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# Watcombe Park

## Conservation Area

### *Character Appraisal*

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# **WATCOMBE**

CONSERVATION AREA

**CHARACTER APPRAISAL**

**Revised**

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July 2005

**TORBAY COUNCIL**

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August 2001

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## PHOTOGRAPHS

### EARLY EDITION ORDNANCE SURVEY:

1: 2500 scale maps (not to scale)

- Ordnance Survey County Series First Edition surveyed 1862-87
- 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
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## **1 LOCATION AND ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS**

- 1.1 The Watcombe Park conservation area is situated some 4 km north of the centre of Torquay and straddles the A379 Teignmouth Road. The wooded slopes of Watcombe Park are an important topographic and landscape feature; they slope from a height of over 150m (about 500 feet) on the north to between 85-100m OD in the south. In 1987 the park was included on the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens (grade II ) and its extent revised in July 2003 to more closely coincide with the boundary of the conservation area.
- 1.2 Until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century there was little development apart from the park and its house, built on an estate built up by Isambard Kingdom Brunel between 1847 and 1859, and the half dozen mid-19<sup>th</sup> century villas to its south and east. In the early-20<sup>th</sup> century a few further detached houses were built in the field forming the northwest corner of the junction of Teignmouth Road and Moor Lane. But from the 1960s onwards this outer part of Torquay saw a major population increase, such that the whole conservation area, with the exception of Watcombe Beach Road, is now encircled by houses and bungalows. About 20 of these are somewhat incongruously included within the boundary, as is the Steps Cross Special School, the latter a post-war foundation.

## **2 HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT, ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT**

- 2.1 Watcombe is located on the northern edge of the large historic parish of St Marychurch, itself the mother church of the adjoining parishes of Kingskerswell and Coffinswell – the three were probably once part of a very large Saxon estate which had been divided up before the Conquest. By Domesday the manorial estates were well defined with five combined within the parish of St Marychurch: St Marychurch proper, Combe Pafford, Edginswell, Shiphay Collaton and Ilsham. Watcombe has been assumed to lie within the Combe Pafford manor, the Domesday *æccclam S MARIÆ* held by the Bishops and diocese of Exeter until 1800.
- 2.2 There has been human activity and possibly settlement in the area since prehistoric times; 400m to the west lies Great Hill, at 180m (587 feet) the highest part of the 4-mile ridge that stretches from Milber Down to the sea at Maidencombe. A beacon at the top, a well-marked hollow and a large standing stone, of presumed prehistoric date stood here until removed by the Torquay Corporation reservoir which was completed in 1926. The ridge, a boundary from prehistoric times, divides the parishes of St Marychurch from Coffinswell, very much as a similar ridge to the south of Torbay divides the historic parishes of Paignton and Churston with the prehistoric Broadsands Chambered tomb lying astride it.
- 2.3 Watcombe is first recorded as *Whatecomb* in a Charter Rolls of 1414 and *Whetcombe* in an *Inquistion post-mortem* of 1438. Wheat Valley suggests arable fields assarted up to the steep slopes north of Moor Lane. On the 1809 OS 1 inch map there is a conspicuous absence where Watcombe Park is now, Great Hill is recorded as

- Holloway Head and Watcombe only appears as a name on the coast located as Watcombe Head. An estate map of c.1859 records Great Hill as Telegraph Hill.
- 2.4 A series of early stucco villas were built on either side of the Torquay to Teignmouth Road, which had been improved as a turnpike after the opening of the Shaldon Bridge in 1827; completed in the 1840s they are typical of the Torquay style being built extensively in the Lincombes and Warberries areas at this time, several have integral service wings. The Brunels occupied two of them between 1849 and 1859; a number became the temporary homes of other prominent persons.
- 2.4 But Watcombe as a landscape is inseparable from the Brunel family, whose creation it was. In 1847 Isambard Kingdom Brunel, indefatigable engineer of the Great Western Railway, the steamship *Great Britain*, the Clifton Suspension Bridge *et multi alia*, decided to build a house and grounds for his residence at Watcombe. There was no ready made estate to take over, Brunel began buying land from the local owners, principally Henry Langford Brown; after the last land purchase in 1858 the estate when surveyed that year amounted to 136 acres. Brunel's envisioned house was never built, but its successor Brunel Manor, now a private conference centre, is the centrepiece of the conservation area within the park which was finished.
- 2.5 After the first major land acquisitions Brunel began the creation of the park in 1848; two historic trackways, one east-west from Barton, the other north-south linking St Marychurch and Teignmouth, were closed and converted into carriage drives. Both lay to the west of the present Teignmouth Road whose broad curves swinging up the hill were part of the turnpike improvements. In the north the old road from Teignmouth diverged from the turnpike just south of Little Acre (SX 291900 68130) meeting the east-west one from Barton between what is now 30 and 32 Brunel Avenue. The Barton road ran from here north of Brunel Avenue to the point where 49 Moor Lane is now, the two forming a reversed L. At the intersection Brunel formed what was to be his southern entrance to Torquay by continuing the east-west line to join the new Teignmouth Road between where now Skara Brae and Watcombe Cottage are situated.
- 2.6 In return Brunel constructed the steps at the top of Steps Lane (from whence it takes its name) to form a quick pedestrian link across the lower curves of the new turnpike; Steps Lane formed the lower end of the pre-turnpike road. Additionally he built Moor Lane west of Steps Cross to form the link to Barton.
- 2.7 Brunel no doubt selected the location for Watcombe Park because of its elevated position and favourable aspect. In 1852 he bought land for a small estate of cottages, schoolroom and chapel for his workers at Barton, a medieval rural settlement about a mile to the southwest (also a designated conservation area), where these buildings, although much altered, can still be seen.
- 2.8 Perhaps the single most impressive aspect of the Brunel's landscaping was his planned grand entrance from over Great Hill to the north east. Here, at the parish boundary at a height of 591', the Admiralty had planned a new semaphore signal station using the Popham system of semaphore. This would be part of the existing chain running between London and Plymouth, but east of the Exe would form a new

southern route avoiding the Haldons where the existing shutter system was in use. In the event the land purchased for the purpose in the 1820s was not needed when the electric telegraph made the whole system obsolete. Brunel bought the hill from the Admiralty in 1849 for £10. This allowed him to approach Watcombe from his main line railway station at Newton Abbot, climb Milber Hill using another turnpike road and cross the Great Hill ridge for nearly ½ mile on his own land before entering the landscaped park via a western lodge, now demolished and the site of the post-war Clarence Falls. The ridge route itself no longer exists, the avenue of trees which marked the driveway was felled in 1983.

