



# Church of St Michael and All Angels, Askerswell, Dorset

Archaeological Observations and Recording, July  
2017



Report No. [53472/3/1](#)

August [2017](#)



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**Client:** The PCC of St Michael and All Angels Church, Askerswell

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## Document Quality Control

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1	Report 53472/3/1 Draft	M Trevarthen		07/08/2017
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3				

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## Project Report Summary Page

Project Details			
<b>OASIS Reference</b>	terraina1-292164		
<b>Project Title</b>	Parish Church of St Michael and All Angels, Askerswell, Dorset		
<b>Short Description of Project</b>	Terrain Archaeology undertook a programme of archaeological observations and recording during trenching works and minor internal digging at the Parish Church of St Michael and All Angels, Askerswell, Dorset. The groundworks were part of a scheme to construct new welfare facilities and a new mezzanine floor into the West Tower, and primarily comprised mechanical trenching for new underground services between the west door of the West Tower and Nallers Lane. No human remains or previously unknown graves were noted and no other features, deposits or finds of archaeological significance were discovered. The minor groundworks inside the West Tower did not reveal the crypt rumoured to lie in this location.		
<b>Project Dates</b>	Start: 10-07-2017	End: 19-07-2017	
<b>Previous/Future Work</b>	No/No		
<b>Project Code</b>	53472		
<b>Monument Type and Period</b>	None		
<b>Significant Finds</b>	None		
Project Location			
<b>County/District/Parish</b>	Dorset/ West Dorset/ Askerswell		
<b>Site Address</b>	St Michael and All Angels Church, Nallers Lane, Askerswell, Dorset		
<b>Site Coordinates</b>	SY 5298 9258		
<b>Site Area</b>	c. 8.5 m		
<b>Height OD</b>			
Project Creators			
<b>Organisation</b>	Terrain Archaeology		
<b>Project Brief Originator</b>	None		
<b>Project Design Originator</b>	John Stark and Crickmay Partnership		
<b>Project Supervisor</b>	Mike Trevarthen		
<b>Project Manager</b>	Peter Bellamy		
<b>Sponsor or Funding Body</b>	The PCC of St Michael and All Angels Church, Askerswell		
Project Archive			
<b>Archive Type</b>	<b>Physical</b>	<b>Digital</b>	<b>Paper</b>
<b>Location/Accession No</b>	No physical archive	No digital archive	No paper archive
<b>Contents</b>			

# Church of St Michael and All Angels, Askerswell, Dorset

## Archaeological Observations and Recording, July 2017

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1 Project introduction

Terrain Archaeology was commissioned by John Stark and Crickmay Partnership, acting on behalf of the Parochial Church Council of St Michael and All Angels Church, Askerswell, to carry out a programme of precautionary archaeological observations and recording (a 'watching brief') at the Parish Church of St Michael and All Angels, Nallers Lane, Askerswell, during groundworks associated with the installation of new welfare facilities and a new mezzanine floor in the West Tower of the church. All works were carried out under Faculty Jurisdiction (Diocese of Salisbury Faculty number 3369, dated 04 January 2017 and accompanying Schedule, dated 07 February 2017).

St Michael's and All Angels is a Grade II\* listed building (National Heritage List Entry Number 1213455), and its churchyard additionally contains a number of individually Grade II listed table tombs (NHL Entry Numbers 1118787, 1118788, 1213466, 1213474).

Archaeological monitoring of the groundworks was carried out by Mike Trevarthen (BA (Hons.), ACIfA) intermittently between the 10th and 19th July 2017.

The assistance of Rachel Osborne (John Stark and Crickmay Partnership) and Joe Mew (Mew Developments Ltd) is gratefully acknowledged.

#### 1.2 Brief

The programme of archaeological works was carried out in accordance with a *Brief for Scheme of Archaeological Investigation* (John Stark & Crickmay Partnership, undated).

