



Torre

Conservation Area

Character Appraisal



TORRE

CONSERVATION AREA

CHARACTER APPRAISAL

Revised

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TORBAY COUNCIL

CONTENTS

	PAGE
1. Location and Essential Characteristics	2
2 Historic Environment, Origins and Development	2
3 Plan Forms and Character Areas	4
3.3 (1) <i>The Villas and Semi-detached Villas</i>	
3.4 (2) <i>Avenue Road</i>	
3.5 (3) <i>Bampfylde Road Terraces</i>	
4 Architectural and Historic Qualities	5
4.1 Listed and Other Key Buildings	5
4.2 Building Form, Ornament and Materials	6
4.3 Condition of Buildings	7
4.4 Local Details	8
5 Character and Relationship of Spaces	8
6 Green Landscape and Trees	9
7 The Setting and Features of Special Importance	10
8 Extent of Loss, Damage and Intrusion	11
9 Summary	12
10 Conservation Area Policies	12
Bibliography	14

PHOTOGRAPHS

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

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

APPRAISAL MAPS

- Map One: Historic Buildings
- Map Two: Age of Buildings
- Map Three: Building Materials - Roofs
- Map Four: Building Materials - Walls
- Map Five: Important Features

1 LOCATION AND ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS

- 1.1 Torre conservation area is situated about 1km north-west of Torquay town centre; it is part of the interlocking and largely contiguous Torquay group of ten conservation areas; Belgravia lies to the south, Tormohun to the east, and Chelston to the west across the Torre Valley playing fields. The southern part of the conservation area between Falkland Road and Mill Lane had been part of the landscaped grounds of the Carys at Torre Abbey; the northern part was split between the Cary estate and the remnant manorial lands of Torre(mohun) acquired by the Palk family in 1768. The conservation area was developed as a suburb almost entirely in the last third of the 19th century.
- 1.2 Because there was no pre-existing settlement within the conservation area development was rapid. The established field tracks and new roads both aided development, whether ancient tracks such as Mill and Rillage Lanes; landscaped carriage drives such as Long Avenue – linking the Abbey to the original manorial and parish settlement of Torre – which became Falkland Road and Lime Avenue; or the new roads laid out after the coming of the Turnpike roads in 1821 and railway in 1848 such as Cleveland and Tor Park Roads. In form it is predominantly of spaciouly laid out detached and semi-detached later Victorian villas and some two-to-three storey terraces built alongside or adjoining a number of tree-lined streets. Development was largely complete by 1900 with minor infill continuing until the 1930s; there has only been limited and sporadic redevelopment since. However, several sizeable extensions have been added to the original villas, with a few even linked together to provide hotel, guest house or holiday flat accommodation. This is now the predominant use of a substantial proportion of the properties.

2 HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT, ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT

- 2.1 Torre is found as *Torra* in Domesday Book, and is *Torre* by 1242. The name deriving from the Old English *Torr*, a rocky hill; the historic settlement was located around the parish church of St Saviour (in the neighbouring Tormohun conservation area). The rocky hill being Tor Hill east of the church, rather than the more prominent Chapel Hill where St Michael's chapel is situated to the north of the conservation area.
- 2.2 The dominant historic and topographic influence on the area from the 12th to the 19th century was Torre Abbey, a house of Premonstratensian canons, founded in 1196 by William de Briwer, the lord of the manor of Torre. The Abbey lies to the south of the conservation area but its foundation grant included all land south of Mill Lane and west of Belgrave Road. At its dissolution in 1539, the Abbey was the richest house of its order and a significant possession to fall to the crown, its possessions included the manor of Torre from which it had been founded. After various lay tenures the Carys, who had been dispossessed of the neighbouring manor of Cockington, acquired the Abbey, its grounds and the surviving abbatial estate in 1662, and held them until 1930. The northern boundary of the abbey's own demesne was Mill Lane, which

formed the route linking Torre with Chelston and Cockington from medieval and Saxon times and possibly earlier.

- 2.3 On the north side of Old Mill Road where the conservation area forms a spur at its western edge, adjacent to the line of the railway, was situated Fulford's Mill. Historically this was part of Chelston, attached to the Manor of Cockington. The stream which divided the manors of Cockington and Torre runs behind the curtilages of 68-88 Avenue Road and separates their western boundaries from the eastern boundaries of the curtilages of 1-10 Millbrook Park Road. This is a good example of pre-Norman land tenure which has determined separate urban development and extents, with boundaries surviving over a thousand years. The mill and its 2 acres are mentioned in a 1449 *Inquisition post mortem* which followed the death of Jane, the second wife of Sir Robert Cary (the Cary were Lords of the manor of Cockington 1374-1654 with brief dispossessions). The mill was located on the north side of the road (within the conservation area) in what is now the curtilage of Park Vista while the miller's house and store lay on the south side of the road, outside the conservation area, in what are now the grounds of Cockington County Primary School. So much of the water supply having been diverted by railway and road construction the mill and its ancillary buildings were demolished in 1878. Confusingly it is recorded as Cockington Mills on the First Edition Ordnance Survey County Series map surveyed in 1861. This is the only part of the conservation area whose history and development are associated with Cockington and the Mallocks, rather than the Carys of Torre Abbey.
- 2.4 A Cary estate map of 1808 shows the area of what was to become Belgravia and the southern part of the Torre conservation areas almost devoid of any settlement other than Torre Abbey itself – an isolated building is shown on the angle between Mill Lane and what is now Bampfylde Road in front of All Saint's Church. The impetus is usually attributed to the opening of Torre Station, as the terminus of the branch from Newton Abbot in December 1848 but it is notable that the 1861 County Series survey shows development only at the eastern edge of the conservation area. The turnpike of Newton Road was completed in 1821 as far as Brunswick Square – on the edge of the historic settlement of Torre (itself confusingly the basis of the neighbouring Tormohun conservation area). It is only here and in Landsdowne Road (now Vansittart Road) closest to the old village that show pre-1860s semi-detached villas and terraces.
- 2.5 The Cary family's holding of the residual abbey, and part of the manorial, estates was undoubtedly pivotal in the later pattern of development. H G Cary (1828-40) almost ignored urban development, although a few modest plots were laid out on Warren Hill (Belgravia conservation area); at his death his heir L S S Cary did not come into the estate until after a nine-year minority. On his coming of age in 1849 L S S Cary began the redevelopment of his lands across Torquay. H G Cary had opposed the original extension of the railway from Torre into the town proper, it took 11 years for the mile-long extension to Torquay Station to be completed. The railway when extended from Torre via Torquay Station to Paignton in August 1859 was built on land belonging to the Mallocks of Cockington and not the Carys of Torre. Not as is commonly thought because of continuing Cary opposition, but because the Cary land

had already been earmarked for development and the financial return was needed. An estate map of 1858, though little changed from that 50 years earlier, does reveal superimposed upon it the lines for the layout of roads and house-plots in the fields. Only Abbey Vale, a villa isolated in its own substantial grounds appears before that date, separated by fields and orchards from the new Landsdowne Road to the east.

- 2.6 It was the railway which made the mass transport of industrially produced bulk building materials easy, and inevitable. For the Carys it enabled first the building of fashionable Belgravia, and then the more modest villas and terraces between Tor Park Road and Mill Lane, most in the distinctly Torquay Italianate style, which remained dominant until the end of the century. It is also the line of the railway which now forms the greater part of the western boundary of the conservation area. The First Edition OS County Series surveyed in 1862 clearly shows how the railway cuts across all the pre-existing landscape and field boundaries, most medieval.
- 2.6 Development was almost complete within a generation, the Church of All Saints, Bampfylde Street was built in the 1880s, when growth was probably at its most rapid. The OS Second Edition County Series surveyed in 1904 shows only the eastern side of Avenue Road, the north-western side of Falkland Road, and the west side of Rowdens Road devoid of housing. By 1933 the latter two areas had been infilled.
- 2.7 Recent changes have led to some former 19th century buildings at the rear of the villas, those probably originally built to accommodate carriages, being adapted mostly for commercial uses such as the car repair workshops in Lime Avenue. Here, although much reduced in number, the street trees at least preserve the spirit of Long Avenue, the formal northern approach to Torre Abbey.