- 2.9 Much of the park was designed by Brunel himself – his notebooks with planting diagrams survive – under the influence of William Nessfield, famed for his use of trees, notably at Kew. The execution of the work by Alexander Forsyth, best known now for the great Arboretum at Alton Towers, was carried out between 1849-55. The trees were supplied by the Veitchs, many of them were then rare, being introductions of the 1840s; the monkey puzzle in particular was only available after 1844. At one stage over 50 men were employed when massive earth movement and road building took place, thousands of tons of peat were brought over Great Hill to bed the trees.
- 2.10 Brunel's Watcombe estate with its formal drives and parkland extended over a much larger area than that which is defined as a registered historic garden today; the southern extent of the estate was Moor Lane. Water was a key element and Brunel employed William Simpson, a leading hydraulic engineer and London colleague, to devise a system for supply. At the northeast corner of the junction of Moor Lane and what is now Padacre Road a reservoir was built to take the water from seven wells running east to west along the north side of Moor Lane; the pump house powered by gas was located within the curtilage of No. 17. An ornamental lake was also constructed whose footprint is now contained by the curtilages of Nos 11-19 Moor Lane. An estate map, compiled after Brunel's death in 1859, clearly shows the arrangement. By the time the OS County Series First Edition was published in 1890 (from surveys of 1862-87) the former lake had been drained and its profile is shown as earthworks.
- 2.11 Brunel had intentionally designed and landscaped the grounds before beginning the building of his house. His architect William Burn had had plenty of time to draw up full plans; these survive as do drawings of the main façade. However With Brunel's early death the main building work was left in limbo, the house designed but only ground works up to balustrade level completed. Mary Brunel continued to live in Watcombe, occupying Langley Lodge (now Langley Manor and just outside the conservation area), immediately north of Portland Villa from 1861-2. In 1863 Watcombe Park was sold to the Vicary brothers of Newton Abbot. The present substantial stone house of c.1870 was built for J. R. Crompton, a wealthy Lancastrian paper manufacturer, who bought from the Vicarys.
- 2.12 By 1887 the estate was owned by a Colonel Ichabod Wright who enlarged the house; an article in that October's *The Gardeners' Chronicle* extolled the park grounds:

*Many who have seen the grounds pronounce them the most beautiful to be met with in this delightful part of the west ... Nature has done much for the place and the natural advantages present have been turned to good account ... Acting on the principle that whilst men are sleeping trees are growing he [Brunel] took the wise course of having the ground-work and planting done before beginning to build. Mr Forsyth was entrusted by Mr Brunel with the laying out of the grounds. How well he acquitted himself in the work is shown by the appearance of the place at the present day, when some thirty years have elapsed since the planting was completed ... Standing immediately in front of the house, which faces down the valley in a southerly direction, the view across the country is one of the finest imaginable.*

- 2.13 Colonel Wright's mounting debts forced the sale of the estate in 1907, from which point it was dismantled, the land being sold off piecemeal. The buildings which surrounds the park on all sides are almost entirely post-war.

### **3 CHARACTER AREAS**

- 3.1 The conservation area may be sub-divided into three quite separate character areas; they are marked on Appraisal Map One and are:

3.2 (1) *Brunel Manor, the Historic Park and Garden*

The largest character area comprises: Brunel Manor and its terraced gardens; the public park – now known as Brunel Woods; and the original stable yard buildings of the main house, recently converted to housing and adjacent to other private housing dating from the late-19<sup>th</sup> to late-20<sup>th</sup> century.

3.3 (2) *The Villas and their Associated Development*

Two small groups of informally arranged detached villas, some since subdivided: the former with access from Teignmouth Road, the latter from Watcombe Beach Road. Also included in this group is Watcombe Cottage, originally built as a chapel for Brunel's estate workers.

3.4 (3) *Later Development*

Most of the later development in the conservation area dates from the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and its inclusion can only be justified in terms of the important landscape setting and the few surviving landscape features. This is especially true of the so-called 'Tea Field', in which the Steps Cross Special School is located, and the unfortunate recent development of the Conifers in the school's former playing field.

### **4 ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORIC QUALITIES**

#### **4.1 LISTED & OTHER KEY BUILDINGS**

- 4.1.1 The conservation area contains five buildings listed as being of special architectural or historic importance, with three additional listings of artefacts associated with Brunel Manor. They are all grade II and are denoted here in bold.
- 4.1.2 Largely hidden from public view, other than glimpses from a footpath to the north, **Brunel Manor** itself was built in a neo-Gothic style around 1870 (*with plenty of spiky gables and dormers* Pevsner). The architect was J. Watson, who took over Burn's foundations, and was later responsible for Holy Trinity, Torwood 1894-6 ( in the Torquay Harbour Conservation Area). Apart from its size, the house is also distinguished by its steeply pitched roofs, cusped barge-boards, and tall chimney stacks of banded brick and stone. The listing describes Brunel Manor as 'a handsome High Victorian house with eclectic detail, preserving most of its original fittings'. There are two separate listings for the terraced gardens to the south and west; these are the work of W. E. Nesfield and are thought to be contemporary with the Manor. On the west side and centrally there are **two flights of steps including balustrading** built of freestone and beyond a **balustrade** and a **retaining wall**, the work of Burn. All the balustrades match in design having square piers and shallow quatrefoil panels; the balusters by contrast are classically circular with cushion capitals below the continuous coping; the retaining wall is of dressed limestone with some artificial-stone replacement.
- 4.1.3 Where the drive to the Brunel Manor approaches Teignmouth Road there are two **gate-piers** and a **wall** of local grey limestone with ashlar dressings, probably associated with Nesfield's later garden layout. There are also several important unlisted buildings; principally the former stable block which is built around three sides of a rectangular courtyard and entered through a tall arch. This has recently been restored and converted to apartments in a manner very much in keeping with the original building.
- 4.1.4 The remaining listed buildings form a loose-knit group of early-mid 19<sup>th</sup> century villas, some with service wings, to the southeast of Watcombe Park. Probably the earliest is **Watcombe Hill House** said to date from 1838; it is stuccoed with a hipped slate roof and rendered stacks. Its moulded doorcase contains panelled reveals, and its windows are in the main 12-pane sashes. The interior retains panelled doors, plaster cornices, and a stick-baluster stair. To the south is **Watcombe Cottage** which was built c.1850 as a chapel by Brunel, for workers on the estate; it is believed to have been converted to a cottage quite soon after his death when an extension was added. It is built of stone rubble with a slate roof and stone stacks. Two pointed-arch windows remain, and some doors date from the original conversion. The listing cites drawings, now at Bristol University, made by Brunel for an elaborate altar piece here which however does not appear to have been carried out.
- 4.1.5 On the east side of Teignmouth Road, built into the hillside is the now divided villa of **Watcombe Lodge** dating from the 1840s; the former service wing is now **Lantern House**; it was rented by the Brunels between 1849 and 1857 when it was known as Watcombe Villa. The main features are the round-headed entrance, panelled front door and a fanlight over with glazing bars and stained glass. The service wing has 12-pane sash windows, probably original, and across the front is a conservatory, with

