

# Welcome to the Royal Seven Stars Hotel, one of Totnes' most fascinating buildings.

The 'burgh of Tottonais' was founded in the early 10<sup>th</sup> century to defend the River Dart against possible incursions by seaborne Vikings. By 1210, the first stone bridge had been built close to the present town bridge visible from the hotel. It is this bridge that made the location of the hotel such a convenient one for travellers and traders when it was constructed in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

During the middle ages it was customary for religious houses to act as hostels for pilgrims and other travellers and would display a sign of seven stars when the mother church was dedicated to St Mary, who wore seven stars in her celestial crown. It is believed the hotel's name originates from such a hostelry that was located close to the present building.

The building we now know as the Royal Seven Stars Hotel is believed to have been built during the 1660s, with a recorded exchange of deeds taking place in 1675 which mentions the 'Seven Stars Inn'. The Inn was leased by George Rooke in 1680 who probably improved and extended the facilities in relation to increased trade coming through Totnes during this period.

By the early 18<sup>th</sup> century the Inn had a large inner courtyard and a wide front entrance through which a horse and rider could enter. The writer and journalist Daniel Defoe stopped in Totnes during his travels in 1720 and wrote about the area, specifically mentioning the 'great inn next the bridge' at which he stayed.



Daniel Defoe, who visited the Seven Stars Inn in 1720

The Seven Stars Inn was put up for sale in 1772 by a Robert Whiteway, who had refurbished the building 'in an elegant and commodious manner', and it was again let in 1773. In 1780 it was acquired by Matthew Ham, who made further alterations by widening the wings into the courtyard and increasing the accommodation. The entrance was also made smaller and the first porch was built on two stone pillars. The stabling was improved and it is possible that this is when the first roof with skylights was built over the courtyard. By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the Seven Stars was a fashionable establishment with high quality accommodation by Devon standards.

The Grand Staircase and Assembly Rooms, now known as the Ballroom, were probably constructed during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century when they were in great demand

then, as today, for events and local functions. The Seven Stars changed ownership several times during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. By 1840 the front of the building had been given a Regency façade, the porch had been replaced with the present version and the Inn was being advertised as a posting house. Several stagecoaches were departing daily to Plymouth and Exeter from the Seven Stars Posting House in 1844, including Royal Mail and Great Western vehicles. The arrival of the railway later in the century caused the use of stagecoaches to diminish, and this is when the premises came to be known as a hotel.



A typical 19<sup>th</sup> century Royal Mail Stagecoach

It is not known how the hotel gained its 'Royal' prefix, although links have been made to Charles II, William of Orange and Edward VII, whose sons were appointed to HMS Britannia at Dartmouth in 1877. There have been other Royal visits to the hotel in relation to the Britannia Royal Naval College since.

In 1859 workmen discovered a granite arch relating to the 14<sup>th</sup> century chantry house on the site of the stables, which were demolished to make way for Coronation Road. The proprietor at the time, John Heath, incorporated this arch into the rear entrance of the hotel and it can still be viewed today when entering the hotel via the car park.



The Royal Seven Stars Hotel and Fore Street in 1928

During the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the Assembly rooms remained active and were put to use by the local amateur dramatics society. During the first World War the hotel saw convalescing army officers, and during the second World War entertaining the armed forces was the main purpose of the hotel.

The hotel has changed hands several times since the wars and was most recently purchased by Nigel and Anne Way who already owned the prestigious Royal Castle Hotel in Dartmouth. A complete refurbishment has taken place which has given the hotel a new lease of life whilst still maintaining its historic character.