3 PLAN FORMS AND CHARACTER AREAS

- 3.1 Most of Torre is built on a relatively gentle west-facing slopes. Some streets, those which follow historic boundaries, roughly follow the topographical contours with gently curving alignments, while others, essentially those of the Victorian lay out, are completely straight. To the south some streets, because of the dominant influence of Long Avenue, cross each other at a 45-degree angles, leading to some unusual plot dimensions; but this does mean that the buildings so affected are visible from widely differing viewpoints and levels. The latter is most obvious where the 19th century Bridge Road crosses over the sunken historic route of Mill Lane, the high retaining walls all built in grey limestone on both sides of the bridge. While the solid All Saints Church at the acute angle between the established Mill Lane and the new Bampfylde Road – two quite different aspects – typifies the bold urban scale on which the Victorians designed and built.
- 3.2 By far the greater part of Torre is made up of villas and semi-detached villas of 1860-1900 situated in their plots; this homogeneity is only differentiated at the periphery. However, three semi-contrasting character sub-areas may be recognised; these are marked on Appraisal Map One and are:

- 3.3 *(1) The Villas and Semi-detached Villas*
The sub-area includes most of the conservation area from the earlier villas and semis along Newton Road, through those on both the old roads and new tree-lined streets of the 19th century development to those on the north side of Lime Avenue facing the larger villas of Belgravia.
- 3.4 *(2) Avenue Road*
Avenue Road on its east side has in the main the same sort of semi-detached villas as elsewhere; but on the west side, where the plot sizes are constrained by the railway, terraces groups of four dominate, and the even more cramped 20th century development on Millbrook Park Road, squeezed between the railway embankment and the stream. Overwhelmingly the common industry of both sub-areas is of hotels and guest houses. Avenue Road is also dominated by through traffic in a way that no other road wholly within the conservation area is.
- 3.5 *(3) Bampfylde Road Terraces*
Only in the upper part of Bampfylde Road where the terraces are adjacent to the similar plan forms and building types of Tormohun, and where there are former light industrial and service buildings between Bath Lane and Lime Avenue is there a marked change. Though even this small area contains two smaller villas and two larger semi-detached pairs, one now joined as the Hotel Virginia.

4 ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORIC QUALITIES

4.1 LISTED & OTHER KEY BUILDINGS

- 4.1.1 There are six listed buildings or structures, all grade II within the conservation area; all are denoted here in bold. **The Parish Church of All Saints** in Bampfylde Road was built to the designs of John Loughborough Pearson (while he superintended his work for the new Truro Cathedral) between 1883 and 1889; it is of coursed- and smooth-faced local grey limestone, with Bath stone dressings, and a slate roof with crested ridge tiles. The original plan included a tower which was never completed. Internally there are 19th century polychromatic floor tiles, and stained glass by Clayton and Bell. (Agatha Christie was baptised here in 1890.) Close to the Church, also in Bampfylde Road, are **two K6 Telephone Kiosks**, designed in 1935 by Sir Giles Gilbert-Scott they are the typical red-painted cast iron domed roof examples with margin glazing to three sides.
- 4.1.2 Only one villa, **Abbey Vale, 49 Avenue Road** is listed; built by 1860, it replaced one of three cottages present here by 1842, the other two were on the site of the present filling station. The villa exhibits, with later additions, a three-bay stucco frontage with a large projecting central porch supported by Ionic columns under a rebuilt parapet. The first floor has twelve pane double-hung sash windows, whilst those on the ground floor are one-over one-pane sashes, indicating a probable re-glazing in the more prevalent Torbay idiom. Its formal garden initially stretched to Mill Lane and remained unbuilt upon until the mid 20th century.

- 4.1.3 At the northern edge of the conservation area, **Torre Railway Station** was built in 1848 for Brunel's South Devon Railway, and enlarged in 1882. It is timber-framed, clad with horizontal boarding under a low-pitched slate roof, hipped at each end, with thin brick or rendered stacks. There are many ornamental features which typify 19th-century station architecture, especially the windows in the style of Gibbs, panelled doors within pilaster frames, and a canopy with a fretted fascia on cast-iron brackets. It is currently being used as the base of an architectural salvage firm and little altered. The steel-and-glass Halfords stands on the site of the engine turntable for the original railway terminus.
- 4.1.4 At the south end of Avenue Road at the six-way junction is **Abbey Dene** an unaltered late 19th century lodge cottage in a Swiss Chalet style; it is built in Flemish-bond brickwork with ornamental slate-hung gables. Empty for a period it is has been undergoing restoration. At this corner it complements the former Torre Abbey estate complex of listed buildings: Ocean Drive and the Torre Abbey lodges across the road in the neighbouring Belgravia conservation area.
- 4.1.5 The former Clarence Hotel, purpose built in the mid-19th century opposite Torre station was demolished in 1999; it has been redeveloped with flats with façades fronting both Newton and Avenue Roads. A late 19th century glazed covered area added to the former hotel and having fine cast-iron detail has been retrieved.
- 4.1.6 While there are relatively few individual buildings that are especially striking or significant in their own right, the distinctive character of the conservation area comes from the combination of form, materials, detail, topography and spatial arrangement. Many of the detached villas are stuccoed and enclosed by limestone walls, especially those still privately owned, or where the rear of a plot borders an adjoining street. The relatively low boundary wall heights, well below two metres, though sometimes topped by a hedge or shrubs, and with gate piers helps to give the area a good sense of space and proportion rather than undue enclosure.
- 4.1.7 The quality and importance is communal, creating a pleasing ambience of building groups, such as those, for example, in Tor Park Road where detached or semi-detached stuccoed villas are gently stepped down the slope. Other good groups include the spacious two-storey terraces with prominent dormers in Bampfylde Road, and the semi-detached groups in Falkland Road and Rowdens Road with their backs almost equally prominent in Bridge Road and Bath Lane respectively. Vansittart Road with its mix of terraces, semi-detached and villas all within a small compass often delights; the addition of an extra house to an existing terrace of four shows that such new building can work when well designed, even if the use of ubiquitous PVCu detracts from the achievement. The overall impression is of modest good taste without showy individual substance – very much more valuable as a unified area than just a collection of separate buildings.

4.2 BUILDING FORM, ORNAMENT & USE OF MATERIALS

- 4.2.1 The use of stucco or plain render on stone under a slate roof overwhelmingly marks out the character of Torre. A handful of houses at disparate locations are of brick, or

part-brick built, being partially rendered at first floor level, with plain tile roofs. The use of exposed stone is quite rare, with only two or three villas so built; a few of the smaller outbuildings in Lime Avenue are of limestone or sandstone, complementing the ubiquitous stone boundary walls.

- 4.2.2 The typical villa form in Torre is square in plan, and stuccoed with a hipped slate roof and red clay ridge tiles, some crested, which very occasionally display decorative finials; some have projecting gables incorporating square bays; the chimney stacks either rise from the eaves and project from the side, or are larger and squat rising from ridge level. Openings can vary widely in detail with paired semi-circular arched or tri-partite windows being among the more common examples, especially in the projecting bays. Door openings with plain semi-circular fanlights above are often recessed in a porch framed by stucco detail; this may typically include moulded pilasters and arches, or pediments with a keystone. Additional ornament to buildings extends in a few instances to rusticated quoins, string courses, bracketed eaves and decorative barge boards. A few good examples of 19th century colour-patterned glass are present, but if once common they appear to have become quite rare.
- 4.2.3 The corner detail of buildings, especially at road junctions, can be quite subtle with symmetrical frontages and side, or even rear, main entrances – sometimes deliberately designed to maximise the front window views. Although most structural features are robust enough to resist complete transformation by later alterations and additions, much historic character detail has been eroded in the conservation area by insensitive modifications.
- 4.2.4 Many examples of original joinery are still in evidence, such as four-panelled doors, detailing to eaves and gables, and double-hung sash windows in a variety of forms. These were added as part of a comprehensive design discipline, intended to treat the building as a whole, and to be mirrored in the case of semi-detached villas.
- 4.2.5 Garden walls, mostly of randomly coursed limestone, are normally freestanding but where the topography imposes sharp changes of level, they are sometimes transformed into retaining walls. Many of the walls incorporate decorative gate piers, in stucco or stone, while a few original iron gates also survive. Additionally there are a few remaining former tradesmen's' entrances through segmental arched gateways; while street name plaques set into some walls are the still in their original Victorian blue ceramic tiles. Away from the main traffic routes, several street lamp bases have fluted cast iron columns, embossed with local foundry names; where original they will have formerly carried gas lamps before conversion to electricity in the early 20th century.

4.3 CONDITION OF BUILDINGS

- 4.3.1 Some buildings, including the Parish Church, are showing signs of lack of maintenance and deterioration, but total loss through decay appears to have been arrested. The small hoteliers who constantly upgrade and, in some cases, add overlarge extensions have seriously compromised the inherent character of some of

the principal former villas. Those in Newton Road in particular are now almost unrecognisable in their original form.