canted corners, round-headed lights and end pinnacles with lead finials. The unlisted coach house has also been converted to residential use under that name.

- 4.1.6 On the north side of Watcombe Beach Road is the former **Watcombe House** dated 1858 – now divided in two as **Washington House** and **Watcombe Court**; it is stuccoed with a slate roof having deep eaves with a dentil course. The house is broadly rectangular with its most prominent façades to the east, facing the sea. Elevational detail is typical of the period with the bays having round-headed arches, some original 12-pane sash windows, and a projecting porch with pilasters. The interior is thought to retain the original staircase.
- 4.1.7 The Lodge Cottage, west of **Watcombe Court** was one of Watcombe House's outbuildings; it is built of grey limestone and slate with crested ridge tiles; it is virtually unaltered from its original design with casement windows of leaded lights, deep set eaves and porch. Watcombe Hall, on the south side of Watcombe Beach Road is also one of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century stuccoed villa group, but has been de-listed. Despite this and being somewhat disfigured by a large extension and a corridor link, the original house retains some good original detail including a low-pitched slate roof, rendered stacks with recesses and platbands, canted corners, deep-bracketed eaves and an imposing west-facing landing window one and a half storeys in height with stained glass.
- 4.1.8 At the junction of Teignmouth and Watcombe Beach Roads, Tithe Barn Cottage, although relatively undistinguished architecturally, may contain fabric from a pre-19<sup>th</sup> century building. For the final two years of his life the Brunels lived opposite the present entrance to the Park in Portland Villa, later known as Maidencombe House and converted to a hotel it was demolished in 1988 for flats. To the south between 1861 and 1912 a wooden bridge designed by Brunel and built by his son Henry crossed the Torquay-Teignmouth road where it entered a cutting. Its site is now within the curtilage of Timberlands.

## 4.2 BUILDING FORM, ORNAMENT & THE USE OF MATERIALS

- 4.2.1 The handsome frontages of the stucco or rendered villas are a major feature of the conservation area. The villas typically have hipped slate roofs and occasional projecting gables or hips incorporating bay windows, and a few yet more extravagant details. The position of the chimney stacks in relation to the roof profile varies considerably with no set pattern. The majority of these are rendered, though some are corniced. Watson's work at Brunel Manor shows an eclectic mix of materials, mostly exposed stone and brick, skillfully used both in the main house and the stable yard to the north.
- 4.2.2 Openings can vary widely in detail, although sash windows are the traditional means of glazing. The frontages and corner details of the buildings have been skillfully executed, often with two or more prominent frontages, with the villas orientated to provide sea views. Additional ornament to the stuccoed villas extends in a few instances to rusticated quoins, plat bands and cornices, bracketed eaves, round-arched openings including porches, verandahs, and at **Watcombe Lodge** a fine 19<sup>th</sup>

century conservatory. For the most part the 19<sup>th</sup>-century buildings in the conservation area have not suffered from the addition of large extensions that so easily mar the integrity of the original – and does so elsewhere in Torquay.

4.2.3 Two types of stone predominate; most widely used is the local grey Torquay limestone mainly in a crazed form here, and Permian red sandstone. Both are used in boundary walls and in the former stable buildings; both were also quarried on estate land east of Teignmouth Road.

4.2.4 Welsh or Cornish slate, especially the former, was the dominant roofing material of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the majority of cases this has survived, although there are instances of replacement with artificial substitutes. New natural slate has been used to good effect in the conversion of the former stable block.

### 4.3 CONDITION OF BUILDINGS

4.3.1 From external observation, the majority of buildings in the conservation area appear to be in a sound structural condition; the large majority are in private residential, or institutional, use and these appear to be in good or exceptionally good order. Although there has been some loss or replacement of original architectural features this is not widespread, and the conversion of the former stables has been well executed with due regard to the original building.

## 5 LOCAL DETAILS, CHARACTER AND THE RELATIONSHIP OF SPACES

5.1 The relatively steep topography, with Teignmouth Road taking the route of an elongated S-curve across the conservation area, creates a sense of discrete isolation between the separate parts. The park is an ideal environment for walkers, as the extensive footpaths allow circular walks to be made from within Brunel Woods to the surrounding countryside and coastline. Long years of neglect and extensive tree growth since the Park was laid out in the 19<sup>th</sup> century has obscured many elements of Brunel and Forsyth's work; Nesfield's garden terraces are in private hands and not normally visible to the public. From some of the more elevated parts of the conservation area there are dramatic outward views, especially towards the south.

5.2 The original buildings are for the most part very reclusive, with their main façades turned away from the carriageway; some frontages are barely visible even at close range. From a distance the stuccoed villas can be glimpsed encircled by trees on the slopes of Watcombe Hill. The more recent housing within the conservation area consists mainly of bungalows of the 1960s-80s; while these detract from the historic landscape they are relatively well screened and the most prominent slopes remain undeveloped.

