original Babbacombe Cliff house retains its early Arts and Crafts feel; it is built of the local grey limestone with sandstone dressings, and some slate-hanging beneath a scanted slate roof. The chimney stacks have moulded brick shafts, and the windows are ovolo-moulded with leaded-light casements; where the windows are oriels the coving is pargetted. There is also an attractive projecting look-out supported on large timber brackets. It has been extended twice, first in the 1920s and then less successfully in the late 20th century. However it has recently undergone extensive restoration, which has undone some of the less fortunate later alteration, and has been a largely sympathetic conversion to flats.

4.1.4 Most buildings within the conservation area remain unlisted but very many have qualities that merit attention, either by virtue of their group value, or as a result of their architectural detail such that they form key components of the historic built environment making up the designated area. The majority are situated in Babbacombe Downs Road and include former villas such as No.11, and the Oddicombe Hall Hotel, formerly an 1860s villa situated on the corner of St Alban's Road, both retain much original character including deep bracketed eaves, cornices, rusticated quoins and windows with crown glass and narrow glazing bars. The purpose-built Royal Hotel on the corner with Portland Road is a pleasing combination of original 19th century detail with early 20th century extensions having canted bays and small-paned casement windows. Nos. 37-47 Babbacombe Downs Road, a three-storey terrace group, retains most original detail on the upper floors, including elaborate parapets with urn finials, bracketed cornices, cast iron balconies, and some original sash windows. The detailed parapet motif is also found at Winstons, 63 Babbacombe Downs Road, which occupies the prominent corner site at the southern end of the Downs before the descent of Beach Road. Beyond the corner

are two short 19th century terraces facing each other: Nos 71-85 on the west side, and Nos 76-84 on the east, the former coastguard station and cottages. Although both have been much modified, they form a good group fronted by boundary walls of local limestone rubble.

- 4.1.5 At the junction of Babbacombe, Babbacombe Downs and Walls Hill Roads are situated an eclectic group of buildings of the 19th and 20th century. Under the current designation these lie just outside the conservation area boundary. **St Anne's Church Hall** is in an early Arts-and-Crafts style, built of the local grey limestone with Hamstone dressings beneath slate roofs; dating from 1883 it may be the earliest Arts-and-Crafts building in Devon. A Heritage Lottery grant in 2004 will facilitate a comprehensive repair and restoration of this interesting and split level building. On the south side of Walls Hill Road Nos 1-6 with their steep cat-slide gabled frontages are late examples c.1914 of the style. Almost opposite the church hall 90-96 Babbacombe Road is an impressive three and four-storey complex with an ashlar double front and many decorative features including prominent cornices, window reveals and a rounded corner entrance bay at the corner below a turreted roof. These buildings make a positive contribution to the conservation area and should be included within it, particularly the unlisted ones.
- 4.1.6 The only other listed buildings form a scattered group within the combe itself and mainly date from the 1840s, although some are built on earlier foundations; they are described in the list as 'part of a group of picturesque small houses built on the steep wooded cliffside above Babbacombe beach'. Although largely concealed behind trees, the largest is The Grove (c.1849) which is built of stucco and slate to a symmetric 3-bay plan in a cottage ornée style with its two outer bays bowed and gabled. The deep bracketed eaves, ornamental barge-boards with apex pendants, and centre window with arched heads are typical such ornée features.
- 4.1.7 The others are closer to Beach Road and much more visible. **Undercliff**, (c.1840s) and close to the sea, has an asymmetric L-shaped plan with canted bays and two ground-floor French windows, all with hood-moulds. Apart from a glazed verandah on posts across the front there is no grand entrance elevation. **Cliffside Cottage Hotel** (also 1840s) is of stucco and slate with rusticated quoins. The front elevation has two gables and a first floor timber verandah, with a Tudor-arched arcade. Windows are mainly timber casements, although some 20th century metal windows have been added. Nearby is **Rose Cottage** (again 1840s) which plastered with a thatched roof, hipped at both ends and pierced by stacks with rendered shafts. There is little detail other than a timber front verandah with slated roof; the two-light casements have recently installed diamond glazing bars.
- 4.1.8 The remaining key buildings are those that form a significant group which rise above the Harbour. All show aspects of architectural merit with some intrinsically good detailing, both original and modified; not least the presence of red brick and tile which is of great visual importance in relation to the coastal setting. The Arts-and-Crafts Beach Cottage appears to be a remodelling of the mid-Victorian or earlier Beach House. The seafront carpark occupies the site of the early villa The Glen, but its demise was early for it is absent from the 1904 Ordnance Survey.

4.2 BUILDING FORM & ORNAMENT

- 4.2.1 The handsome stucco or rendered frontages of both the terraces and villas are a feature of Babbacombe Downs Road. The villas typically have hipped slate roofs with occasional projecting gables or bay windows incorporated in the hips; even the smaller terraces also have hipped slate roofs. Facing the Downs, several buildings of three storeys or more have flat roofs with parapets. The position of chimney stacks in relation to roof profiles varies considerably with no set pattern. The majority are rendered, and some are corniced. The moulded brickwork to the tall stacks in Nesfield's house of 1878 display especially fine craftsmanship.
- 4.2.2 Openings can vary widely in detail although the surviving sash windows are most frequently of the local pattern of a single horizontal glazing bar. The corner detail of buildings, especially at road junctions can be quite subtle with two main street-facing frontages in evidence, such as Oddicombe Hall Hotel which faces onto both St Alban's and Babbacombe Downs Roads. Behind the enlarged hotels of Babbacombe Downs Road which were once villas, rear service access is obtained from Bedford Road, but poor quality rear extensions with unattractive elevations predominate and do nothing to enhance the conservation area. This has been allied to the transformation of the sea-facing frontages to a more contemporary appearance and to link, or considerably, extend the previously detached villas. The result has been to spoil their proportions, consume the open space between them and end in frontages which bear little or no relation to the original 19th century buildings as well as to deny any sea views to the terraces set behind in Bedford Street.
- 4.2.3 Additional ornament to buildings extends in a few instances to the appearance of rusticated quoins, string courses, bracketed eaves, glazed porches; and ironwork detail on balconies and canopies. As in much of Torquay, the extensive boundary walls, mostly of randomly coursed limestone make an enormous contribution to the historic built environment and are difficult to replace. Most are freestanding but where there are sharp changes of level, they sometimes transform into retaining walls. Other typical Torquay features are the 19th century cast iron street-light columns, originally carrying gas lamps and normally embossed with local foundry names; and the seats with a characteristic coiled snake design. An especially prominent feature is the perimeter cast-iron post and rail fence bordering the western edge of the Downs for much of its length.