- 4.3.2 Throughout the conservation area, re-roofing in artificial slates and the substitution of period joinery with PVCu double-glazed windows and doors is widely undermining what remains of the solid Victorian character. Many of the original villas in Avenue Road, probably purpose built around 1870 as accommodation for visitors, had distinctive large tri-partite windows down to floor level with internal reeded shutters and mid panels. Already, an alarming number have recently been replaced with double-glazing, and timber, with all the fine quality detail discarded.
- 4.3.3 A particularly incongruous example of what disastrous results can occur when the retention of traditional materials is not deemed necessary can be observed on the east side of Cleveland Road where the wholly inappropriate materials used: wood, brick and PVCu conspire to deny the building's late 19th century semi-detached antecedents. It is not only the appalling aesthetic that is regrettable, but in the absence of Section 4 controls there are few if any, statutory means to control such lamentable alterations.

4.4 LOCAL DETAILS

- 4.4.1 There is a strong and pleasant contrast between the gleaming white stucco, the mainly pale grey limestone walls and rich vegetative cover, much of it evergreen. The sloping or undulating topography, giving more distant glimpses of adjoining suburbs, provides much of the inherent character that constitutes the image of Torquay as The English Riviera.
- 4.4.2 The 'one-over-one' light, double-hung sash windows, some with semi-circular heads, is a local characteristic strongly represented here. This feature appears calculated to emulate the 'sky-over-sea' vistas which, whilst not visible in much of the conservation area – apart from the upper floors of the buildings towards the area's southern end – is strongly associated with what drew the early residents, and which the visitors now mostly come to enjoy.

5 CHARACTER AND RELATIONSHIP OF SPACES

- 5.1 There is a contrast between the broad, straight, boulevard-style major streets and the gently curving, sometimes undulating and generally quieter, back roads. The amount of space between, and the orientation of, the villas gives rise to a pleasing air of spaciousness. In an area around the northern end of Avenue Road, much character has been lost as a result of some unsympathetic modern infill, conversion to flats, and the competitiveness between guest houses leading to excessive signage.
- 5.2 Some fairly sharp differences in level enliven the relationship between buildings and provide both containment within retaining walls and contrasting glimpses over, or between, buildings, sometimes with views towards more distant skylines. The northern half of Cleveland Road is a typical example. Conversely, height differentials

between the front and rear of buildings sometimes gives rise to ugly and overbearing front or rear elevations where later alterations or extensions upset the original proportions. Some walls on slopes also appear to pose particular maintenance problems, especially where the downward thrust of the slope causes outward bowing. This can be exacerbated by the dense cover of trees and shrubs.

- 5.3 The character of the conservation area has suffered however from an over-preponderance of hotels and guest houses in some parts, especially in Avenue and Newton Roads, and to a lesser extent Bampfylde and Falkland Roads. In these areas prominent signs, many internally illuminated, plastic door and window canopies, hard surface forecourts with boundaries removed to accommodate off-street parking, all have had a detrimental affect. Elsewhere, by contrast, some small hotels and guest houses feature attractive sign-writing and show where care has been taken to preserve the original boundary features, and retain the original windows and doors. These are mainly found fronting the quieter roads, such as Cleveland, Vansittart and Bridge Roads; here where on-street parking is also permitted, many more original boundary features remain undisturbed.

6 GREEN LANDSCAPE AND TREES

- 6.1 Public open space in the conservation area is limited, apart from two small triangular areas: one between the southern end of Falkland Road and Avenue Road; the other to the east of All Saints' Church, at the apex of Mill Lane and Bampfylde Road. Originally the large triangle formed by Cleveland, Tor Park and Avenue Roads was laid out as Tor Park, but by 1904 this had become Torre Park Nurseries, and by 1933 it had been developed into 9 semi-detached and 2 detached houses. West of the railway line the Torre Valley North playing fields, which lie between Mill Lane and Walnut Road, inexplicably, form an undesignated island between the conservation areas of Torre, Belgravia and Chelston. This area was the celebrated pre-war Devon Rosery before the advent of Cockington Primary School. Its green expanse of about 2.5ha (over 6 acres) is an important element in the townscape, continuing the green artery which runs through Belgravia to the sea. It should be brought within the Torre conservation area, to control any development at its edges.
- 6.2 Within the present boundaries of Torre, the overall impression is of a rich, almost park-like, setting to most villas made up of deciduous street trees (mostly planes and limes), and substantial numbers of other mature trees and large shrubs within the grounds of villas. Many of the walls are now topped by hedges or shrubbery, while some of the mature trees in close proximity to walls and pavements are beginning to pose structural problems through root spread. Where ivy occurs, it is sometimes causing structural damage by loosening mortar. The seemingly ubiquitous palm trees are mainly confined to the grounds of hotels and guest-houses, but even mature specimens tend to be limited in size and spread, and fortunately do not normally give rise to maintenance problems.
- 6.3 The mature street trees, some of which may date back almost 200 years in Lime Avenue and Falkland Road, form a strong visual feature which is essential part of the

character and setting of the conservation area. Unusually, for the most part, they rise not from the pavement, but from the carriageway itself. Some of the planes especially have become over-mature and constant heavy pruning has led to some specimens becoming stunted. Their future conservation and possible replacement is bound to become an important issue in the years ahead and regular observation is necessary.

7 THE SETTING AND FEATURES OF SPECIAL IMPORTANCE

7.1 The conservation area is one of several in Torquay that typifies a particular phase in the town's Victorian residential development, both in its social stratification and in its date. Torre lies somewhere in the middle, later and less opulent than the Lincombes or the Warberries, earlier than Cary Park, and of a higher social standing than some of the earlier terraces which infill the historic centre of the Tormohun conservation area – historic Torre. The sloping valley setting gives the area a sense of containment with outward views to the surrounding tree-clad slopes to the north, and west to Chelston across the valley. There is always the hint of the sea to the south beyond Belgravia; in all a varied and pleasant area rather than one of outstanding quality.

7.2 Torre may be considered, with the adjoining conservation areas of Belgravia and Tormohun to the south and east, as part of a wider but connected locale, embracing the Saxon and medieval settlement and parish centre (Tormohun), and the abbey founded on manorial land (Belgravia). The transition between the conservation areas may not be seamless but neither is it stark: the semi-detached villas on the north side of Falkland Road, naturally complement the larger houses on the south side; similarly the short terraces on the east side of Vansittart Road echo some on the west side of South Street. To the west the Torre Valley Playing Fields, that important and wide area of level green open space, and the railway beyond, provide a natural boundary before the heights of the Chelston conservation area. Here the rising ground on the opposite side of the valley offers pleasantly contained views from Torre. Chelston while a Victorian suburb of similar date, and also set in a mature landscape, has a distinctly different history and character. While historically the area west of Avenue Road belonged to Cockington, the line of the railway established in 1859 now forms the demonstrative boundary; hence the historical accident that the site of the medieval mill of one manor now lies within the modern designated conservation area shaped by another.

7.3 It is possible to summarise the features that give the conservation area its special character as follows:

- ❖ the setting of the conservation area with significant outward views towards Chapel Hill above Torre Station to the north, and across the valley towards Chelston to the west; and the proximity to Torre Abbey and its associated landscape to the south;
- ❖ the overall planned layout from the late 1850s onwards providing an attractive townscape and several important vistas, enhanced by the differences in level and the

confidence and ingenuity with which building on sloping ground has been handled; thus a combination of form, materials, detail, topography and spatial arrangement;

- ❖ the quality and communal importance of building groups, which are very much more valuable as a unity than as a collection of separate buildings;
- ❖ the survival of a large proportion of period detail and inherent character in the many unlisted buildings, such as the decorative stucco and complementary period embellishments, carved eaves brackets, and gable-end barge-boards, semi-circular and segmental arched openings, and significant corner treatment, such as rusticated quoins;
- ❖ the survival of boundary walls, ornamental gate piers, some original ironwork and colour-patterned glass, timber detail to doors, windows, porches, and glazed canopies;
- ❖ the number of visually important mature trees, especially the significant number of street trees, which appear to have been an integral part of the original layout.

8 EXTENT OF LOSS, DAMAGE AND INTRUSION

8.1 The character of the conservation area largely hinges on its significance as a discrete and distinctive suburb of Torquay, whose 19th century villas, while not of the highest order, and where not unduly damaged by later alterations and additions, contain much original character.

8.2 The previous sections have outlined some of the specific conservation problems that the area is subject to. These can be briefly summarised as follows:

- ◆ unsympathetic extensions and modifications, which have wholly or partially degraded the original integrity of the building;
- ◆ the loss of symmetry in semi-detached villas, where there have been marked frontage changes to elevations and boundaries, including, mostly in the case of hotels and guest houses, conflicting colour schemes and the opening up of front gardens and forecourts for off-road parking;
- ◆ the widespread replacement of original doors and windows. Even those with failing joinery should be repairable, or replaced in the original materials, which are sustainable and will outlast the PVCu;
- ◆ the damage to boundary and retaining walls by a lack of maintenance, and root damage by vegetation;
- ◆ street lamps which have no relation to their historic context or precedent;

- ◆ intensive signage which insensitively competes for maximum visitor attention on the main entry routes rather exhibiting a restrained but appropriate aesthetic;
- ◆ street trees which have died have created an asymmetric pattern for those which survive because there is no apparent policy for replacement; those which are now over mature will exacerbate the problem unless a replacement strategy is adopted.