## 6 GREEN LANDSCAPE AND TREES



- 6.1 Brunel Woods form the focal point of the main landscape features within the conservation area, about half of which consists of tree cover. An information board within the wood outlines the history of the park, its richness and variety of vegetation. It records the thousands of cartloads of peat that were brought in to assist in the planting of an arboretum, with many species of conifer introduced, for example the Monterey Cypress (*Cupressa macrocarpa*), which at the time was a rarity. The part of the park dedicated to the public suffered neglect between Brunel's death in 1859 right up until 1987 when a local trust was formed to research and protect Brunel's achievement: plotting all the trees just before a major storm of 1990. This became a valuable record when Task Force Trees (jointly operated by Torbay Council and the then Countryside Commission) carried out major landscape restoration. The Brunel Column and the associated sculptures surrounding it, using storm damaged timber, were completed in 1993 by Keith Barrett and record aspects of Brunel's life and work.
- 6.2 In spite of the storm many of the original trees survived and there are some good examples of Mediterranean pine and especially Monterey pine (*Pinus radiata*). Also present are holm oak (*quercus ilex*), Spanish oak (*quercus x hispanica*) and what appears to be one or more specimens of the locally found Lucombe Oak (LUCOMBEANA). There are also many of the more common deciduous species, for example oak (*quercus robur*), ash (*fraxinus excelsior*), lime (*tilia x europaea*), sycamore (*acer pseudoplatanus*), beech (*fagus sylvatica*), and horse chestnut (*aesculus hippocastanum*). Clearly the original concept was thematic and separate parts of the park are identified as the thornery, beech wood, pinetum, the avenues, the quarry, Brunel's Rockery, and the meadow.
- 6.3 Dense woodland also exists to the east of Teignmouth Road and north of Watcombe Beach Road, but apart from a single footpath from the public car park it is largely inaccessible. Otherwise landscape features fall into two main categories. Firstly there are hedges and hedgerow trees bordering parts of Moor Lane, Steps Lane, Teignmouth and Watcombe Beach Roads. Secondly are mature trees either within or bordering the grounds of the villas with a few fine specimen trees surrounded by lawns. Almost everywhere, trees act as a foil or a backdrop to buildings, even in the case of recent development, and in some cases obscuring them almost completely.
- 6.4 Between Watcombe Lodge and Watcombe House the rough land is the result of clay pit diggings. G F Allen, who had bought Watcombe House in 1857 to retire to, discovered a rich vein of potters' clay here during 1867 while digging for a well during landscaping. He established the Watcombe Terrac-Cotta Clay Company ½ mile away in St Marychurch to exploit it.

## **7 THE SETTING AND FEATURES OF SPECIAL IMPORTANCE**

- 7.1 Watcombe complete absence from the historical record – early 19<sup>th</sup> century maps record it as open countryside – comes to an end with the construction of the Teignmouth-Torquay turnpike following the opening of the Shaldon bridge in 1827, and Torquay's development as a fashionable resort. The scattering of villas begin to

appear on the hillsides around Watcombe and Maidencombe from the late 1830s. Brunel's designed landscape of the 1850s was of a greater order.

7.2 The important elements contributing to the character of the Watcombe Park conservation area can be simply summarised as follows:

- ❖ first and foremost Brunel's unique designed landscape of the 1850s aided by Forsyth, with the historic house of 1870 including the early work by Burn, and Nessfield's later work;
- ❖ the large extent of remaining open space within the historic park, including the extensive network of footpaths in Brunel Woods provided for public recreation;
- ❖ the 19<sup>th</sup> century villa development orientated towards the sea, some of which remain significantly unaltered, including the original spatial arrangement, roof profiles, stacks and original pots, etc;
- ❖ the range of historic frontage and layout forms employing an intricacy of detail, and using a range of materials including mid-19<sup>th</sup> century decorative stucco cornices and moulding, and the later-19<sup>th</sup> century use of polychromatic building materials;
- ❖ the survival of a high proportion of period detail, both internal and external, such as original sash windows with their glazing bars, stained glass, moulded architraves, and panelled doors, shutters and reveals;
- ❖ the survival of boundary walls using local grey limestone and red sandstone;
- ❖ the location of the Watcombe Beach Road public car park, providing access to an unspoiled beach; the Valley of the Rocks; woodland and coastal walks with access to the South West Coast Path;
- ❖ extensive tree cover and tree groups which often act as an important foil to buildings, especially in the Beach Road area.

## **8 EXTENT OF LOSS, DAMAGE AND INTRUSION**

8.1 There are fortunately few elements that are detrimental to the character and appearance of the conservation area. These are:

- ◆ the insensitive and inappropriate inroads made into the landscape by bungalow development, especially around Steps Lane, and on land north of Brunel Manor off Seymour Drive during the 1960s-80s;
- ◆ the loss of some historic joinery, especially original sash windows and 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 trees which have become over-mature and dominate the setting of buildings.

## 9 SUMMARY

- 9.1 The ensemble of the listed Brunel Manor and the registered Historic Park and Garden are combined in the Watcombe Park Conservation Area, both contribute to an area of local distinctiveness and national importance. They form an attractive and environmentally sensitive part of Torquay. The origins of the historic park and its association with possibly the most famous of the great 19<sup>th</sup> century engineers gives the conservation area much of its historic status and a uniqueness, for there is no other landscape known to have been created by Brunel. The eastern portion also includes an area of great landscape value and is part of the coastal preservation area, containing some of the best countryside to be found anywhere along the southern coastline of Devon.
- 9.2 The original character of the 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings has been little compromised by subsequent alterations and additions, but they are widely spaced and tend to recede into a landscape which, for the most part, is the dominant feature of the conservation area. There are some locations where boundaries and the surviving historic elements of design and ornament are significant and need safeguarding. This is especially the case in those parts where recent development has taken place. The conservation area contains some widely disparate elements, but now that the landscape and countryside features of an important historic setting are fully appreciated, scope for future development that would result in significant further changes is likely to be very limited – and should remain so.

## 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 Watcombe Park conservation 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 the significant features, identified in sections 7 and 9 as contributing to the local character and special importance, which need to be safeguarded or enhanced, 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 merit just outside the periphery of the conservation area and the extension of the existing boundary where appropriate.