#### 1.3 Site Location

Askerswell village lies amidst undulating countryside, adjacent to the River Asker, an east-west flowing watercourse that joins the River Brit at Bridport. St Michael's Church is located near the southern edge of the village, immediately north of Nallers Lane. The northern part of the churchyard slopes northward to a boundary with the grounds of Court House, whilst its western extent is defined by a path separating it from the grounds of Askerswell House. To the east and south, the edges of the churchyard are marked by a vertical fall of about one metre to adjoining properties and to Nallers Lane respectively. It remains unclear whether the churchyard has been raised or surrounding land lowered, although the relative height of the road and surrounding properties to the churchyard suggests the former, and this may be supported by online LIDAR imaging of the site (<http://enfarchsoc.org/opendata/> accessed 26/07/2017).

The archaeological works were centred on OS NGR SY 5298 9258.

#### 1.4 Geology

The southern part of Askerswell village overlies Cretaceous Upper Greensand deposits. Somewhat north of the site, Greensand gives way to Gault Formation mudstone, with Fullers Earth Formation mudstones beyond. No superficial drift deposits are mapped (<http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html>).

#### 1.5 Archaeological and Historical Background

Askerswell (*Oscherwille*) is listed in the Domesday Book of 1086, held by the Abbey of St Mary and St Rumon, Tavistock (Thorn 1983).

The original foundation date of St Michael's Church is unknown. However the survival of a late 12th century font suggests that the original building was of at least that date (Pitfield 1981, 39). The form of the original church is not known: Hutchins (1863, 176) describes it as consisting of a "chancel tiled, a body covered with lead, and a high tower adorned with battlements and pinnacles". The oldest extant fabric of the church is the West Tower, which appears to have been added in the early 15th century (Pitfield 1981, 39). A stone panel with a shallowly carved depiction of the of the Crucifixion, of probable 15th century date, is set externally in the plinth on the north side of the west door but is probably not in its original position.

There is a belief that the sealed vault of the historic Eggardon family lies under the west door of the church (Hannay and Legg 2007).

The church was allowed to fall into disrepair during the first half of the 19th century and all except the west tower was demolished in 1857. The new church designed by Talbot Bury consisted of a nave, chancel, north aisle, vestry and south porch, was completed in 1858 (Pitfield 1981, 41).

## 1.6 Previous Archaeological fieldwork

There have been no archaeological investigations in the church or its close environs.

## 1.7 Aims and Objectives

The aim of the Archaeological Observations and Recording was to establish and make available information about the archaeological resource existing on the site, to place the archaeological results within the local, regional and national context, as appropriate, and advance understanding of the archaeology of the site and its surroundings.

Its objectives were:

- To investigate and record all the *in situ* archaeological deposits and features revealed during the programme of works to an appropriate professional standard.
- To record recovered artefacts and other materials to an appropriate standard.
- To present the results in a report to the appropriate standard.

## 1.8 Groundworks

A new water pipe and foul drain trench was excavated between the west tower down to Nallers Lane, along the south side of the church and down along the edge of the path to the south porch of the church. Excavation of this service trench was carried out using a rubber-tracked mini-excavator, producing a trench 0.30 m wide and up to 0.80 m deep. Arisings from the trench were stored on plastic sheet adjacent to the trench edge, or were removed from site by the groundworks contractor.

The trench was hand-dug beneath the threshold of the west door, and the limited digging inside the West Tower was relatively shallow by comparison with the external trench.

## 1.9 Methods

All archaeological works were undertaken in accordance with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) *Code of Conduct and Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief* (CIfA 2014).

All sensitive groundworks were attended by a qualified and professionally accredited archaeologist for purposes of inspection and recording.

Deposit sequences exposed by the trenching were recorded using elements of Terrain Archaeology's suite of *pro-formae* written and graphic record sheets. A digital photographic record was maintained throughout the works, recording aspects of their setting, context and technical detail.

## 1.10 Archive and Dissemination

Owing to the small scale of the works, the negative results obtained and the absence of retained finds, no project archive, other than this report, has been curated for this project.



A copy of this report will be lodged with Dorset County Council's Historic Environment Record (HER). The HER is a publicly funded and accessible resource, and deposition of the report will place it, and the project results, in the public domain.

A digital summary of the archive will be placed with the OASIS project ([www.oasis.ac.uk](http://www.oasis.ac.uk)) under the reference code *terrains1-292164*. A digital copy of this report will be uploaded for inclusion in the Archaeological Data Service (ADS) online 'grey literature' library.

