

*An Archaeological Evaluation at
The Old Vicarage, Baschurch,
Shropshire, 2011*

by
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Shropshire
Council

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION AT
THE OLD VICARAGE, BASCHURCH, SHROPSHIRE, 2011**

by

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A Report for

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SUMMARY

There is currently a proposal to build an extension to The Old Vicarage, Baschurch, Shropshire. The proposed development site lies within the historic core of the medieval and post-medieval settlement of Baschurch, and it was considered that archaeological remains relating to the occupation and development of the medieval and post-medieval town might survive within the site. Because of its potential historical and archaeological significance, an archaeological evaluation of the site was required prior to the planning application being determined. The Archaeology Service carried out this evaluation in July 2011. Trial excavations on the site located an area of former wet, waterlogged deposits beneath the present lawns of The Old Vicarage, and desk-based research indicated that a pond, possibly a former medieval fish-pond or moat, covered part of the study area up to the mid 19th century. A quantity of late medieval and early post-medieval pottery was recovered from the upper silts of the former pond. No other significant archaeological features or deposits were encountered. It is recommended that the proposed development be accompanied by a programme of archaeological work in order to record the archaeological deposits that will be disturbed by the development.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Baschurch is a village in north Shropshire situated 11km northwest of the county town of Shrewsbury. The Old Vicarage, Baschurch, lies on the western side of the village, opposite the parish Church of All Saints at NGR SJ 4233 2196.

1.2 The village of Baschurch can trace its origins back to the late Saxon period at least, when a collegiate church is known to have existed in the village. In the medieval period the manor was held by Shrewsbury Abbey. In the 13th century the abbey founded a borough at Baschurch, and the eastern side of the village is still known as Newtown. It has been suggested that The Old Vicarage may have lain within the area of a former manorial enclosure run by Shrewsbury Abbey. It is possible that archaeological remains relating to both the medieval and post-medieval development of Baschurch may survive within the study area.

1.3 There is a proposal to erect a single storey extension to the existing care home at The Old Vicarage (the study area). It is considered that archaeological remains relating to the occupation and development of the medieval and post-medieval town might survive within the proposed development site, and that there is a possibility that archaeological remains might be encountered during the groundworks for the proposed development. Any such below ground archaeological remains would be adversely affected by the construction of the proposed new extension.

1.4 Because of the potential significance of the archaeological resource it has been considered necessary that a programme of archaeological work be carried out prior to the determination of the planning application. This archaeological work is to comprise a desk-based assessment of the study area followed by field evaluation.

1.5 The Archaeology Service, Shropshire Council, has been commissioned by Select Health Care Ltd. to carry out this programme of archaeological work to a scheme of investigation agreed by Shropshire Council's Historic Environment Team.

2 AIMS

2.1 The aim of this archaeological evaluation is to provide information that will enable an informed and reasonable decision to be taken regarding the archaeological provision for the area affected by the proposed development at The Old Vicarage, Baschurch.

2.2 The objectives are:

- a) To locate any known archaeological features and deposits within the study area.
- b) To assess the likely survival, quality, condition and relative significance of any archaeological features, deposits and structures.
- c) To identify and recommend options for the management of the archaeological resource, including any further archaeological provision where necessary.

2.3 The methodology for this assessment is based on requirements set out in a specification prepared by the Archaeology Service and agreed by the Historic Environment Team, Shropshire Council.

3 THE HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

3.1 Prehistoric activity around the study area is indicated by a number of cropmark features. A Bronze Age barrow cemetery marked by a number of cropmark ring ditches (Historic Environment Record [HER] nos. 02396, 02397, 02398, 04038, 04086) lies immediately to the north of the present village, c.200m north of the study area. A second Bronze Age cemetery (HER 02451) lies to the west of the village at Moor Farm (three areas within this cemetery have been scheduled as an Ancient Monument, National Monument No. 32297, Round barrow cemetery and parts of a field system 500m west of Whitmore House). The northeastern part of this barrow cemetery was subject to an archaeological evaluation in 2002. Here a geophysical survey identified a number of features, confirmed by trial excavation. Dating evidence was scant, but two hearths produced radiocarbon dates of between AD 420-700 (Appleton-Fox, 2002). Cropmark enclosures (HER 02394 & 04869) and field systems (HER 04036 & 04037) to the east of the village suggest the presence of farmsteads of Iron Age and/or Romano-British date.