9 SUMMARY

9.1 On first impressions, Torre appears to have lost much of its Victorian ‘feel’ owing to intensive demands of the hotel and guest house trade on their buildings. These, in this part of Torquay, offer much less expensive accommodation than those larger establishments nearer the sea. Thus many insensitive modifications, installed in answer to a competitive commercial environment, now overlay or even obscure buildings intelligently planned and built with feeling at the latter end of the Victorian development. Fortunately there are areas where period detail still predominates. When the unfortunate practice of installing modern so-called convenience materials and surfaces – ultimately unsustainable – is arrested, and then reversed, the conservation area will be appreciated much more as a whole, than the lack of individually listed buildings suggests at present. Torre is an important part of Torquay’s historic built environment.

9.2 There are two other aspects of this environment which also require special consideration. One is the extent of walls that are in a relatively poor state of repair; in a few instances, they are becoming structurally unsound. The other is the number of street trees, which, although of vital importance to the visual quality of the conservation area, are reaching senescence; where they have already gone the regular planned symmetry is giving way to a haphazard gap-toothed effect.

10 CONSERVATION AREA POLICIES

10.1 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)

10.2 To frame specific policies within the Torre conservation area:

- (1) All unlisted buildings identified as key buildings or groups of buildings that contribute to the historic built environment 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, 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 Torre Valley North playing fields which should be included within the revised boundaries of the conservation area; thus recognising the integrity of this key area of open space at the junction with Torre, Chelston and Belgravia conservation areas.

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Initial research by John Fisher BA MA MRTPI IHBC
June 2000

PHOTOGRAPHS

The Setting

- 1 Across Avenue Road the conservation area slopes upwards and east from the Torre Valley North playing fields.
- 2 The pavilions and playing fields of Torre Valley North, the green heart of the area - 6½ acres (2.6ha) - not formally with the conservation area, but an essential part of it which should be designated.
- 3-4 The many street trees are a prominent feature of Torre; they are a relict from the earlier 19th century park layout. These London planes line both sides of lower Bampfylde Road, in the background are the Torre Valley playing fields (3). The trees clearly extend into the road (4), this with their size and maturity can be seen as an hindrance to vehicular traffic, but it undoubtedly limits the use of the road by larger lorries, and they provide the historic link with the former grounds of Torre Abbey whose remaining parkland lies 150m to the south.



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- 5 In Falkland Road the trees of Torre Abbey Park's former Long Avenue are accommodated on the spacious pavement, though this disappears when Lime Avenue continues the original route. The simple benches provided in the late 19th century in the first flush of pride by the new Borough of Torquay have been sadly neglected.

The Villas and Semi-detached Villas

- 6 The earliest buildings within the conservation area were those that flanked the south side of Newton Road, put up after the completion of the turnpike road improvements in 1821. This is still a major traffic through route. The villas and semis have almost all been converted to hotels, the latter often joined or extended. Here the semi-detached pair of 18-20 Newton Road has become a single hotel. The basic plan with its low Italianate tower, long round-headed windows, plat bands and rusticated quoins is highly attractive. But the bungalow-like extensions, indifferent ironwork, plastic canopies, unattractive signage, top-hung windows and capped stacks which have had their pots removed all detract considerably.
- 7 Away from the Newton Road, the streets are more enclosed and much quieter: 36 Cleveland Road, at its junction with Tor Park Roads, both on quite different levels, is in excellent repair, all its original features respected - the conservatory is undergoing restoration. Beyond the semi-detached pair Tavy Cleave and Cartref step down the hill and wind round to the south.
- 8 On Rillage Lane the form is similar with the corner house aligned east to west, as No. 34 is here at the junction with Cleveland Road, and the others aligned north to south. Where original decorative features and boundary walls both remain intact, the conservation area shows itself at its best.



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- 9 Within a short distance of little over 200m Vansittart Road includes villas, semis and terraced house groups. On the east side, which is adjacent to Tormohun, this was originally Landsdowne Road, which terminated with the southern curtilage of what is now 7 Vansittart Road. The curtilages of the South Street terraces Nos. 33-51 extending well to the west of where they do today. Eventually these were shortened and the road was pushed through to join South Street (demolishing the existing houses which stretched to Mill Lane) as Vansittart Road. The large semi-detached pair of 1-3 Vansittart Road was the erected, larger than was general for the size of the plot. Lothair, No. 1 is often obscured from view by the large street trees and its high hedge, here in the winter the full-height double bays and the high airy conservatory can be seen; the walls, gate-piers and gate (35) are all superb examples of well a planned and thoughtful design.
- 10 Almost opposite is an attractive former villa, now subdivided as Nos 6 & 8. The simple elegance of the two-over-two sash windows is not matched by the PVCu top-hung replacements, the plastic strip merely an attempt to match the horizontal glazing bar. The large satellite aerial on the façade of No. 8 is not only ugly but inappropriate, it could easily be masked by locating it behind the stack.
- 11 To the south the new developments of Prestbury Park strive to echo the terrace-group-of-four form. Inevitably they are smaller than their originals, but with horizontal plat banding and differential heights, accomodated by the step down the slope towards Mill Lane the achievement is not bad. The sash form in PVCu with their thick cross-sections shows why the original form and material is superior, while the boundary walls, though of limestone, seem unfinished lacking any top coping.
- 12 The plot at the the junction of Cleveland Road and Mill Lane with Bridge Road forming the high level boundary is even more demanding. Here the detached house of 2 Mill Lane again takes the the footprint of a semi-detached type. The result is prominent but not over-decorated, the impressive early-20th century conservatory masks the south-facing oriel and has an awkward join with the east-facing bay. The poor condition of the wall is a cause of major concern, not only aesthetic, but also structural for on the Mill Lane side it has a structural, retaining function.



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- 13 South of Mill Lane the Victorian development follows the early-19th century layout of tree-lined avenues in Torre Abbey Park, the roads and lanes crossing at 45 degrees. Bridge and Bampfylde Roads intersect at just such an angle, here the change of level allows the semi-detached pair of 25 Bampfylde Road and 8 Bridge Road an extra storey at the rear, and a balcony over the garden. Once again when the original sash form is compared with the PVCu imitations it is the latter which is obviously the poorer. Similarly the demolition of the boundary wall to insert a timber gate - inevitably giving over the garden to car parking - introduces an alien and unattractive material.
- 14 Bath Lane south of Bridge Road functions as a service lane for the large properties, now mostly hotels, on Bampfylde and Falkland Roads. There is an intimacy in the scale of the lane enhanced by the high survival of rear boundary walls, softened by vegetation.
- 15 Abbey Dene at the Avenue/Walnut Road junction sits in isolation in the southeast corner of the Torre Valley North playing fields. It has been on the Buildings-at-Risk register, but was undergoing restoration in the summer of 2005. The late-19th century brick house with its ornamental slate-hung gables in the style of a Swiss chalet is unique in the conservation area.

The Avenue Road area

- 16 Torre Station at the northwestern corner of the conservation area was originally built in 1848 and enlarged in 1882. It has the typical timber-framed, horizontally clad boarding of such stations, here founded on a low limestone dwarf wall. Also typical of 19th-century station architecture are the many ornamental features: the Gibbs-style windows, panelled doors within pilaster frames, and a canopy with a fretted fascia carried on cast-iron brackets. Its use as a warehouse of architectural salvage has preserved it. The steel-and-glass Halfords to the south on the site of the engine turntable for the original railway terminus does nothing to enhance the station setting, or the entrance to the conservation area.



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- 17 Opposite Torre Station on the opposite side of Newton Road, and thus strictly outside the conservation area boundary, a tram shelter survives. It is built into the retaining wall of St Michael's Hill and retains its large jettied canopy carried on elaborate cast-iron brackets and central pier. It makes an attractive conjunction with the station, harking back to a period of integrated transport.
- 18 A recent addition to the conservation area in 2000, the flats on the site of the Clarence Hotel stand at the junction of the two major through routes, Newton and Avenue Roads, one towards Tormohun and central Torquay, the other to Belgravia and the sea front. The slate roofs and stucco work with decorative horizontal banding, prominent quoins and round-headed windows below the gablets all echo the building forms of the conservation area.
- 19-20 Typical Avenue Road terrace groups of four; of Nos 116-122 in the foreground all retain their front boundary walls and the central pair their gate piers, two preserve their original sash windows. The canopy and satellite aerials are, as always, intrusive. The long row of the latter at first floor rather than chimney level creates a bizarre vista. The side view of 116 shows where the guests' car park has been located; the rear extension is early and certainly present by 1900 (20).



