

# Totnes Building Stone Walk

Caz Donovan (acknowledgement: Mike Barr from the Devonshire Association)

Totnes has many old walls which contain a number of different types of stone. In the past the cost of transporting stone for building was kept down by using local stone and much of this would have been brought to Totnes by the river Dart. The majority of the stones used in walls are limestone and sandstone from the Torbay area and Berry Head, and volcanic rock which was quarried in various places around Totnes including Ashprington. The roof tiles and hanging slate were also quarried locally.



The wall in Market Square and most of the other old walls in Totnes have been built using a variety of coloured stones, many of which are volcanic and metamorphic. There was volcanic activity in this area about 400 million years ago when lava flowed into sediments. The rock formed was basalt, some of which was altered to chlorite slate and amphibolite by the process of metamorphism during continental collision. This gave them their foliated, flaky structure. The minerals in these rocks are rich in iron and where they are weathered, become shades of orange and red. The chlorite slate is green and the black and dark grey is volcanic rock, probably basalt.





volcanic stones in The Market wall

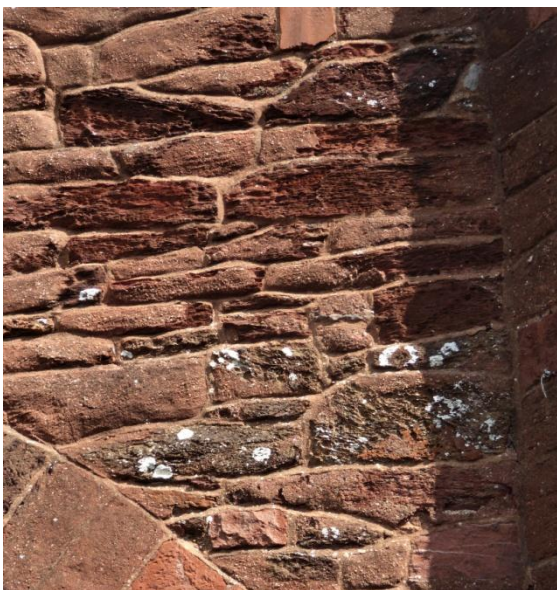


volcanic rock with gas bubbles holes unfilled



and filled with minerals

St Mary's Church – the main body of the church is made of two red stones – the rough stone is volcanic and the smooth stone is red sandstone of Permian age. The sandstone on the church wall was useful for sharpening arrows before archery practise.



Church walls of volcanic stone and sandstone



arrow grooves in the sandstone





the weathered Beer Stone on the front of St Mary's

The contrasting stone used for the main entrance of St Mary's church is a limestone imported from Beer and is called Beer Stone. This was Devon's 'luxury' stone but it didn't weather well. The top plinth of the church is Douling Stone from Somerset. This stone is also used at the back of the church for the windows and for the stone gateway from the side alley to the churchyard.



Douling Stone used for window frames at the back



and is the stone of the side entrance

Around the back there is limestone in the wall of the church. It is Devonian in age and is probably from Torbay. It is a coral limestone and if you look closely you can make out pieces of coral. These limestones also contain a type of sponge called stromatoporoid which you can also see.

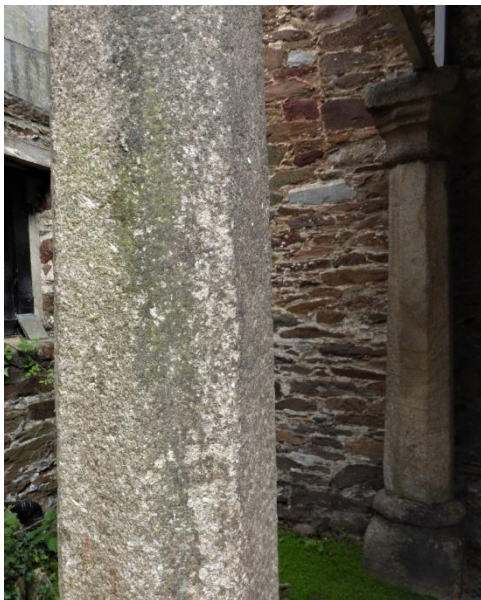




coral in limestone



stromatoporoids



The steps leading down to the Guildhall, the Guildhall pillars and windowsill are all made of Dartmoor granite.

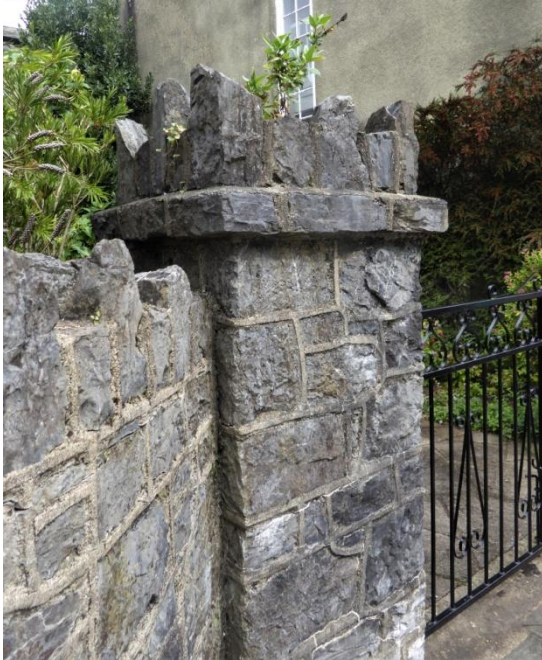


Before we explore the buildings of Fore Street go to Station Road by the King William IV pub. On the left at the far end of a wall are some stones called breccia. This rock is Permian in age and was deposited by flash floods in a desert environment. It is found along the coast at Goodrington, Paignton, Teignmouth and Dawlish. In the stones you can see a mixture of pebbles all different types, shapes and sizes.