3.2 It has been suggested that Baschurch may be the burial place of an early 7th-century British hero, Cynddylan, (Gelling, 1992, p75). Baschurch (*Eglwysseu Bassa*) is named as such in a 9th-century Welsh poem, the *Canu Heledd*, and Gelling also notes a suggestion that the use of the plural “churches” indicates a Celtic *clas* with many small shrines – possibly the remains of the barrows in the Bronze Age cemeteries. The Dark Age radiocarbon dates from the hearths in the area of the western barrow cemetery is significant here. Gelling also notes in this context the presence The Berth hillfort, which lies 1.5km north-northeast of the village, an atmospheric site once surrounded by pools and marshes and which in the post-medieval period (and more recently too) attracted traditions of Dark Age activity. However, Gelling does not consider that the poem represents a reliable historical tradition of events, and warns against building on the identification of places within it.

3.3 On the other hand, the presence of a late Saxon settlement is reliably recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086. In the late Saxon period, Baschurch was a royal manor, and was the *caput* or head place of Baschurch Hundred (an administrative area stretching from just north of Shrewsbury up to the Cheshire border). The Domesday Book shows that Baschurch was a prosperous manor, and also records the presence of a church (HER 00834). After the Norman Conquest, the manor was held by Roger of Montgomery, Earl of Shrewsbury. The Domesday Book records that by 1086 Shrewsbury Abbey already held 2½ hides of the manor from Earl Roger. His son, Robert of Belleme, subsequently gave the abbey the remainder of the manor. (Thorn & Thorn, 1986, 4.1.3 & notes). Shrewsbury Abbey established a borough in the town in the early 13th century (mentioned in a charter of 1229) possibly based on land on the east side of the village which still bears the name “Newtown”. The borough does not appear to have thrived, however, and the settlement may even have contracted before expanding again in the 18th century. (Priestley, 2008)

3.4 The study area lies within the area covered by the Central Marches Historic Towns Survey (CMHTS) assessment of Baschurch (Buteux, 1996). Although this study pre-dated any of the more recent archaeological interventions in and around the village, it’s analysis of the medieval and post-medieval urban form remains largely unchanged by later work. The proximity to the church of the land parcel (HER 05087) within which The Old Vicarage sits and the shape of the parcel’s eastern boundary suggest that it was part of the original settlement of Baschurch. The CMHTS study considered it possible that it functioned as a

manorial enclosure and was the centre of the manor run by Shrewsbury Abbey, or that it was part of the precinct of the Saxon collegiate church, or both.

3.5 A plan of the parish of Baschurch of 1794 (**SA P22/L/1/1**) shows a pond lying in the grounds of the Old Vicarage to the south of the vicarage building. The 1st edition OS 25" map of 1880 shows an earthwork feature (HER 05082) that corresponds with the north side of this pond, though the pond itself is no longer present. The CMHTS study suggested that the earthwork feature shown on the 1880 OS map may have been the remains of a moat of medieval to post-medieval date belonging to the earlier manorial site. The 1794 map suggests that the pond may perhaps have been a fish-pond rather than the remains of a moat. By the time of the 2nd edition plan of 1902, this feature has gone, and a carriage drive is shown running past the south side of the vicarage. The present terrace and ha-ha on the south side of the vicarage probably date to the 20th century.

3.6 There has been no previous archaeological work on the proposed development site itself, although two evaluations have taken place on land immediately to the southwest of the study area (Vyce, 2000; Jeffery, 2001). The results of both evaluations were entirely negative, with no archaeological features or deposits being encountered.

4 THE FIELD EVALUATION

4.1 A single trench 15m long by 1.2m wide and aligned north-south was excavated using a mechanical mini-digger across the lawns to the south-east of the Old Vicarage building. The trench was excavated by machine to the top of significant archaeological deposits, which were then cleaned by hand and recorded.