17.



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- 21 Behind the curtilages of 68-88 Avenue Road lies the only part of the Domesday manor of Cockington within the conservation area. This is occupied by two terrace groups, one of three and one of four; and the 11 houses of Millbrook Park Road squeezed up against the railway embankment. Here the terrace of three: Laburnham Lodge, Park Vista, and Millbridge House, was built after the medieval mill of Chelston, Fulford's Mill, and its ancillary buildings were demolished in 1878. The mill itself occupied the area of the front garden of Park Vista now given over to car hardstanding - behind the sign to Millbrook Park. Its ancillary buildings lay within the grounds of the primary school.

The Bampfylde Road Terraces

- 22 As Bampfylde Road progresses up the hill from Avenue Road villas and semis are present either side; where it crosses Bridge Road obliquely the sub area is entered. The corner house here 5 Bridge Road, on the opposite side from No. 8 (12) continues as terrace of 11, 3-23 Bampfylde Road. The intelligent treatment of the corner house, its plan and roof line following the angle of the road junction is somewhat vitiated by the overlarge and inappropriately placed Torbay palm, signage and canopies.
- 23 Looking towards the east end of Bampfylde Road the street trees survive only on the north side, nearer the church. The attractiveness of the terraces as a group with their attic dormers is evident, only the canopies strike a discordant note.
- 24 As they should look: 19 Bampfylde Road with hardly any later additions to the original pattern, and crucially nothing taken away. The wall design adjusts its form to the slope of the hill, typical Victorian attention to simple detail.



21.



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24.

- 25 Nos. 3 & 5 Bampfylde Road, next to All Saints Church, preserve their original frontages and details - the gate pier could easily be restored; the coach lamps are simple lapses in taste. A pleasing contrast is provided by the limestone and yellow sandstone details of the church.
- 26-27 John Loughborough Pearson's All Saints Church 1883-9 is of coursed, smooth-faced local grey limestone, with Bath stone dressings, and a slate roof with crested ridge tiles. It was thoughtfully designed to take account of very different levels either side: a high frontage on its north against Mill Lane (26) and a more level one on its south against Bampfylde Road (27). The planned tower was never begun.



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27.

- 28-29 At the junction with Mill Lane 2 Vansittart Road shows the façade of a semi-detached type, behind typical boundary walls with a regular, stepped crenellated finish (28). But from Mill Lane the form continues as a terrace of six, the west end again taking the form of a semi's façade (29). It is a well thought out solution to both demanding topography and limited plot size. The view here is from Bampfylde Street across the open space in front of All Saints.
- 30 Bath Lane north of Bridge Road has a different character from that to the south of it (14); it is level rather than sloping, the rear of the Bampfylde Street properties are close packed terraces, while those on the Lime Avenue side are former workshops and stable units converted to small cottages. Here the triangular terrace of 1-3 Bridge Road, and the stone-built detached house of Wrington behind its high walls give the sub-area a much less homogeneous character than elsewhere within the conservation area.
- 31 Lime Avenue itself continues the original line of the early-19th century Long Avenue, terminating in a cul-de-sac; the traffic through flow following the line of Falkland Road, which links with Lucius Street. None the less it is wide, although most of the street trees have been lost except at the north (closed end); 2 semi-detached pairs have been fitted into the space between it and Falkland Road, behind the Belgrave Road frontage. Endwood and Linden Lodge lie to the right, the further pair behind has been joined as the Hotel Virginia.



28.



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31.

Details

- 32 The elaborate glazed entry to Endwood from Lime Avenue: high walls, monumental piers, and a wide double door.
- 33-34 Gate piers: an elaborate example from 32 Newton Road; it is well cut with an intricate pyramidal cap, concave and stepped, topped by a highly decorative urn (33). A more typically vernacular one from Avenue Lodge off Bridge Road, near Falkland Road - the gate itself has long since gone.
- 35 A fine wood-and-iron pedestrian gate to Lothair, 1 Vansittart Road (9).



32.



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34.



35.

- 36 A cast-iron finger post, typical of the late-19th and early-20th century at the six-way junction between Falkland Road; Chestnut and Walnut Roads; and Avenue Road and The King's Drive, where Belgravia and Torre conservation areas meet.
- 37 One of a number of cast-iron fluted columns set up for public gas lighting; a number survive throughout the conservation area. They are often embossed with local foundry names and now support automated electric street lights.
- 38 A number of Victorian blue ceramic single-letter street name tiles survive.

Threats

- 39 Overlarge extensions which conceal and replace the original plan forms can be seriously detrimental to the distinctive character of the conservation area. The hotels on Newton Road not only have extensions to their fronts (6); a number have also been insensitively extended at the rear. Here it is in the form of enclosed verandah, which obscures the carefully designed rear elevations, removing the lower bay windows. The slope between Newton Road and the upper part of Cleveland Road (north of Tor Park Road) is steep so the effect of any large rear extension is exacerbated by the topography.



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39.

- 40 A number of the historic 19th-century buildings have replaced the original glazing and windows; or added overlarge extensions; or have removed decorative design features; or replaced original materials with inferior substitutes; or have even demolished key elements. Fortunately only one building has transgressed in all these fields: this rear elevation is one half of a Victorian semi-detached house in Cleveland Road. It is utterly unrecognisable as such, with only the limestone boundary wall gives a hint of the form and detail lost.
- 41 In the 1920s a number of houses were built on the south side of Cleveland Road, on the site of Tor Park Nurseries, where they form an enclave quite different from the rest of Torre. Though small in scale they too have been altered, often without due consideration. Even where the boundary walls survive intact the addition of flat-roof extensions, replacement windows, stairs to a flat conversion, a prefabricated garage, and stark brick gate piers are all detrimental to the character and local distinctiveness here.
- 42 Both the window types: stained glass and the narrow round-headed sashes, and the openings with their decorative reveals are at risk when the fabric deteriorates.