4.3 USE OF MATERIALS

- 4.3.1 Stucco and white or colour-washed render over stone are the predominant building materials. Bricks may have been used as the underlying material from the 1850s. The use of exposed natural stone is limited, and where it occurs it is usually rough-faced. Dressed stone, often of a different variety, is used for quoins and openings. The local grey Devonian limestone is most widely used as randomly coursed rubble in boundary and retaining walls, with dressed examples used as steps to paths, and as kerbstones and gulleys.
- 4.3.2 Welsh or Cornish slate quickly became the dominant roofing material of the 19th century, although much has now been replaced by artificial substitutes. The slate-

hanging at Nesfield's Babbacombe Cliff House near the top of Beach Road is probably Cornish. The more widespread use of plain tiles on buildings close to the harbour, not a traditional feature in the locality, may indicate that these were originally shipped in.

4.3.3 Of particular merit, though afforded little statutory protection, is the wealth of period detail. Although partly compromised by later alterations and additions, especially at ground floor level, there are several good decorative examples of stucco and render including brackets, cornices, eaves and architrave detailing. Chimney stacks are topped with mainly cream terracotta chimney pots, although many have been removed. There are also doors and windows with original panels and glazing bars, and balconies with cast iron balustrading, for example 37-43 Babbacombe Downs Road. Such detail, where it occurs, adds much to the overall character and charm of the conservation area.

4.4 CONDITION OF BUILDINGS

4.4.1 From superficial external observation, the majority of buildings in the conservation area appear to be in a sound structural condition, the large majority being in private domestic or commercial use. There are some indications of ageing roofs, including flat roofs, which may soon require a complete overhaul. Other significant factors, including the loss of architectural features and the mutilation of building fabric are most likely to occur when the original historic detail is under-maintained or has been neglected to the point where replacement is the easier option.

4.4.2 In the conservation area as a whole the potential for the removal and replacement of historic detail, especially doors and windows, as well as some elevational detail and boundary features is always high. This is particularly the case with unlisted buildings where there is little or no statutory protection – even some listed buildings have been partially affected. A considerable proportion of period joinery and glazing to windows and doors has already been lost to quite unsuitable PVCu replacements that bear little relation to the original form or fabric. Much remaining 19th century joinery, except where it has obviously lacked maintenance, is still in good condition, and normally capable of restoration, rather than replacement.

5 GREEN LANDSCAPE AND TREES

5.1 In Babbacombe Downs Road and St. Alban's Road mature trees are mainly found within the grounds of the hotels and guest houses – the former villas – close to the street frontage where they are an important feature. Most are deciduous, for example lime (*Tilia*) sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*), beech (*fagus sylvatica*) or horse chestnut (*Aesculus hippocastanum*) with a few Mediterranean pines, mainly Corsican (*Pinus nigra* var. *maritima*) or Monterey pine (*Pinus radiata*).

5.2 Many trees cover the cliff-slopes stretching from the edge of the plateau of The Downs to the shore-line with a few glades. This was not always the case, as early 20th century photographs show. Many also appear to have naturalised with similar deciduous species to those above-mentioned. Also present are holm oak (*quercus ilex*)

and what appears to be at least one specimen of the locally found Lucombe Oak (LUCOMBEANA). The well-wooded slopes interspersed with bare rock-faces are now a special feature of this section of coastline. The buildings rising above the harbour are set against this backdrop which is dominant landscape feature.

6 THE SETTING AND FEATURES OF SPECIAL IMPORTANCE

6.1 The 19th century ability to tame seemingly impossible and ‘sublime’ landscapes for public recreation and enjoyment is well represented here by the considerable network of paths and roadways which cut across the contour lines in a sequence of curves and hairpin bends. Many of the paths have steps, some with railings. From much of the more elevated part of the conservation area there are dramatic outward views, both out to sea, and along the coastline. Those qualities that give the conservation area its special character may be summarised here, and indications given of where there is the potential for improvement:

- ❖ the coastal hamlet and its setting with early-mid 19th century alterations and additions to earlier buildings;
- ❖ the wide extent and variety of open space between the built-up edge of Babbacombe and the coastline;
- ❖ the Downs development facing the sea from the mid-19th century onwards, much of which remains significantly unaltered, including overall frontage detail, spatial arrangement, roof profiles, stacks and original pots;
- ❖ the historic house of 1878 designed by W E Nesfield;
- ❖ the extent of the remaining 19th-century street layout, including the historic quality of the open spaces, the quayside and pier, the walkways and their historic surfaces, the street furniture including lamps, seats, railings, shelters et al;
- ❖ the range of historic frontage and layout forms which employ an intricacy of detail, and a range of materials including decorative stucco cornices and moulding; and the often imaginative use of building materials in combinations which characterises much of the best development that took place between the early to late 19th century;
- ❖ the survival of a high proportion of period detail: original sash windows with glazing bars, panelled doors, and shutters; cast-iron features: railings and balustrading; and a smaller proportion of original ground-floor frontage detail including window reveals;
- ❖ the extensive network of cliff footpaths and steps amidst the remnants of a mid-19th century planned landscape setting; and the survival of boundary walls using local limestone rubble;
- ❖ extensive tree cover and tree groups which often act as an important foil to buildings, especially in the Beach Road area.

7 EXTENT OF LOSS, DAMAGE AND INTRUSION

7.1 There are however a number of elements that are detrimental to the character and appearance of the conservation area. Those currently identified include:

- ◆ those buildings fronting The Downs which have suffered later additions and alterations, completely out of character with their original form, which spoil the effect of potentially very attractive frontages overlooking an extensive area of public open space;
- ◆ those buildings that are in a poor state of repair, are under-maintained, or have been subjected to mutilation;
- ◆ the gradual but incremental loss of distinctive architectural features, such as window surrounds, cornices, canopies etc;
- ◆ the loss of a large proportion of historic joinery, especially original sash windows with glazing bars, and four and six-panel original doors;
- ◆ the loss of natural roofing slate and its partial or complete replacement with artificial substitutes, some of which are very poor imitations of the original;
- ◆ the loss of the traditional frontages, especially at ground-floor level to commercial premises, and their replacement with plain fascias and strong horizontal elements at variance with the period detailing of the upper floors.