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## PHOTOGRAPHS

### **The Setting of the Park**

- 1 The view from southern edge of Brunel Woods towards the twin churches of St. Marychurch: the Anglican tower and the Roman Catholic spire.
- 2 The bank on the right hand side of Steps Lane was formerly the division between the Watcombe Estate which lay to west and neighbouring land holdings.
- 3 'The Meadow' is a clearing in Brunel Woods, part of the planned landscape. Many trees included in the original design were lost in the severe storm of January 1990, but some fine conifers survive, as for example, this Douglas Fir.
- 4-5 The 1990 storm left much fallen timber from which this large wood-carved group was created by Keith Barrett in 1993 for the public park. The stand of Monterey Cypress were rare in Britain when first planted in the mid-19th century (5). Brunel's trademark tall top hat makes him easily identifiable from a distance.





1.



2.



3.



5.



4.

- 6 The well-concealed car park in Watcombe Beach Road gives access to the beach 400 metres distant. The heavily wooded setting here extends well beyond both the conservation area and the registered gardens of Watcombe Park.

### **Brunel Manor Buildings**

- 7-9 Brunel Manor dates from c.1870, the existing building, now a conference centre, was built for the wealthy Lancashire paper manufacturer J R Crompton by J Watson, to a ground plan originally prepared by William Burn for Isambard Kingdom Brunel, but was left incomplete at the latter's death in 1859. The building has a wealth of neo-Gothic detail and a rich combination of materials, mainly of local limestone in a crazed rubble pattern with Bath stone dressings and with stone and brick polychromy in the tall stacks (8). The eastern extension is from the later 20th century (9).
- 10-11 The former estate buildings and stable yard 100 metres northeast of the main house have been recently converted to housing. The high standard of craftsmanship in brick and stone is evident across the block.





6.



7.



8.



9.



10.

## **The Villas**

- 12 Watcombe Hill House is probably the earliest of the villas in the conservation area; it is said to date from 1838. It is simple stucco structure with a hipped slate roof above deep eaves. The verandah extends along the length of both the southwest and the southeast sides. The interior retains panelled doors, plaster cornices, and a stick-baluster stair.
- 13 Watcombe Cottage was built c.1850 as a chapel by Brunel, for workers on the estate; it is believed to have been converted to a cottage quite soon after his death when an extension was added. It is built of stone rubble with a slate roof and stone stacks. Two pointed-arch windows remain, and some doors date from the original conversion.
- 14 The former Watcombe Lodge is now sub-divided with the rear service wing forming a separate house, the Lantern House, with the main house of Watcombe Lodge to the south. The buildings mainly date from c.1860 and are well screened by mature trees which largely obscure a fine 13-bay conservatory. This extends across the east front with many decorative elements such as the round-headed lights, end pinnacles with lead finials, and the adjustable vents along the ridge.
- 15-16 The former Watcombe House dated 1858, is now also sub-divided, with Washington House forming the eastern half (15), and the flats of Watcombe Court the west (16). It retains many typical period features, among which are the low hipped roof with deep eaves and tall rendered stacks. The house is broadly rectangular with its most prominent façades to the east, facing the sea. The detail is typical of the period with the bays having round-headed arches, and a projecting porch flanked by prominent pilasters.





11.



12.



13.



15.



14.

- 17 The stone-and-slate built Lodge Cottage of the former Watcombe House is in typical late-19th century cottage style using local limestone. Almost unaltered from its original design, it maintains casement windows with leaded lights, deep set eaves, a porch, and crested ridge tiles.
- 18 Watcombe Hall, here from the northwest, is the southernmost of all the villas and one of the largest. The stuccoed villa has been delisted - being somewhat disfigured by its extension and corridor link - despite this the original house retains some good original detail including its low-pitched slate roof; rendered stacks with recesses and platbands, canted corners; deep-bracketed eaves; and an imposing west-facing landing window one-and-a-half storeys in height with stained glass.

### **Later Housing**

- 19 Houses dating from the 1970s in Brunel Avenue; beyond at the extreme right the stone walls enclosing an early footpath link from the top of Steps Lane (hence the name) to Teignmouth Road can be seen.

### **Details**

- 20 One of a pair of listed gate-piers at the entrance drive to Brunel Manor.
- 21 A wall in local red sandstone delineates part of an early carriage drive leading west from the manor to sweep south into the area of 'The Avenues', part of the early planned landscape. It survives as a footpath to the rear of Seymour Drive. At this northern edge of the conservation area, there are a number of mid-late 20th century dwellings set within the richly wooded landscape that is integral to its overall character.





16.



17.



18.



19.