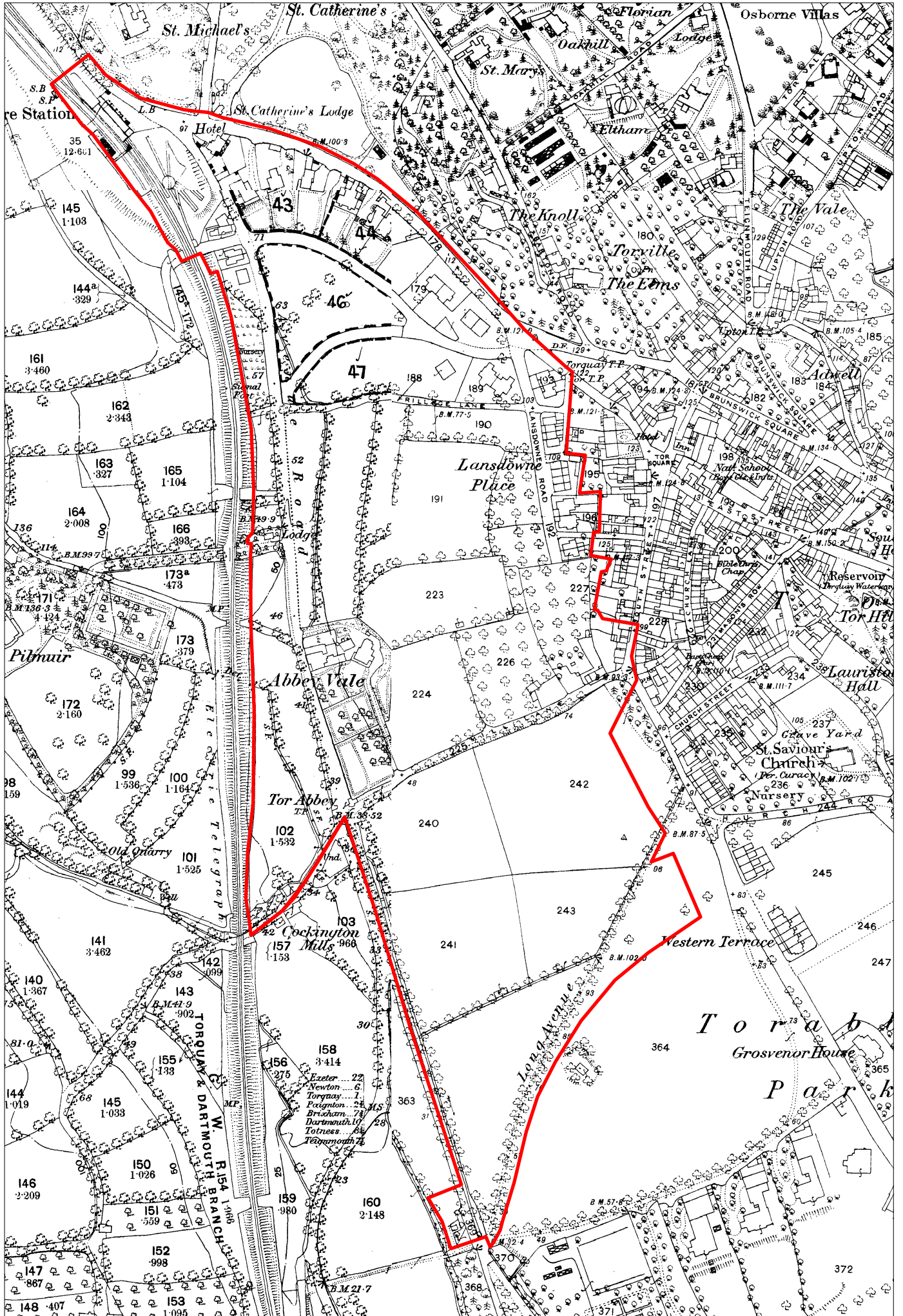
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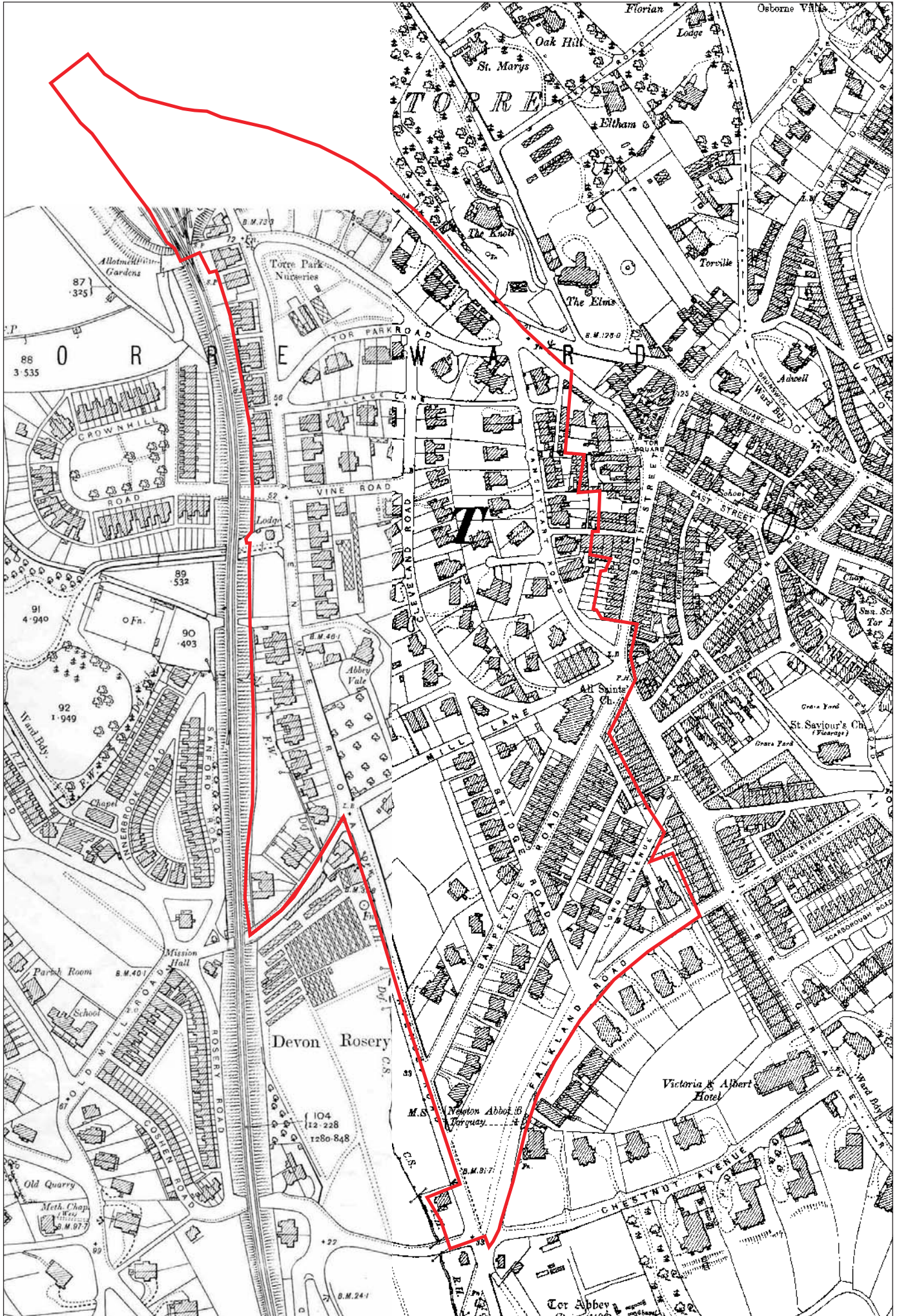