8 SUMMARY

8.1 The Babbacombe Downs conservation area both possesses and is within sight of some of the highest quality coastline within the environs of Torbay, and indeed Devon as a whole; it has the character of a separate small resort within the larger resort, retaining its own individuality, both in terms of the later 19th century development and the origins of the earlier hamlet much closer to the shoreline.

8.2 To some extent the original 19th century character has been compromised by subsequent alterations and additions, which is also typical of some other Torbay conservation areas. The Adopted Local Plan acknowledges this:

many of Torbay's Conservation Areas have been designated 'warts and all' and contain areas of very mixed quality, including past development that is totally out of context with the surrounding area. Redevelopment or alterations to existing buildings may provide opportunities to design more appropriate new buildings or to restore lost or degraded features. (Torbay Local Plan 1995-2011, The Built Environment 14.8)

8.3 Thus conservation planning advice will always aim to improve the quality of new building, or to restore lost or degraded features from historic ones. The recent

restoration and conversion of Nesfield's house is a good example of what may be achieved. Additionally there is also scope to preserve boundary features and the surviving historic elements of design and ornament including the sympathetic use or re-use of appropriate materials.

- 8.4 Enhancement can also be achieved by 'the control of development in adjacent areas which could impact significantly on the townscape and environmental qualities within Conservation Areas' (Local Plan, 14.10). It has been noted above (4.1.5) that just outside the conservation area boundary there are a number of good individual buildings and building groups, listed and unlisted.

9 CONSERVATION AREA POLICIES

- 9.1 Conservation Area policies are addressed in the adopted local plan:

Policy BE5 - Development within or affecting a Conservation Area will only be permitted where it will preserve or enhance the character or appearance of that area.

The Policy outlines the Council's strategy for Conservation Areas. It includes issues such as the control of demolition, alterations and extensions, boundary features and design aspects, as well as the control of development in adjacent areas which could impact significantly on the townscape and environmental qualities within Conservation Areas. (The Built Environment 14.9)

further it is recognised that:

Roof materials, chimneys, cornices and mouldings, original windows and shopfronts, railings and boundary walls can all make an important contribution to the character of a Conservation Area. The Council will introduce Article 4(2) Directions to bring such items under normal development control. (The Built Environment 14.56)

- 9.2 To frame specific policies within the Babbacombe Downs Area:

- (1) All unlisted buildings identified as key buildings or groups of buildings that contribute to the historic built environment (see Map One) should be included within Article 4(2) Directions to control inappropriate changes to the principal elevations.
- (2) Protect from detrimental loss all those key local features of special importance (see Section 6), which need to be safeguarded or enhanced, when determining development proposals within the conservation area; and where in future, Conservation Area, or Article 4 consent may be required.
- (3) Give due consideration to other key local factors which make up the features of special importance, such as the building groups of special merit outside the conservation area – or more practically extend the conservation area to

include several more streets which retain areas of relatively unscathed late 19th to early 20th century character.

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PHOTOGRAPHS

The Setting and The Downs

1-5 The Babbacombe Downs conservation area is an eclectic mix of contrasting environments; the dynamic since the mid-19th century has been to create a holiday and recreational setting; this is now predominantly aimed at summer tourists. 'The Down' not only functions as a garden to the hotels and guest houses that flank the south side of Babbacombe Downs Road (1) but also as a form of 'green' beach (2). From here outward views are spectacular (3); they are also in complete contrast to the sense of enclosure gained whilst negotiating the steep descent to the foreshore (4, 5). Much of the wooded and rock-faced coastline at Babbacombe was made accessible by the extensive network of paths and steps created by the Victorians as a Romantic Landscape.

6 The dramatic coastline dwarfs buildings; the conservation area is as much of landscape as of townscape value. The cliffs exhibit the complex local geology of Devonian limestones and Triassic red sandstone, both used as a local building material.



1.



2.



3.



4.



5.



6.

Buildings

- 7 Oddicombe Hall Hotel, a former villa of c.1860, at the corner of St. Alban's Road and Babbacombe Downs Road retains much of its 19th century character.
- 8 The poor quality rear extensions of the large hotels fronting Babbacombe Downs Road are serviced from Bedford Road; although the buildings that face these extensions are of a much better quality themselves, they lie outside the conservation area (32).
- 9 49-57 Babbacombe Downs Road, a listed terrace of five houses of the late 1840s has glazed front verandahs, mostly original four-panel doors with plain fanlights over, and two-pane sash windows with horizontal glazing bars.
- 10 71 Babbacombe Downs Road is an 1870s terrace to which a 1930s bay has been added; the limestone rubble walls are an important and attractive local feature.
- 11 Cottages of c.1860 at the eastern end of Babbacombe Downs Road; most have lost their original casement windows.
- 12 The north side of Walls Hill Road, behind the ubiquitous limestone walls are several mid-20th century houses; to their rear the land falls precipitously (17).



7.



8.



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11.



12.

- 13 Beach Road provides one of the two vehicular routes giving access to the shore close to which are a number of cottages and villas. Although some have been modified there are several in a cottage orneé style of c.1840.
- 14-15 The listed Babbacombe Cliff dates from 1878 and is the work of W E Nesfield in an early Arts-and-Crafts style. Formerly a hotel, then holiday flats, it is undergoing redevelopment into luxury flats, removing later accretions and restoring original features where possible.
- 16 The Grove, a modified mid-19th century detached villa, is one of several built into the steep hillside in this part of the conservation area.
- 17 One of the Walls Hills houses looms over Beach Road demonstrating the steep local topography. In the foreground is a 19th century cast iron fluted lamp, a typical example from a local foundry. This and the adjoining seat are leaning at an angle also suggesting some subsidence has occurred.
- 18-20 Listed Cottages in Beach Road forming part of a picturesque group dating from c.1840 are the best surviving examples of development which has its origins in the cottage orneé style. Rose Cottage is thatched with a slated front verandah (19); Farandole, formerly Cliffside, Cottage is stuccoed with a crested slate roof and high paired chimneys (20).



13.



14.



15.



16.



17.



18.