4.2 The earliest deposit encountered was a grey clay (Figure 6b; 12) with pebbles and cobbles, situated in the central part of the trench. It lay at a depth of 0.6m below the ground surface in the southern third of the trench, but it dropped away to both the north and the south. To the south, this grey clay lay beneath a deposit of very organic, very dark grey silty clay (11). To the north, it lay beneath a deposit of very organic peaty silt (6), which extended across the northern two thirds of the trench. The organic silts in turn lay beneath a layer of dark grey organic loam (5) up to 0.12m thick, which produced a few fragments of pottery of late medieval to 17th-century date. This in turn lay beneath a layer of very dark greyish brown sandy silty loam (10) 0.15m thick with cobbles and pebbles which contained a small amount of 18th- and 19th-century pottery and glass.

4.3 Over the southern three quarters of the trench area this last deposit lay beneath a layer of loamy topsoil (3) and turf (1) about 0.3m thick. The topsoil was mottled occasionally with yellow clay, and had the appearance of having been imported made ground. At the northern end of the trench, the silty loam with cobbles (10) lay beneath a deposit 0.2m thick of very dark greyish brown sandy silty loam (Figure 6a; 9), possibly a buried topsoil layer. This lay beneath a buried surface of cobbles, pebbles, and gravel (8) in a very dark grey sandy loam matrix. This surface lay beneath a thin clean layer of very dark grey humic loam (7), possibly a buried turf layer. The northern part of the trench area was then built up with a deposit of topsoil (2) and turf (1) up to 0.7m thick, which formed a sloping terrace running east from the edge of the patio on the south side of the vicarage. The presence of plastic tape at the base of this deposit indicated a very recent origin, and it probably dates to the extension of the nearby Coach House building.

4.4 No other significant archaeological features or deposits were located or recorded in the evaluation trench.

5 DISCUSSION

5.1 . The proposed development site lies within the historic core of Baschurch, and within an area thought to have formed part of the original early medieval settlement. The position of the block of land within which the development site sits, relative to the church, has led to the suggestion that it may have functioned as a manorial enclosure associated with the manor run by Shrewsbury Abbey. The cartographic evidence suggests that up to the 18th century the gardens to the south of the Old Vicarage were occupied by a pond. This pond may have been associated with the suggested manorial site, and may have been a former fish-pond. By the later 19th century the pond had silted up and been in-filled to leave a remnant earthwork feature. By the early 20th century the gardens had been remodelled and this feature had disappeared.

5.2 The evaluation trench located organic water-lain deposits in the form of clays, silts and peat (5-6 & 11-12) that were almost certainly the remains of this pond. Dating evidence in the form of late medieval to early post-medieval pottery was recovered from the uppermost deposit (5) within this feature. This pottery comprised two body sherds of a green-glazed jug of 13th-14th century date, an unglazed body sherd of a jug or pot of 14th - 15th century date, a rim sherd of a jug or pot of 14th -15th century date, a rim sherd of a glazed Midlands Purple ware pot of 15th – 16th century date, a body sherd of a trailed slipware pot of 16th to early 17th century date, and the base and a base sherd from two early 17th-century brown glazed earthenware tankards. The significance of this small assemblage is that it is the first pottery from these periods which has been recovered from the area of the core of the historic settlement of Baschurch, and accordingly provides the first archaeological confirmation of medieval domestic settlement activity within the village.

5.3 A layer (10) sealing the top of the pond fills contained pottery of 18th - 19th century date, consistent with the cartographic evidence for the in-filling of the pond at this time.

5.4 No evidence for prehistoric or early medieval activity was found by the field evaluation, though the possibility that these might survive within the development area cannot be entirely discounted.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