A brief report of the project will be published by Terrain Archaeology in the *Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society*.

## 2. Results

### 2.1 Soil Sequence

Trenching south and west of the West Tower revealed a similar soil sequence.

0.00 – 0.15 m BGL	<b>Topsoil</b>	Moderately firm mid-dark grey-brown slightly humic clayish loam, containing occasional stones >20mm and frequent small roots.
0.15 – 0.70 m BGL	<b>Churchyard Soil</b>	Moderately firm mid-yellow brown calcareous clay loam, containing occasional stones >40mm and scarce larger nodular flint, chert and greensand.
0.70 m + BGL	<b>Natural</b>	Firm mid-light yellow-brown clay loam containing common brecciated small- to medium stone, with occasional larger fragments up to c. 60mm.

The upper two soil layers appear to have been scarped away by the creation of the ramped south path. Towards the southern end of the trench, beneath the south gate and Nallers Lane, the soils appeared mixed, largely homogenous and potentially reworked.

### 2.2 Structural Features

No footings from the church building were exposed. No indication of a crypt structure rumoured to lie beneath the West Door of the church was encountered.

### 2.3 Other Archaeological Features and Deposits

No features or deposits of archaeological significance were noted.

## 3. Finds

### 3.1 Finds Assemblage

A very small quantity of finds was noted during the works. These comprised a small sherd of relatively late (potentially late 19th-20th century) yellow-glazed vessel with pale sandy buff-pink fabric, from the East Dorset (Verwood) potteries, and a small fragment of unidentified animal bone. The finds added no intrinsic or informational value to the project and were not retained. No artefacts earlier than the late 19th-20th century were noted.

No human skeletal material or coffin fittings were found.

## 4. Discussion and Conclusions

### 4.1 Discussion

No graves or disturbed grave contents were identified during the groundworks, despite relatively deep trenching (up to 0.8 m below ground level) across and obliquely along the predicted east-west alignment of churchyard burials. There are two main possible reasons for this: (i) the churchyard was never 'crowded' and burials were not routinely placed to the south of the church until the 17th-18th centuries, when the extant table tombs were constructed: or (ii)

pre 17th-18th century graves lie at greater depth than was observed. Of these, the former is perhaps more likely, as no grave cuts, or disturbed human bone or coffin fittings were seen in deposits of apparently natural stony clay-loam at the base of the service trench. However, the limited nature of the investigation must be acknowledged, and any interpretation of the results obtained must, accordingly, remain tentative.

No remains of the earlier church building were found, probably because the earlier church lay beneath the present one. The rumoured crypt of the Eggardon family reputed to lie beneath the west door was not exposed during the limited, relatively shallow, works beneath the West Tower.

## 4.2 Conclusions

The archaeological potential of the site was unknown prior to commencement of this project. The programme of precautionary observations and recording of the groundworks has confirmed that no graves, burials or significant archaeological features/ deposits were impacted by the works, and that the archaeological programme was successful in offsetting any loss in the overall archaeological significance of the site.

## 5. References

- |                                   |         |  |
|-----------------------------------|---------|--|
| ClfA                              | 2014    | <i>Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief</i> . December 2014. Chartered Institute for Archaeologists.   |
| John Stark & Crickmay Partnership | Undated | <i>Brief for Scheme of Archaeological Investigation</i> . Unpublished document, JSCP   |
| Hannay, C. and Legg, R.,          | 2007    | 'Askerswell' <i>Dorset Life</i> <b>345</b> , December 2007, 24-6.  |
| Hutchins, J.,                     | 1863    | <i>The History and Antiquities of the County of Dorset</i> . Volume 2. Third Edition (ed. W. Shipp and J. W. Hodson).  |
| Pitfield, F. P.,                  | 1981    | <i>Dorset Parish Churches A–D</i> . Dorset Publishing Company; Milborne Port.  |
| RCHME                             | 1972    | <i>An Inventory of Historical Monuments in the County of Dorset. Volume Four, North</i> . London; HMSO.  |
| Terrain Archaeology               | 2017    | <i>All Saints Church, Tarrant Keyneston, Dorset: Written Scheme of Investigation for a Programme of Archaeological Work during the Formation of a new Kitchen and WC</i> . Unpublished client report, reference 3461/0/1 January 2017. |
| Thorn, C. and Thorn, F.,          | 1983    | <i>Domesday Book, Dorset</i> . (Chichester: Phillimore).   |