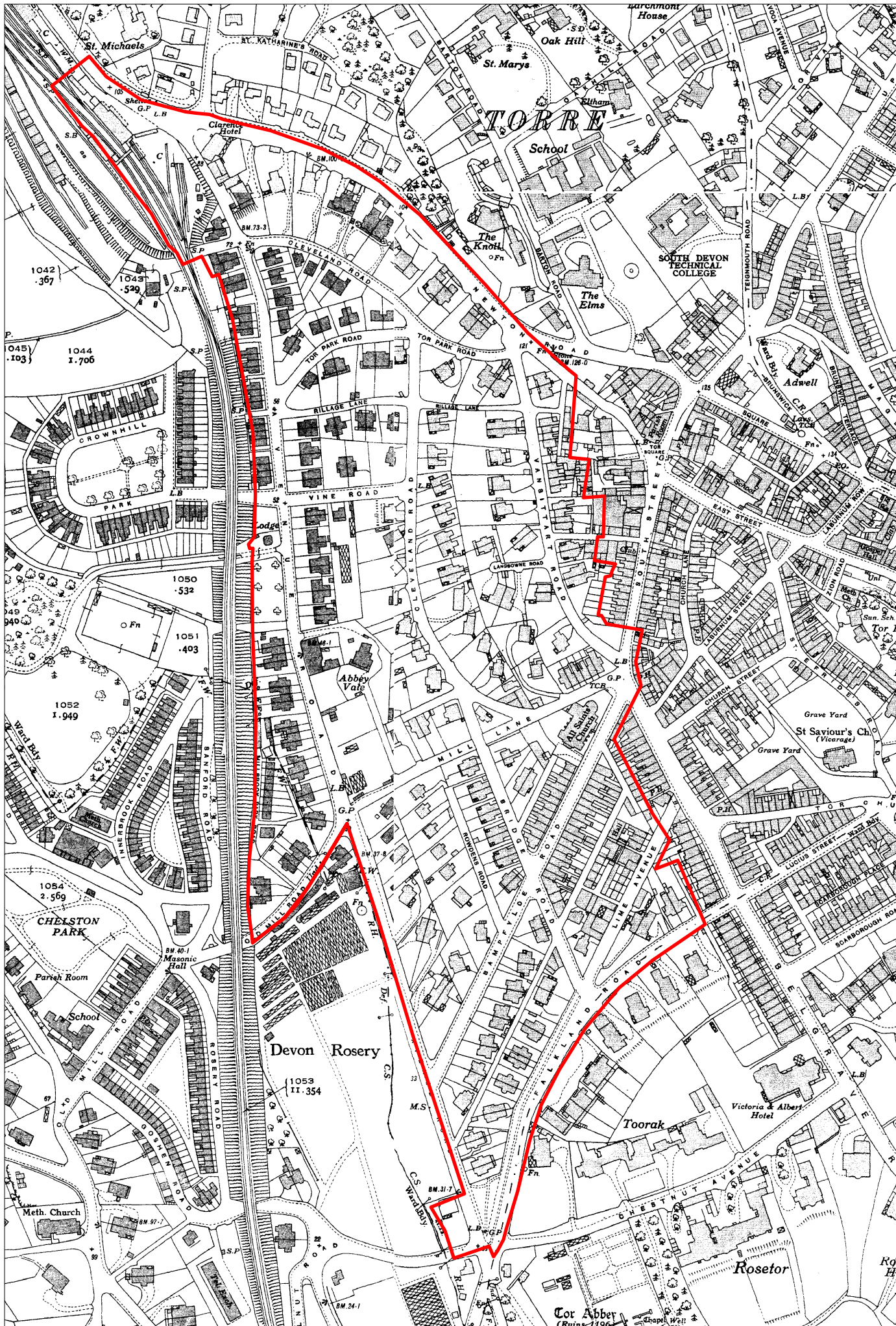
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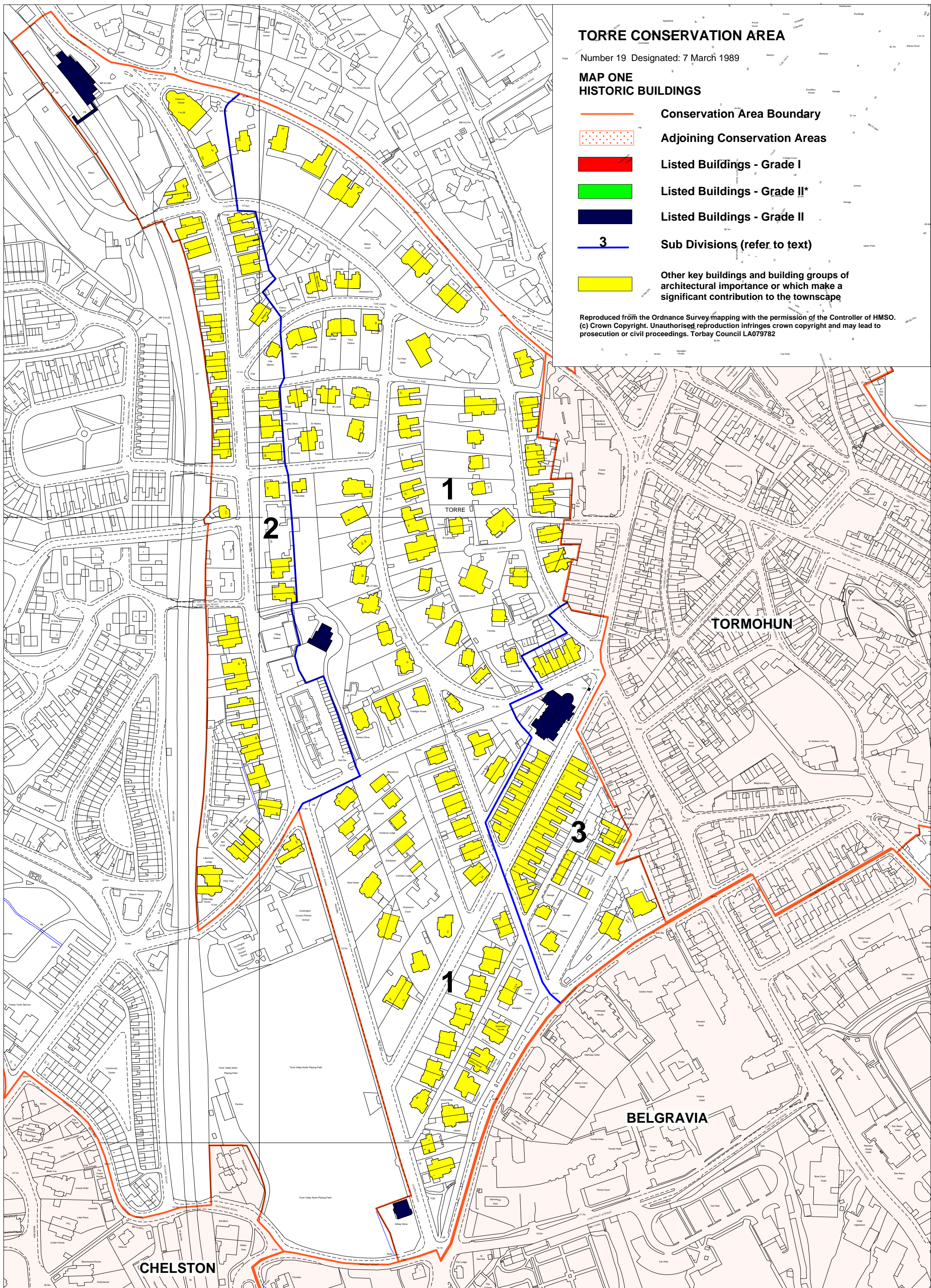
TORRE CONSERVATION AREA

Number 19 Designated: 7 March 1989

MAP ONE HISTORIC BUILDINGS

-  Conservation Area Boundary
-  Adjoining Conservation Areas
-  Listed Buildings - Grade I
-  Listed Buildings - Grade II*
-  Listed Buildings - Grade II
-  3 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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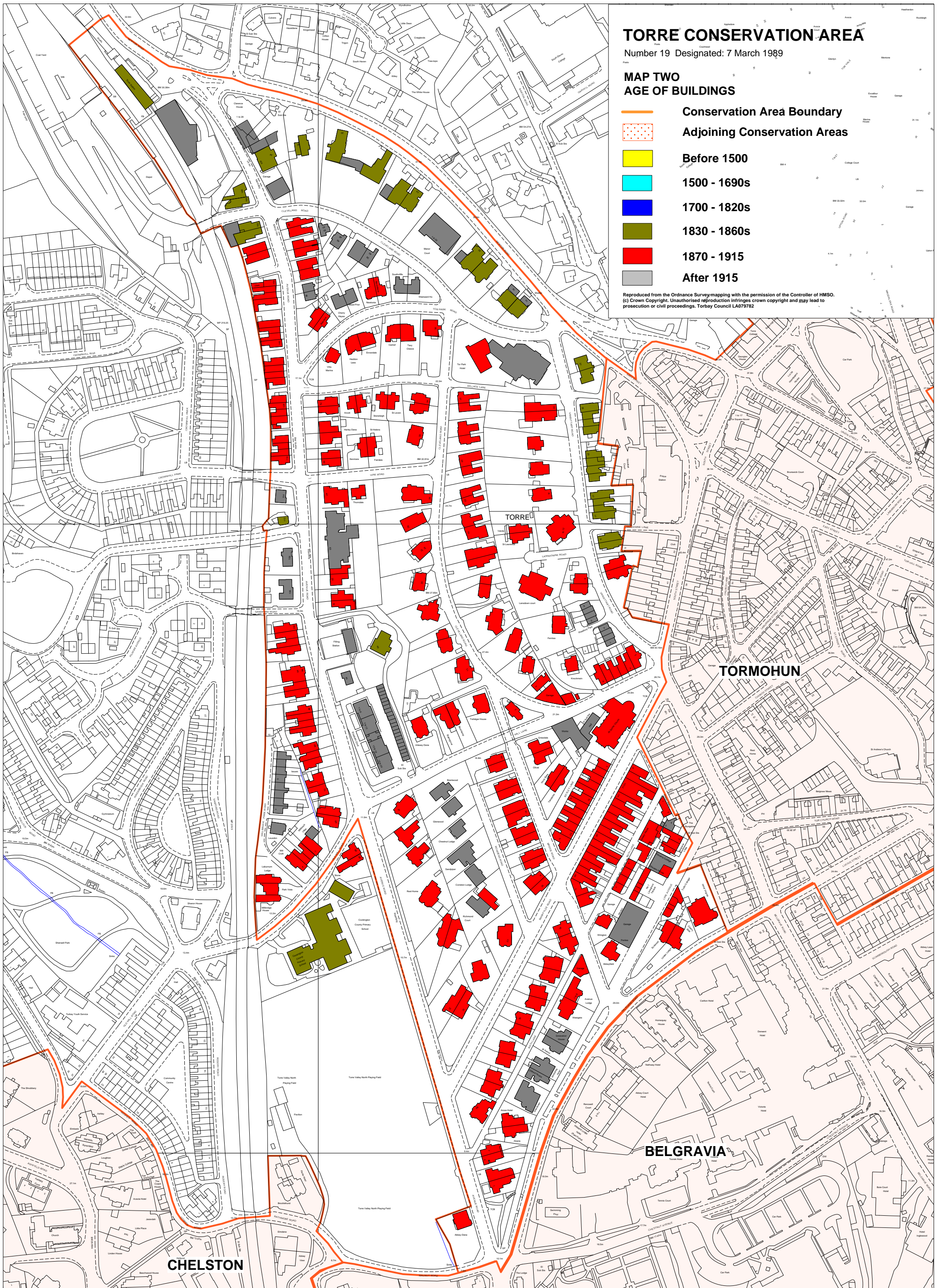
TORRE CONSERVATION AREA

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MAP TWO AGE OF BUILDINGS

-  Conservation Area Boundary
-  Adjoining Conservation Areas
-  Before 1500
-  1500 - 1690s
-  1700 - 1820s
-  1830 - 1860s
-  1870 - 1915
-  After 1915