21-23 Babbacombe Village clusters around the small harbour at the foot of Beach Road; the houses are red-roofed in contrast to those on the Downs above. Most of the buildings have been modified in the early/mid 20th century. Beach Cottage appears to be a remodelling in the Arts-and-Crafts style of the earlier Beach House (22). To the rear of the Cary Arms is a noticeably earlier building form (23).

Details

24 A rebuilt gate pier leading to a path off Beach Road provides an alternative pedestrian route between the beach and The Down, a steep climb of some 300 feet.



19.



20.



21.



22.



23.



24.

- 25 Distinctive ironwork to a globe street lamp at The Down.
- 26 The cable driven Babbacombe Cliff Railway dates from the 1920s and is operated by Torbay Council. It provides a main means of access to Oddicombe beach where car parking is restricted.
- 27 Iron railings on the north side of Beach Road appear to be in relatively good condition, but are largely obscured by undergrowth.

Potential

The following Buildings, one is listed, closely adjoin but are not included within the conservation area boundary; their inclusion would be a logical extension to the area.

- 28-29 This four-storey part-ashlared sandstone building with its sem-circular turreted entrance bay is an impressive feature of the townscape situated at the crucial junction of Babbacombe, Babbacombe Downs and Walls Hills Roads.
- 30 The listed St. Anne's Hall, constructed of snecked local grey limestone with yellow Ham Hill dressings dates from 1883 and is one of the earliest Arts-and-Crafts buildings in Devon.



25.



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27.



28.



29.



30.

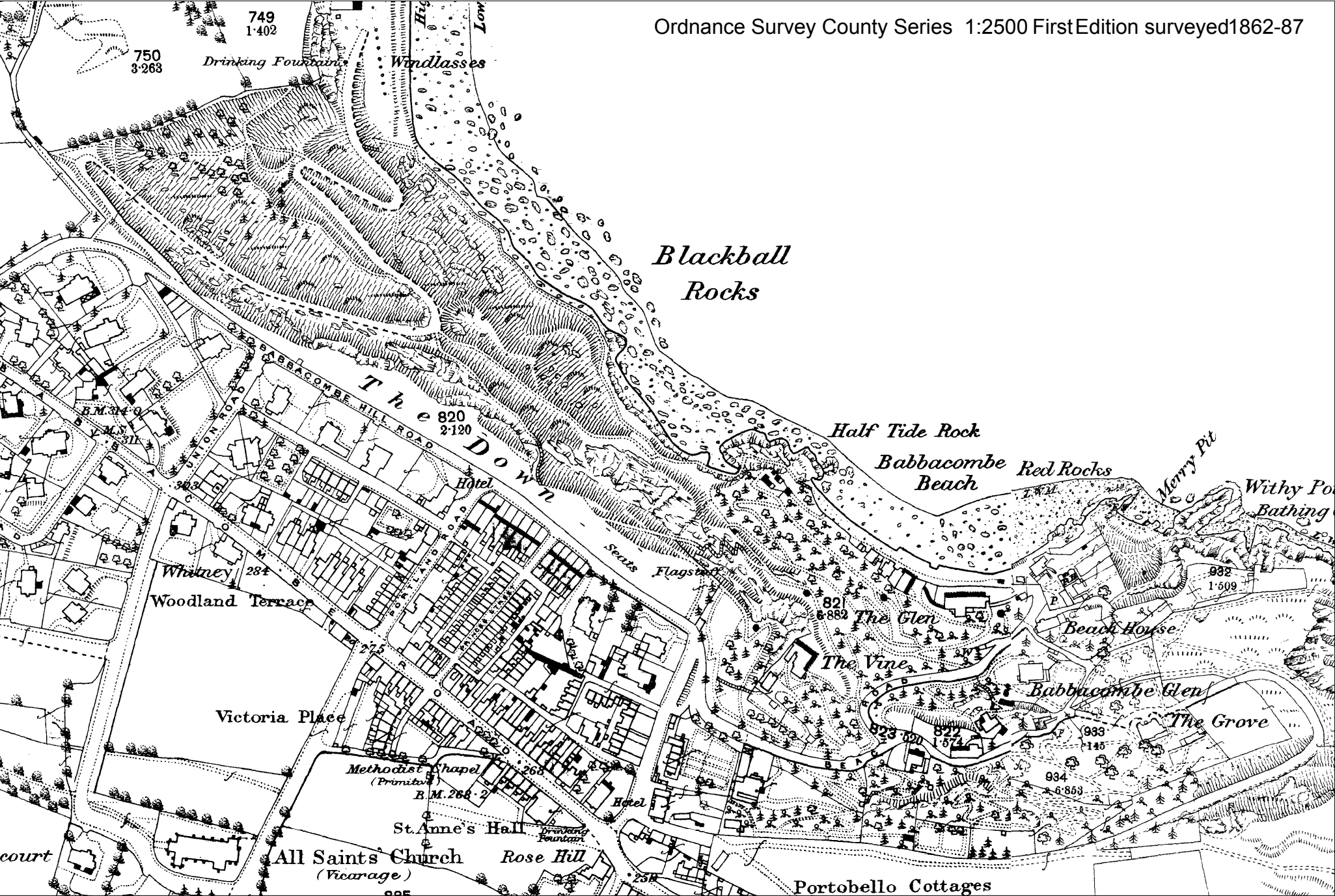
- 31 By contrast the houses in Walls Hill Road are a late example of the Arts-and-Crafts style c.1915, which preserve some surviving leaded light panels in doors and windows, and cottage-style casement windows.
- 32 The south side of Bedford Road has well-proportioned frontages with some largely original mid-and-late 19th century detail in complete contrast to the north side (8).



31.