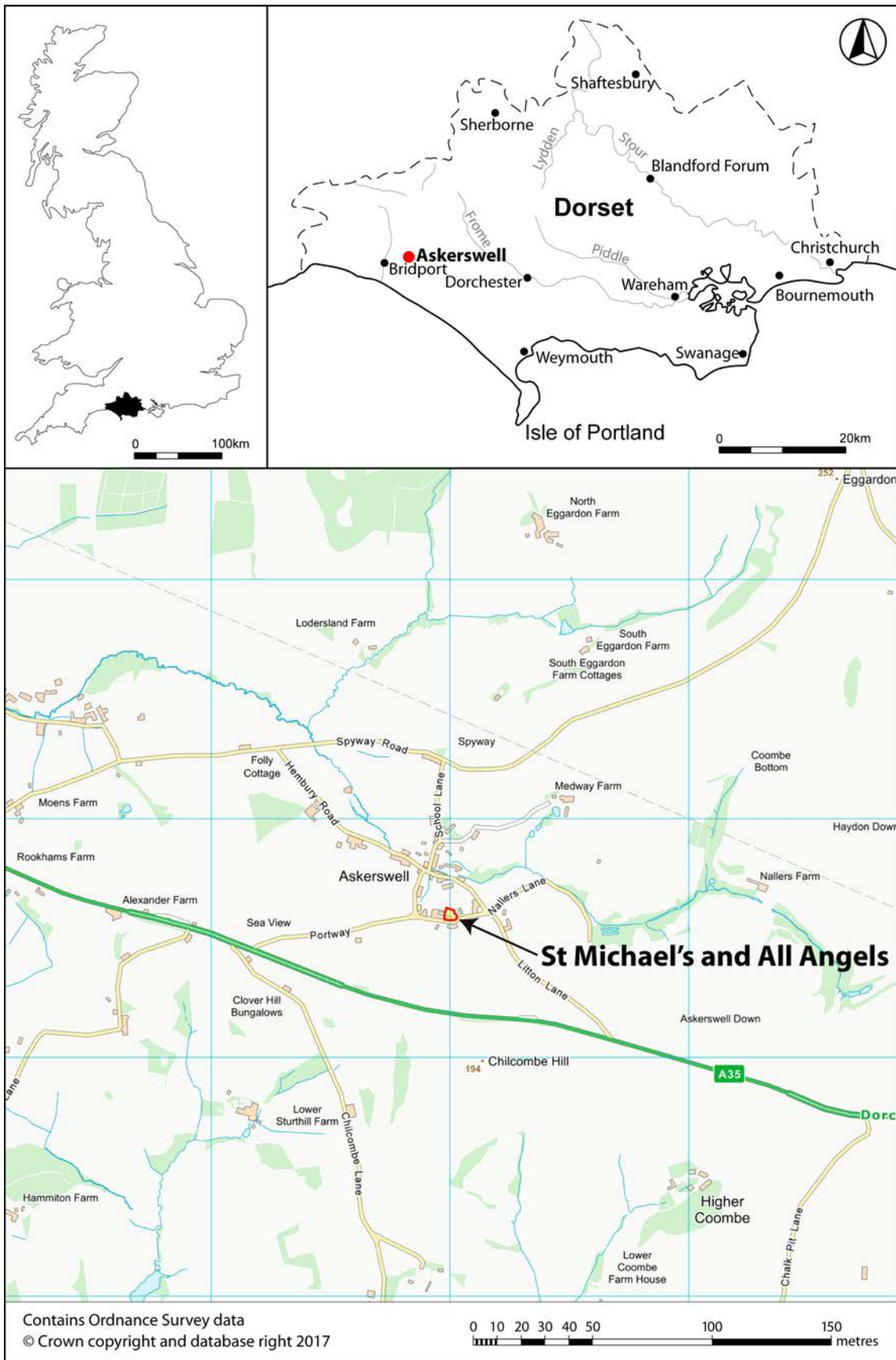


Figure 1: Site Location.