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






TORRE CONSERVATION AREA

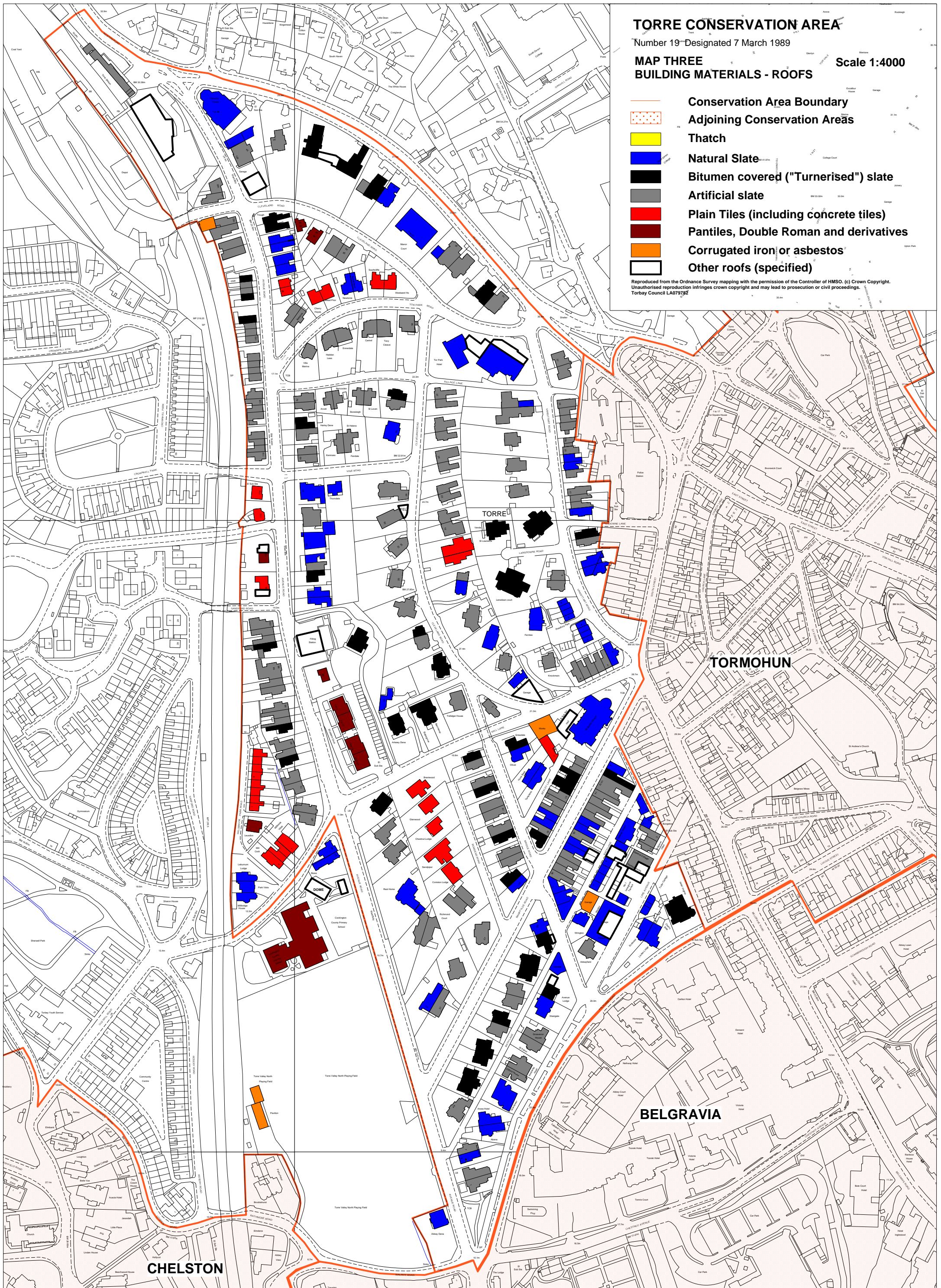
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MAP THREE BUILDING MATERIALS - ROOFS

Scale 1:4000

-  Conservation Area Boundary
-  Adjoining Conservation Areas
-  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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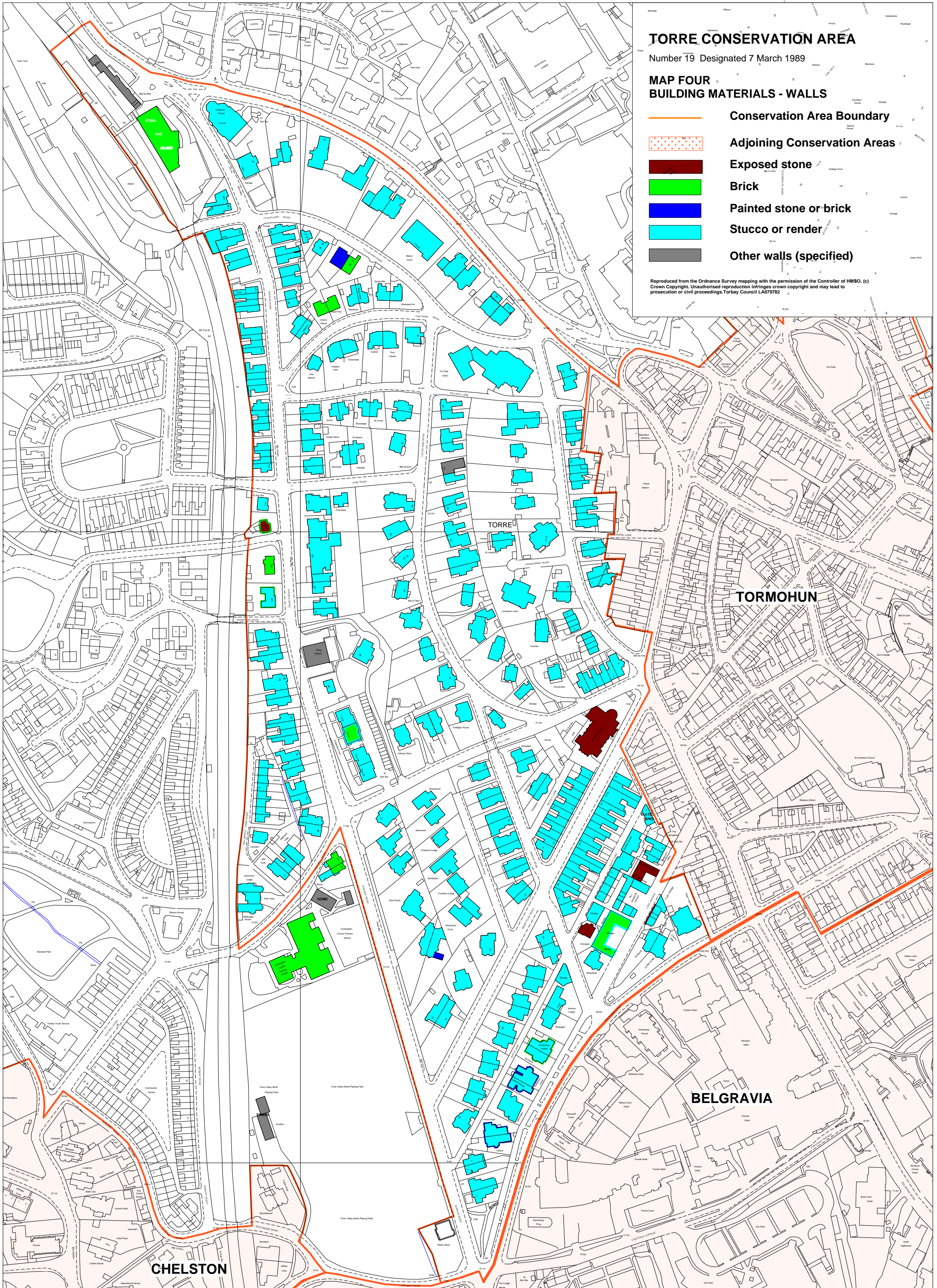
TORRE CONSERVATION AREA

Number 19 Designated 7 March 1989

MAP FOUR BUILDING MATERIALS - WALLS

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

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TORRE CONSERVATION AREA

Number 19 Designated: 7 March 1989

MAP FIVE IMPORTANT FEATURES

TORRE CONSERVATION AREA

-  Adjoining Conservation Areas
-  Useful pedestrian links
-  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
-  Prominent walls
-  Main tree groups and individual trees
-  Open Space - largely unrestricted public access
-  Open Space - limited or restricted public access
-  Significant Landmark
-  Feature of Special Interest
-  Viewpoint - open
-  Viewpoint - enclosed

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