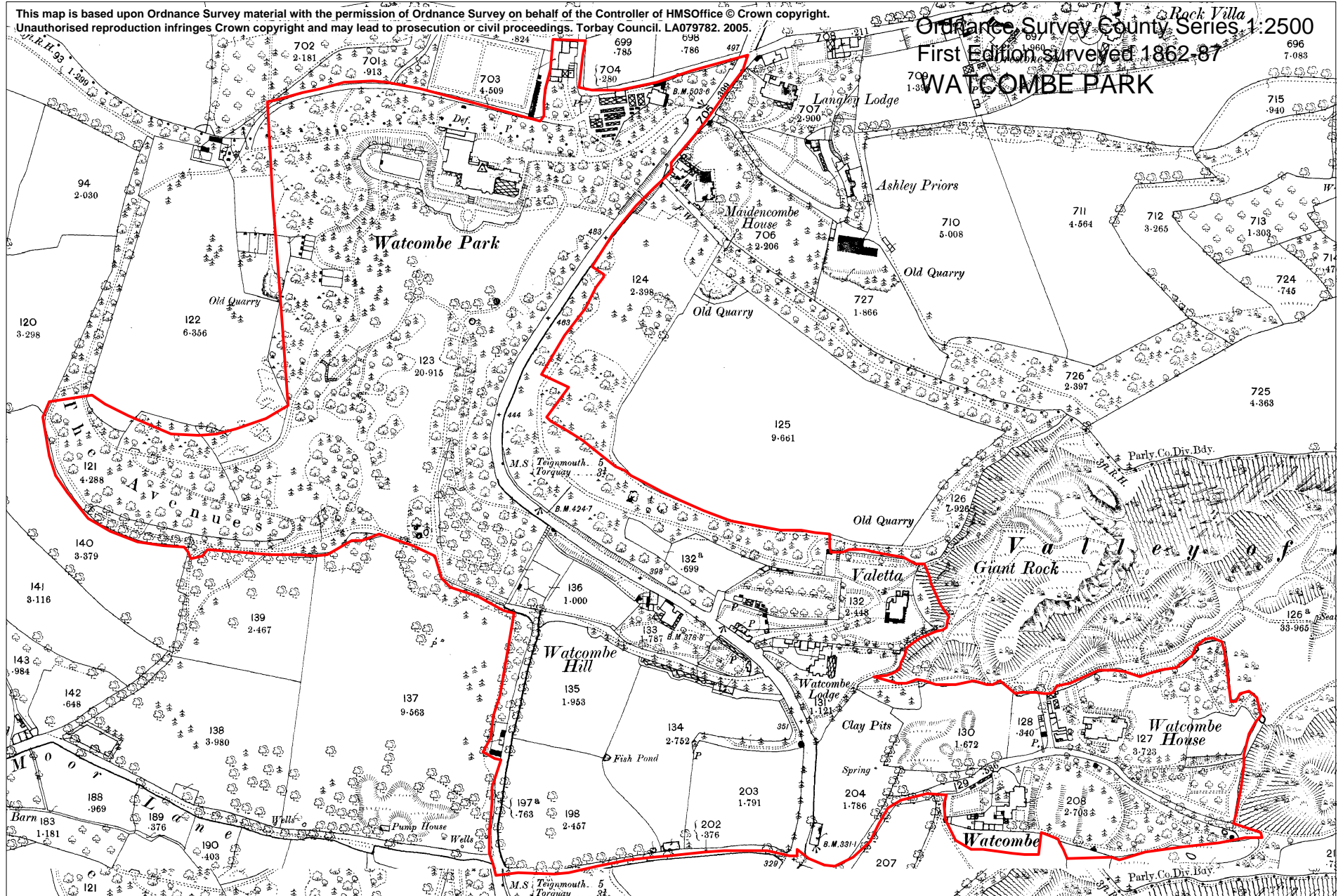


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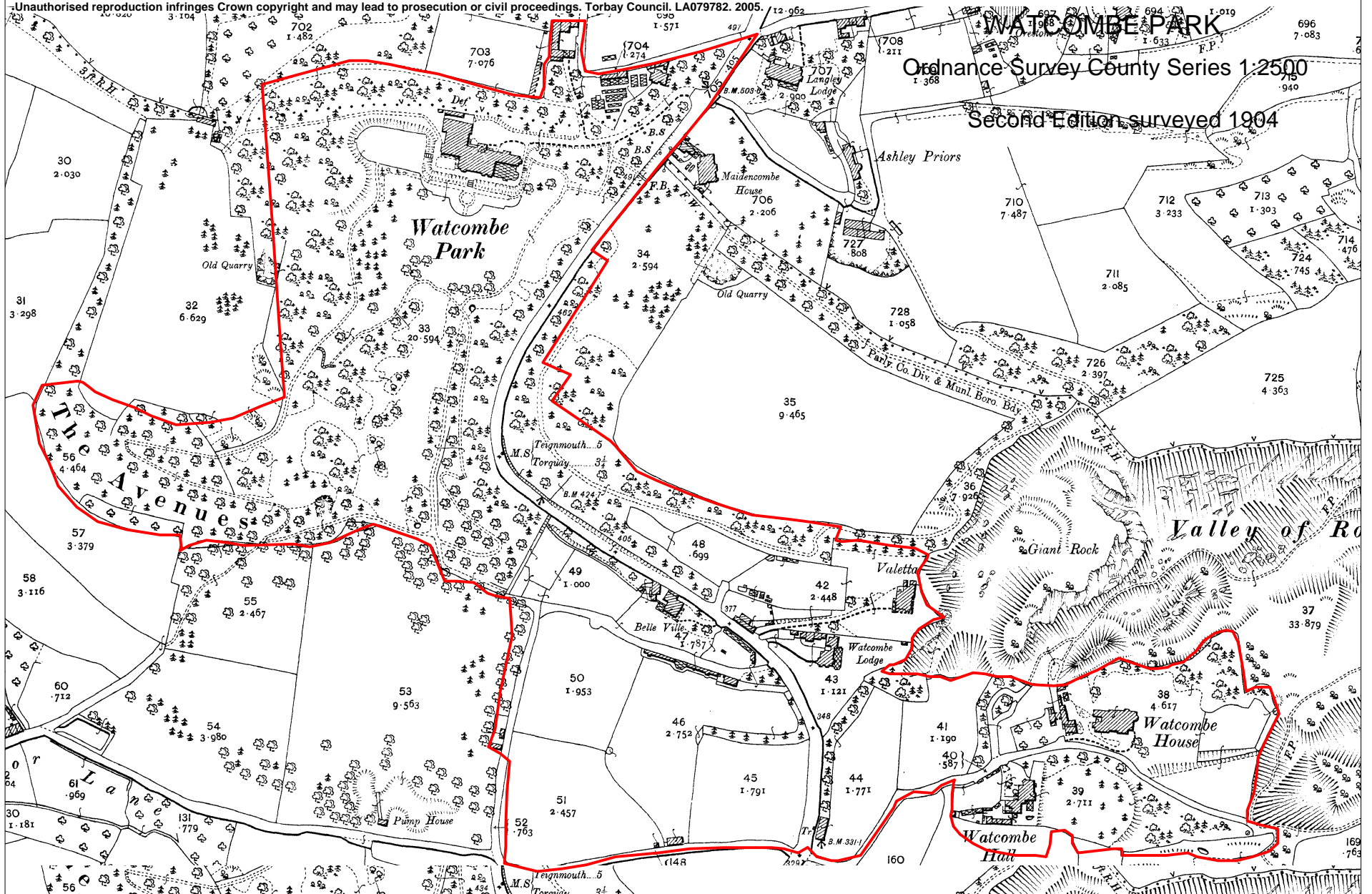