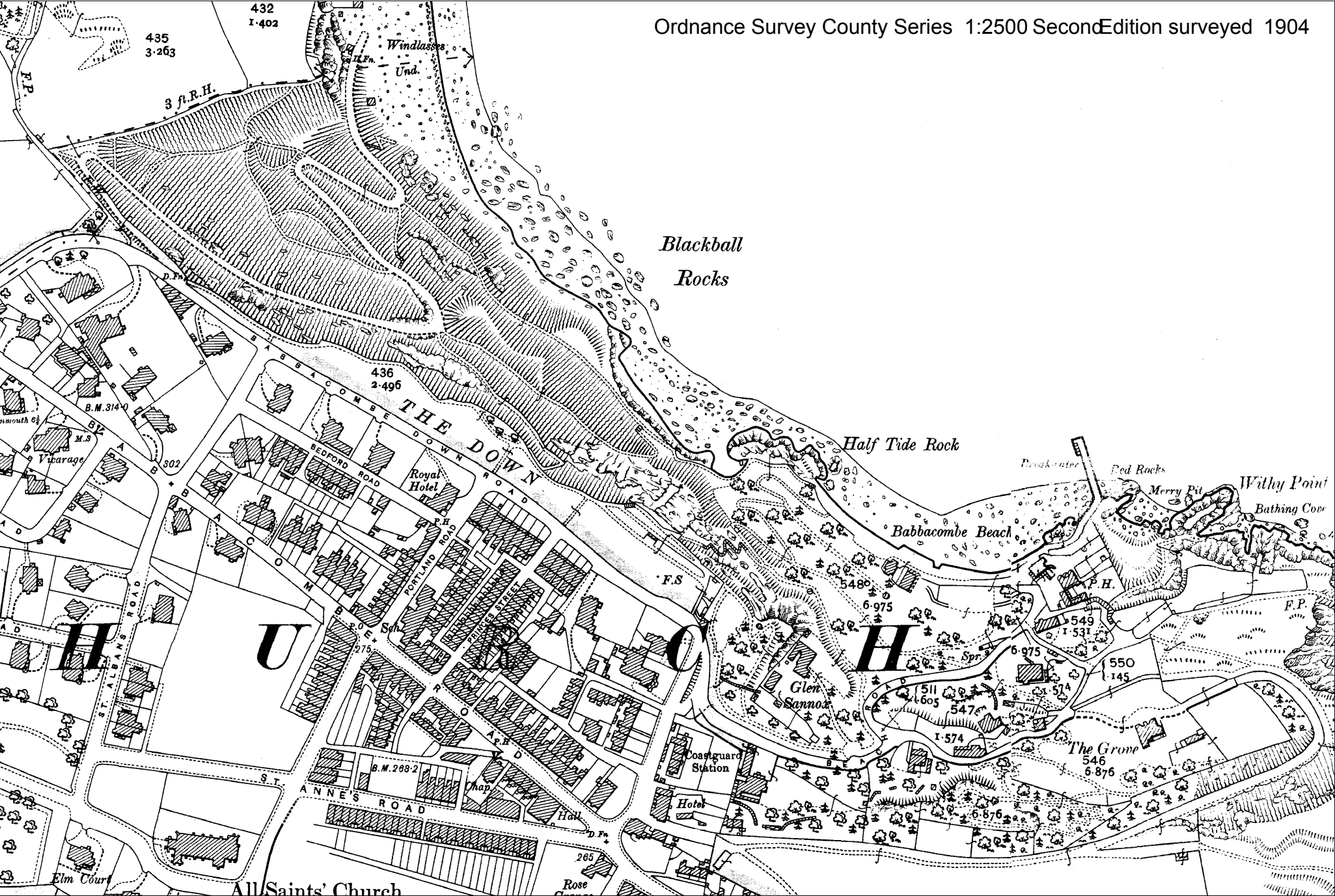


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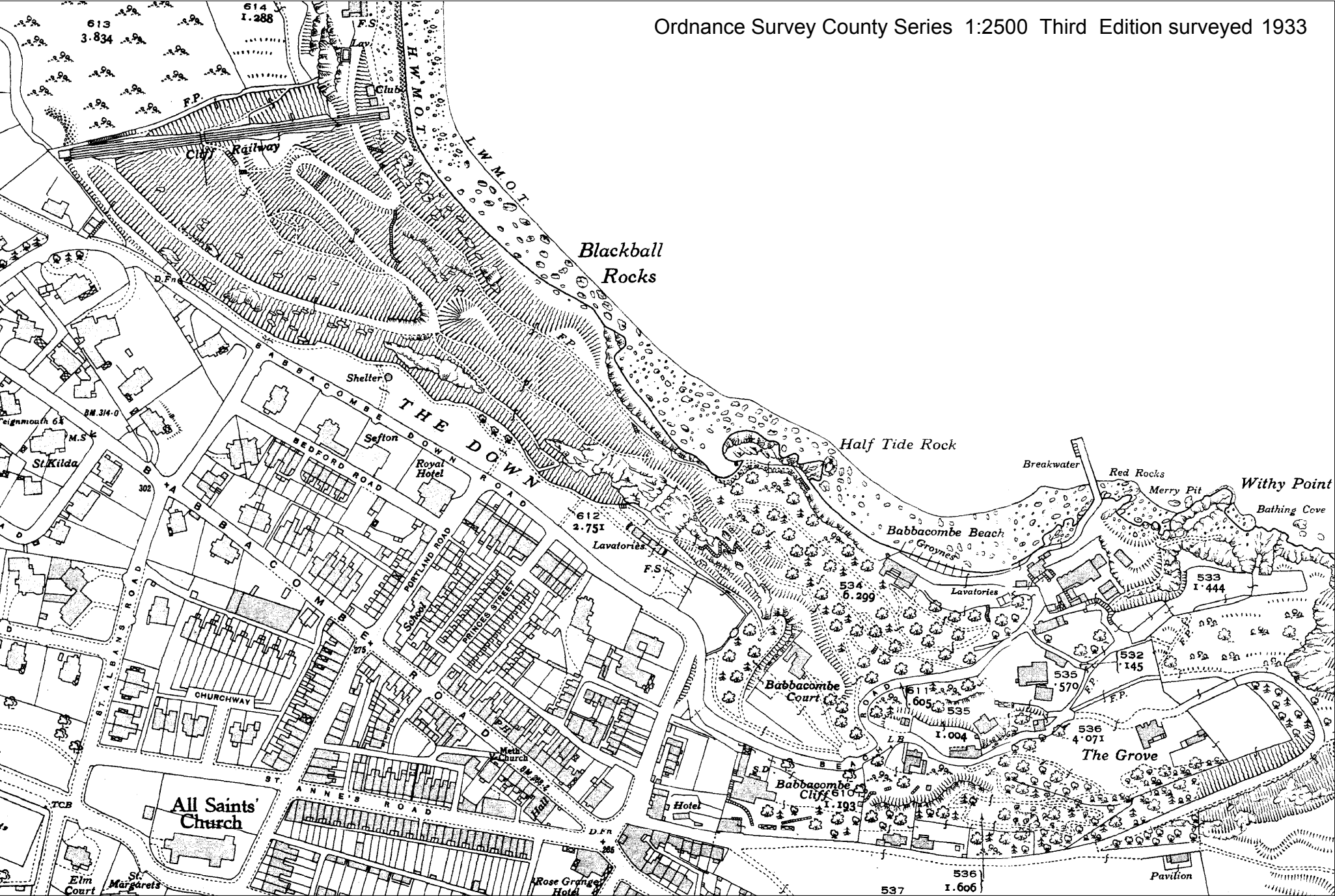