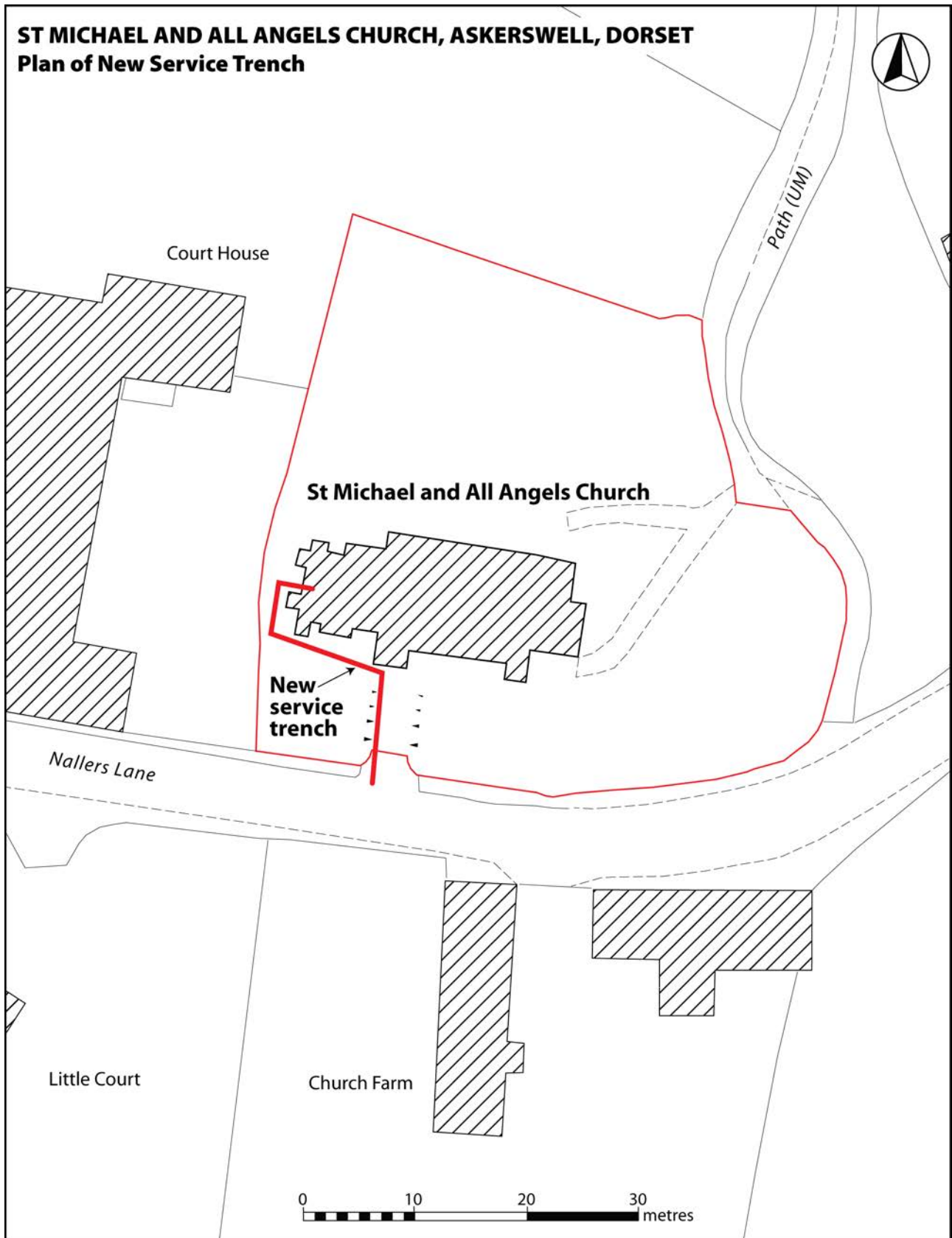


Figure 2: Plan of route of new service trench.





*Plate 1: Pipe trench south of Nave and West Tower. View from east.*



*Plate 2: Detail of soil sequence south of West Tower. 0.3 m scale. View from north.*



*Plate 3: Pipe trench west of West Tower. View from north.*





*Plate 4: Pipe trench along south path to Nallers Lane. View from south.*