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**WATCOMBE PARK**

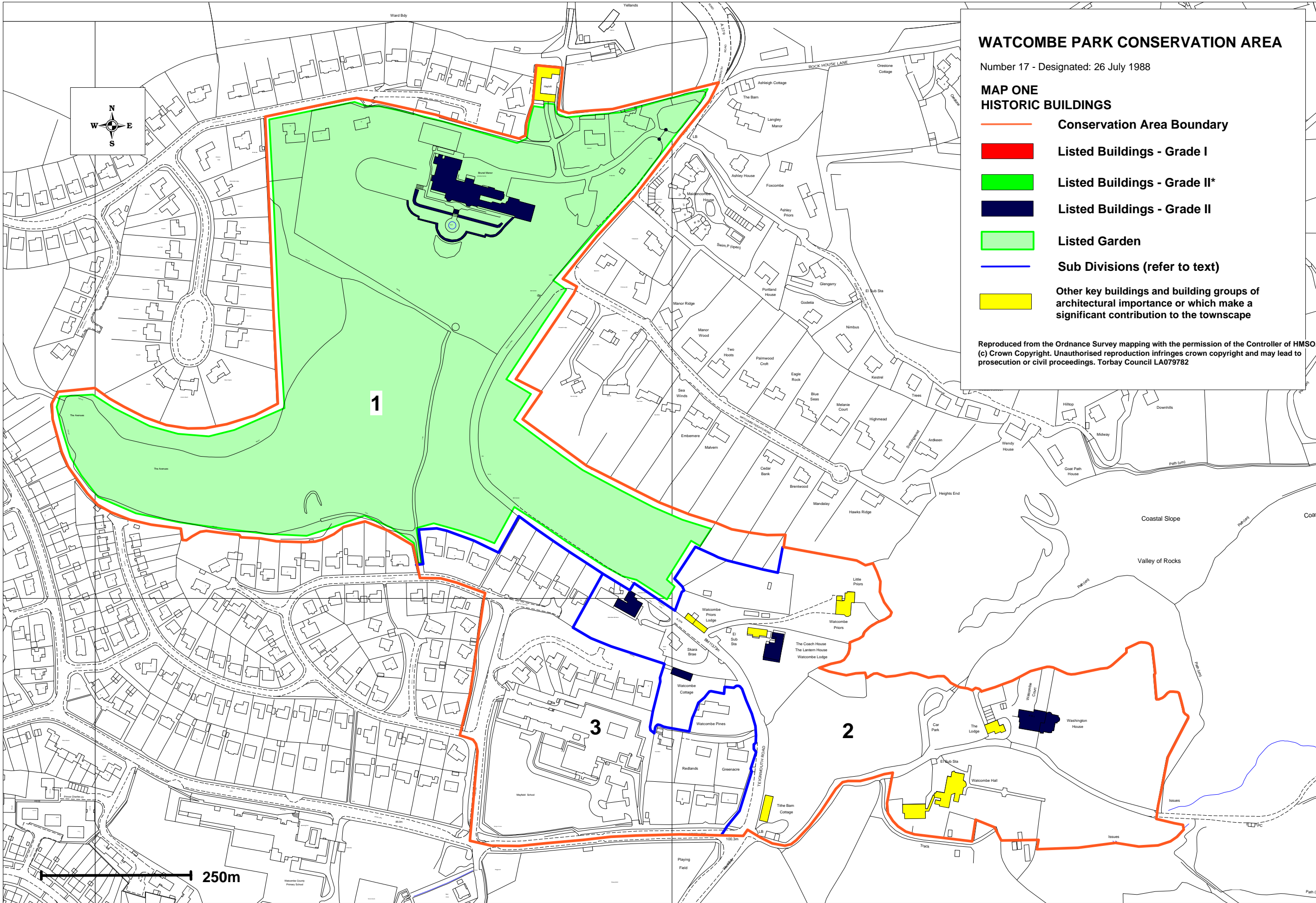


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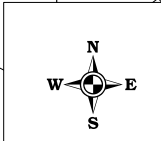
**WATCOMBE PARK CONSERVATION AREA**

Number 17 - Designated: 26 July 1988

**MAP ONE  
HISTORIC BUILDINGS**

- Conservation Area Boundary
- Listed Buildings - Grade I
- Listed Buildings - Grade II\*
- Listed Buildings - Grade II
- Listed Garden
- 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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250m