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BABBACOMBE DOWNS



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BABBACOMBE DOWNS

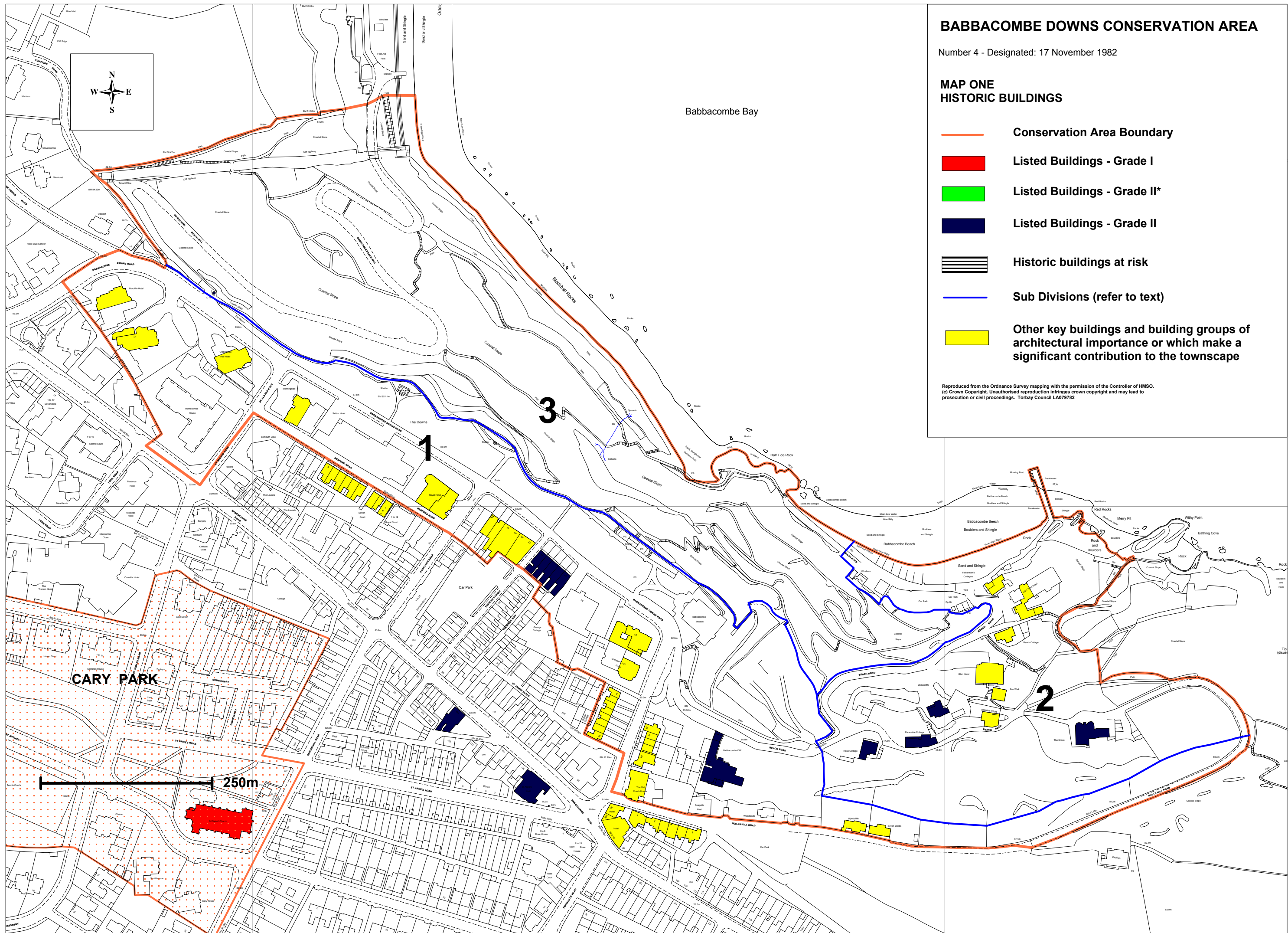
BABBACOMBE DOWNS CONSERVATION AREA

Number 4 - Designated: 17 November 1982

MAP ONE HISTORIC BUILDINGS

-  Conservation Area Boundary
-  Listed Buildings - Grade I
-  Listed Buildings - Grade II*
-  Listed Buildings - Grade II
-  Historic buildings at risk
-  Sub Divisions (refer to text)
-  Other key buildings and building groups of architectural importance or which make a significant contribution to the townscape