Devonian limestone is a tough rock and as it was a plentiful local stone it was used a lot in Totnes. You will see that many of the walls are made of limestone and in some places it is the stone placed on top of the wall for extra protection. Looking carefully you might spot some fossil corals. Totnes Bridge is also made of Devon limestone.



limestone wall in Fore Street



limestone toppings on wall in South Street

There are buildings in Fore Street built using limestone. The Totnes United Free Church and the Methodist Church both have limestone walls. Look for corals in the United Free Church.



limestone in United Free Church



limestone in Methodist Church



The window dressings of the Methodist Church are of Bath Stone, another limestone from Somerset.



Bath stone window dressing of the Methodist Church

The building Lloyds Bank occupies is an interesting building containing quite a few different stones. The main stone at street level is Dartmoor granite. There is a course of yellow limestone higher up which is probably Bath Stone - also the stone of the cornice. The Devonian limestone is above the granite and the window dressings are granite and limestone with some brick.

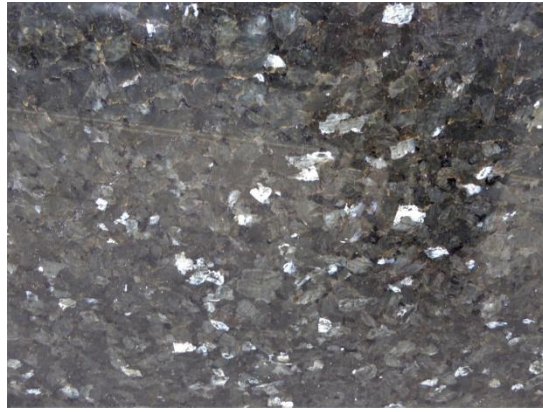


granite, limestone and Bath stone



Dartmoor granite

Just up the hill from Lloyds Bank is Peter's Optical. Below the window there's a very different building stone which is very common in many High Streets round the country. It is a very attractive stone with plagioclase feldspar crystals which catch the sunlight. This rock is called labradorite and is imported from Norway.



Totnes Museum

The Museum is a timber-framed house. In Devon most timber-framed buildings have stone side walls, the rest, including the front wall, is timber framed.



side wall of the Museum

Turning off Fore Street we look at the buildings along South Street. The Angel Studios is another old wall made of a mixture of stones – volcanic and limestone.





limestone



volcanic

Further up on the right-hand side is a building called 'The Mews'. It is the usual mixture of different stones - red and green volcanic rock and limestone but if you look carefully you can see one piece of granite and a piece of white stone which could possibly be Bath Stone although this stone is usually slightly yellow. No doubt these stones were left over from other building works in the town.



volcanic stones and limestone in The Mews wall





granite in The Mews wall



possibly Bath Stone



Whilst walking along the upper part of South Street you pass a carved granite arched doorway.

At the Civic Hall note the limestone on the top of the walls. (earlier photo) Walking out on to the High Street across the road is the old bank, now White Stuff, which is made of Portland limestone from Dorset. This is a very popular stone, still being quarried, and was used for the building of war memorials, Buckingham Palace, St Paul's Cathedral and the British Museum. It has also been exported to many countries – one of the places it is found is in the United Nations headquarters in New York. It is also found on the front of The Mansion in Fore Street and was used to rebuild Exeter and Plymouth after the war.





Many of the kerbstones in Totnes are made of Dartmoor granite displaying the white crystals of the mineral feldspar which can be quite large and are a characteristic of the tor granite of Dartmoor. One quarry, Haytor quarry, transported granite via the specially built granite tramway down to the Stover Canal to the Teign estuary where it was shipped to many places. Some of the pillars in Butterwalk in the High Street are granite and in Collins Street there is a large piece of granite where you can still see the drilling holes where it was split using the plug and feather method.



The limestones of Devon were slightly metamorphosed and baked which made it hard enough to take a polish. This happened at a time of continental collision which also fractured the rock. During the Permian, when Devon had desert conditions, the red from the oxidised sandstone coloured the limestones which, when cut and polished, made it an attractive decorative stone much favoured by the Victorians. You can see some in the streets of Totnes – in Castle Street on the left it has been used for kerbstones and it is the doorstep for two shops, one in The Narrows called The Pearly Queen Boutique and the Cat Charity shop in Fore Street. This was called 'Devonian marble' and was used extensively as a decorative stone in churches, museums and town halls in the south of Devon and beyond.