1

2

3

TEIGNOUTH ROAD

100.3m

LB

100.3m

100.3m

100.3m

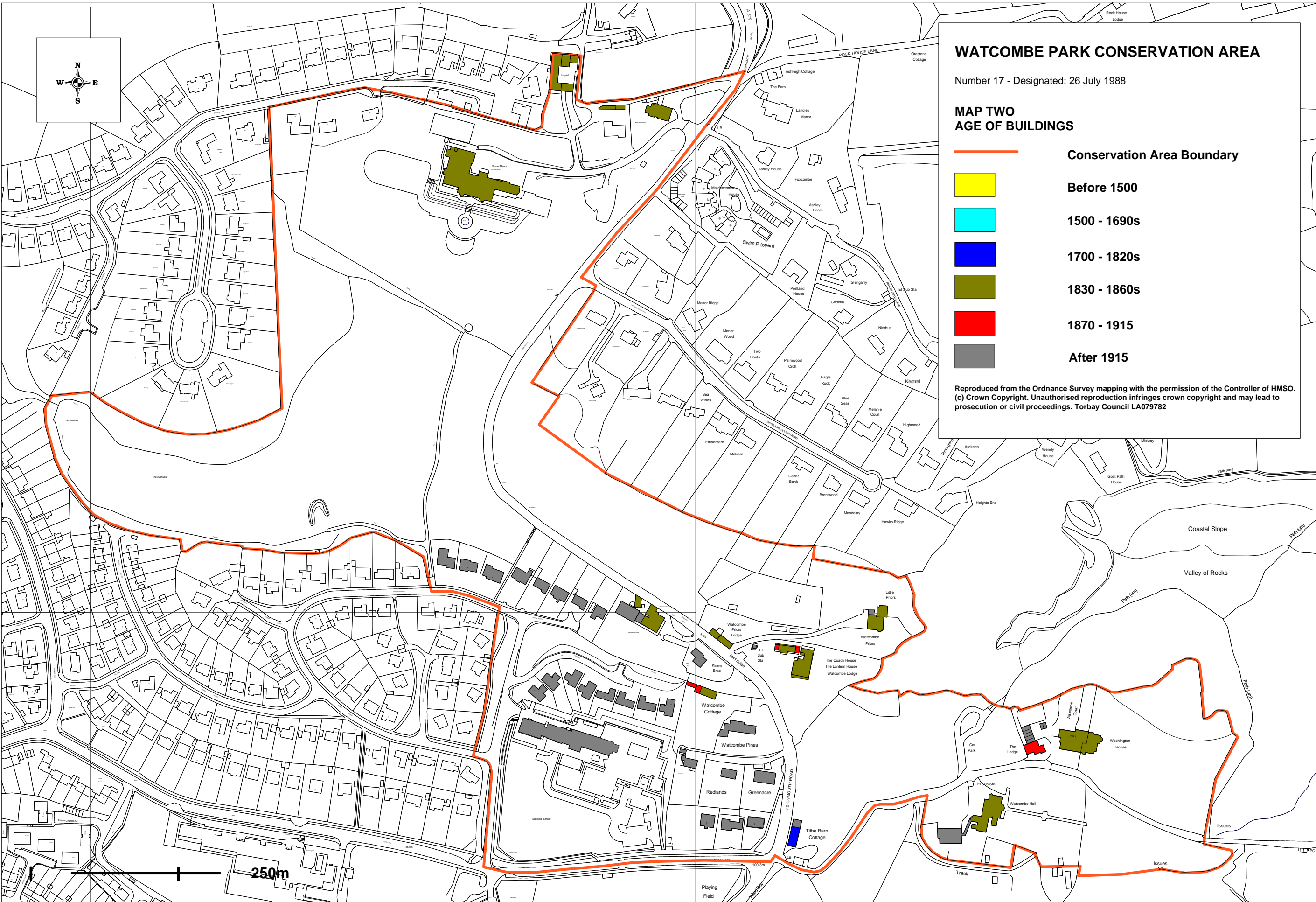
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**WATCOMBE PARK CONSERVATION AREA**

Number 17 - Designated: 26 July 1988

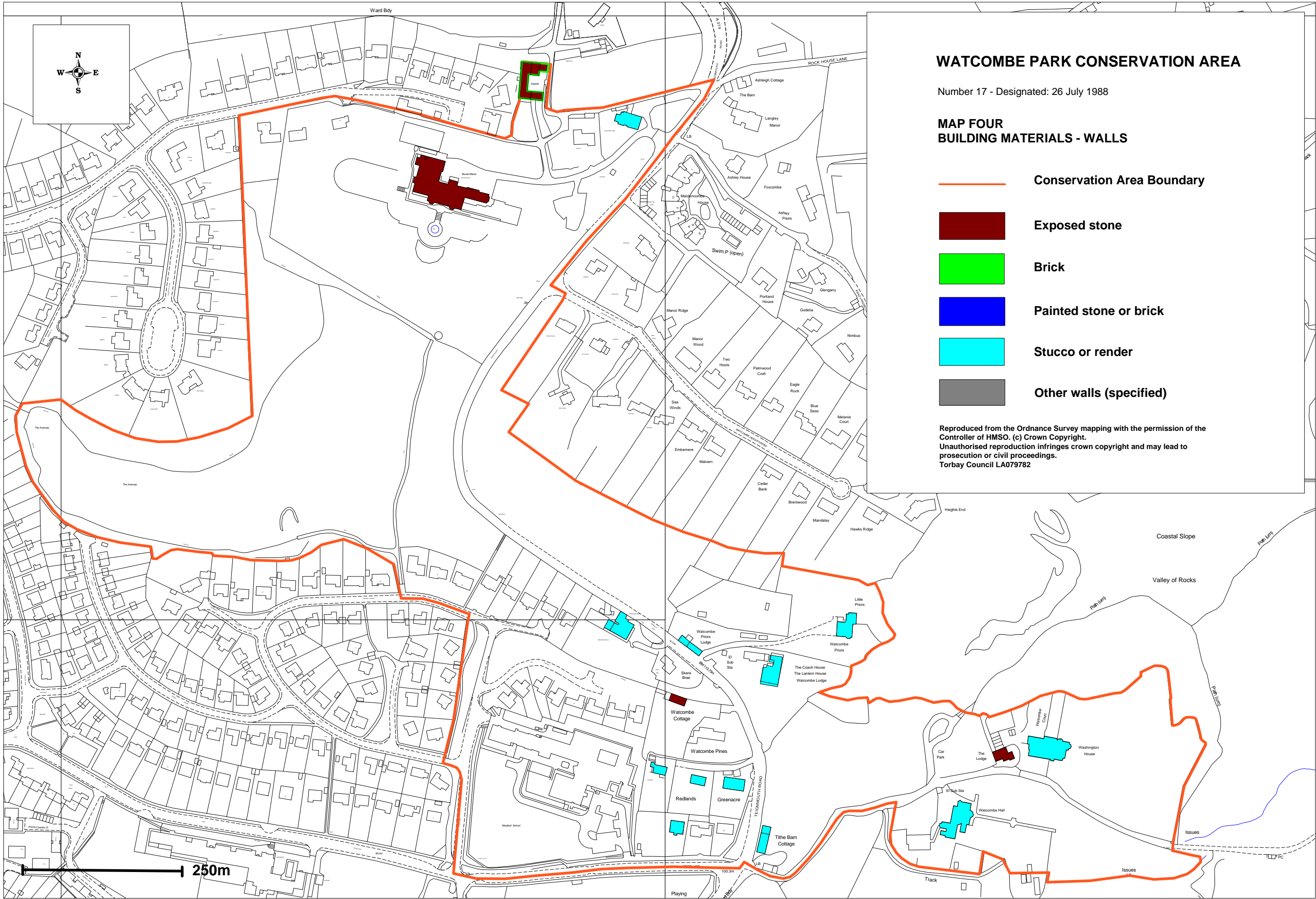
**MAP TWO  
AGE OF BUILDINGS**

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

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# WATCOMBE PARK CONSERVATION AREA

Number 17 - Designated: 26 July 1988

## 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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250m