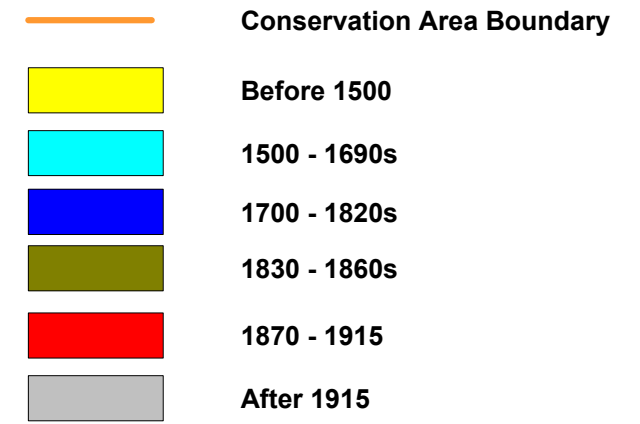
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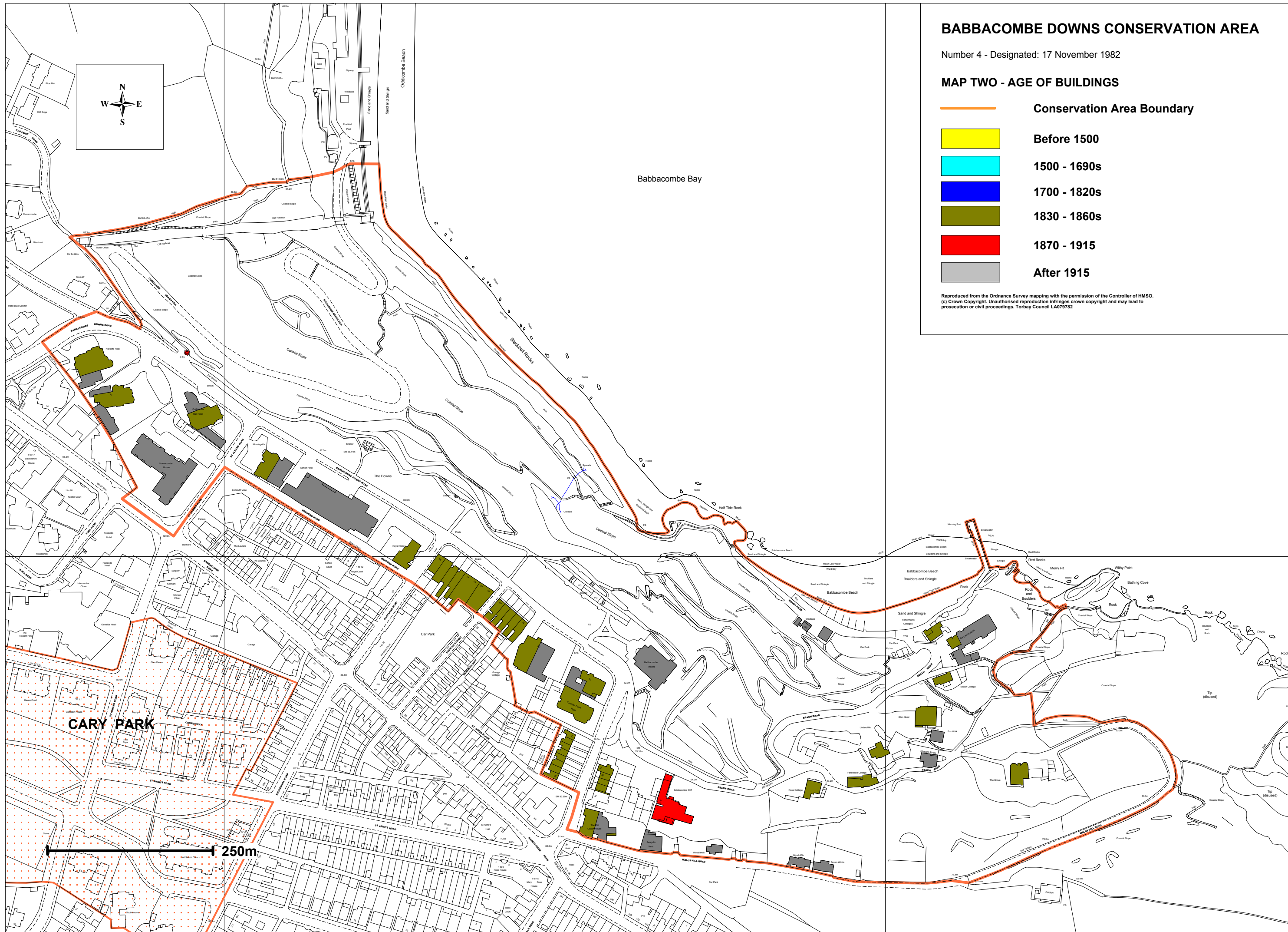
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MAP TWO - AGE OF BUILDINGS








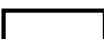
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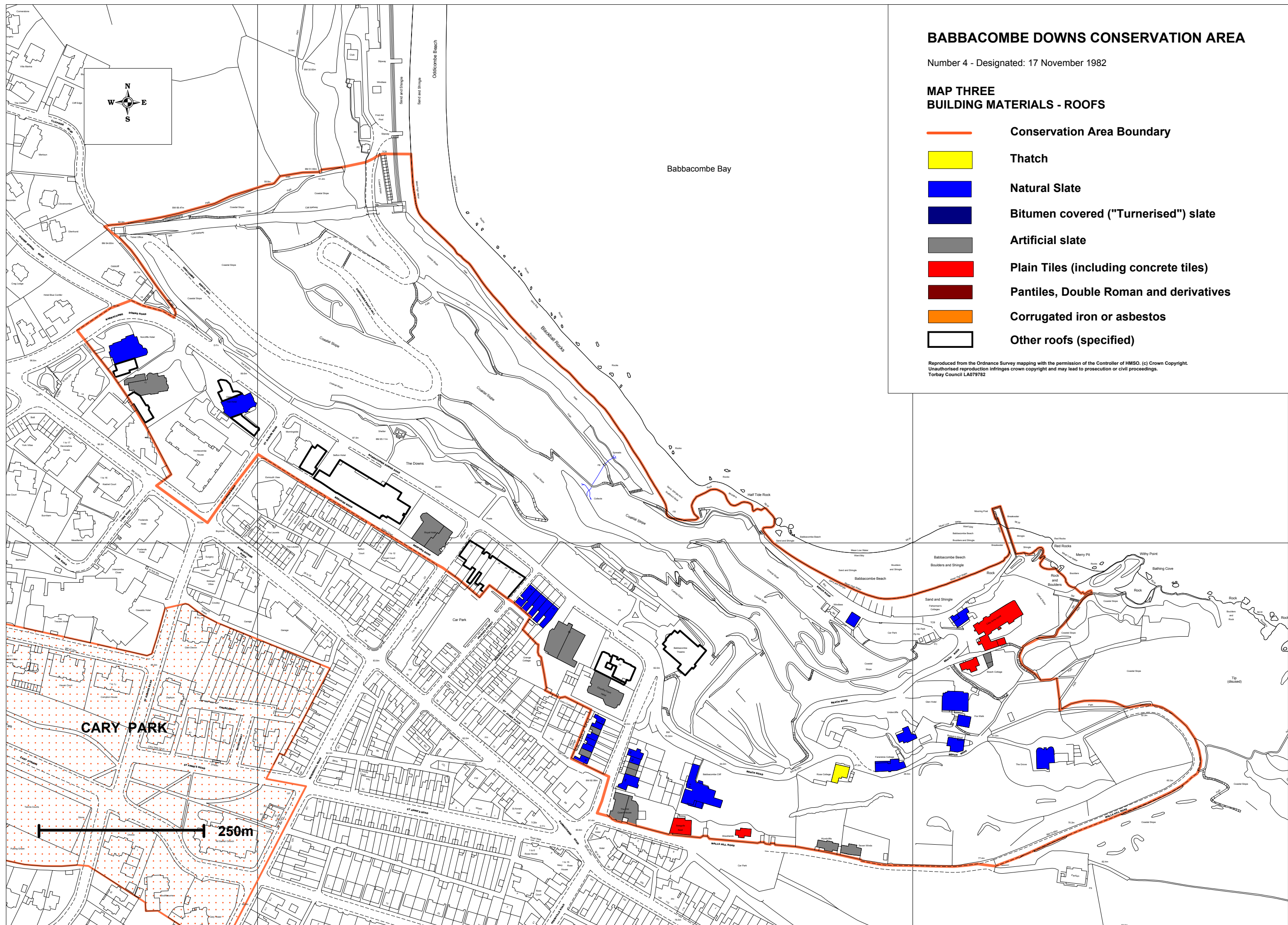
BABBACOMBE DOWNS CONSERVATION AREA

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MAP THREE BUILDING MATERIALS - ROOFS

-  Conservation Area Boundary
-  Thatch
-  Natural Slate
-  Bitumen covered ("Turnerised") slate
-  Artificial slate
-  Plain Tiles (including concrete tiles)
-  Pantiles, Double Roman and derivatives
-  Corrugated iron or asbestos
-  Other roofs (specified)







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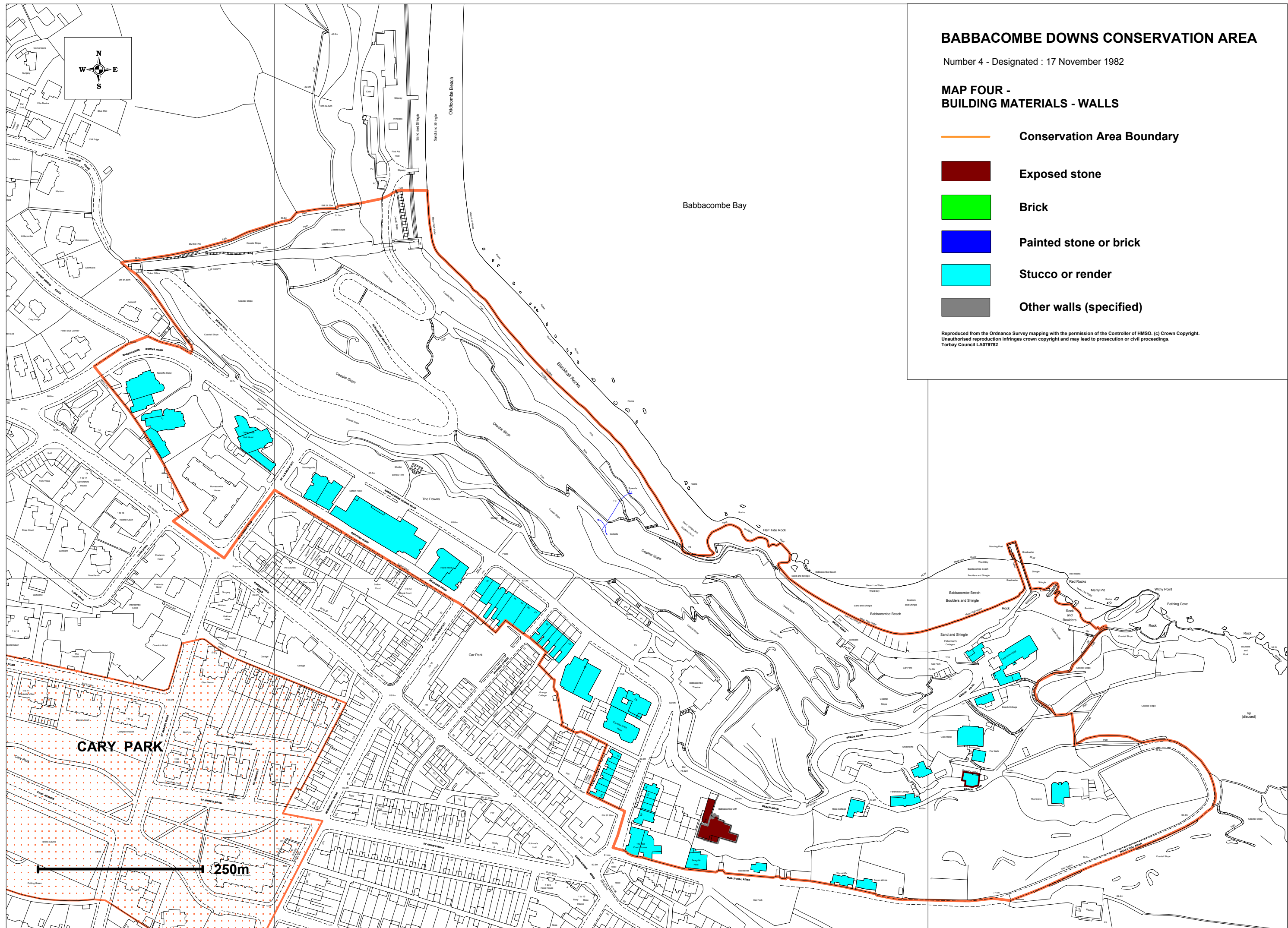
BABBACOMBE DOWNS CONSERVATION AREA

Number 4 - Designated : 17 November 1982

MAP FOUR - BUILDING MATERIALS - WALLS

-  Conservation Area Boundary
-  Exposed stone
-  Brick
-  Painted stone or brick
-  Stucco or render
-  Other walls (specified)














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BABBACOMBE DOWNS CONSERVATION AREA

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MAP FIVE IMPORTANT FEATURES

-  Conservation Area Boundary
-  Important building groups, normally of a similar date, or character of frontage detail.
-  Largely unspoilt frontages retaining significant period detail (including original shop fronts)
-  Main Hedgerow
-  Main tree groups and individual trees
-  Open Space - largely unrestricted public access
-  Open Space - limited or restricted public access
-  Significant Landmark
-  Viewpoint - open
-  Useful pedestrian links
-  Prominent walls
-  Feature of Special Interest
-  Viewpoint - enclosed

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