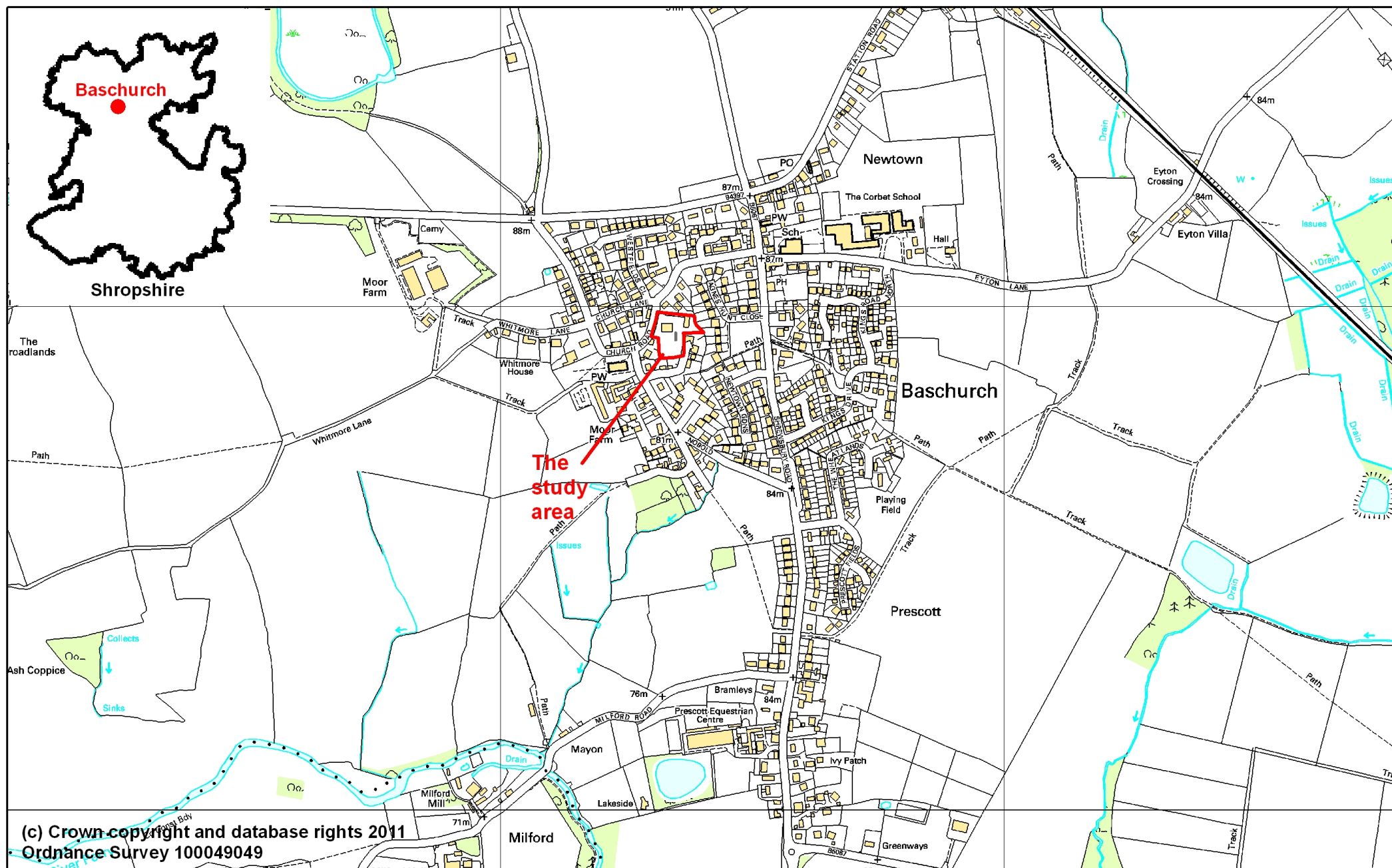
6.1 In the light of this evaluation, it is recommended that a programme of archaeological work should accompany the proposed development at The Old Vicarage. This programme of archaeological work might comprise the archaeological monitoring of destructive groundworks (the excavation of foundation and service trenches) associated with the development. Provision of time and resources should be made for the recording and sampling of any archaeological features revealed during such groundworks. It is considered that this would provide an adequate mitigation strategy for the development.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AOD	Above Ordnance Datum
OS	Ordnance Survey
HER	County Historic Environment Record, Shirehall, Shrewsbury
SA	Shropshire Archives, Castle Gates, Shrewsbury
TSAHS	Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society
TSAS	Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological Society





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The Old Vicarage, Baschurch 2011

Figure 2: The study area and significant archaeological sites noted in the text

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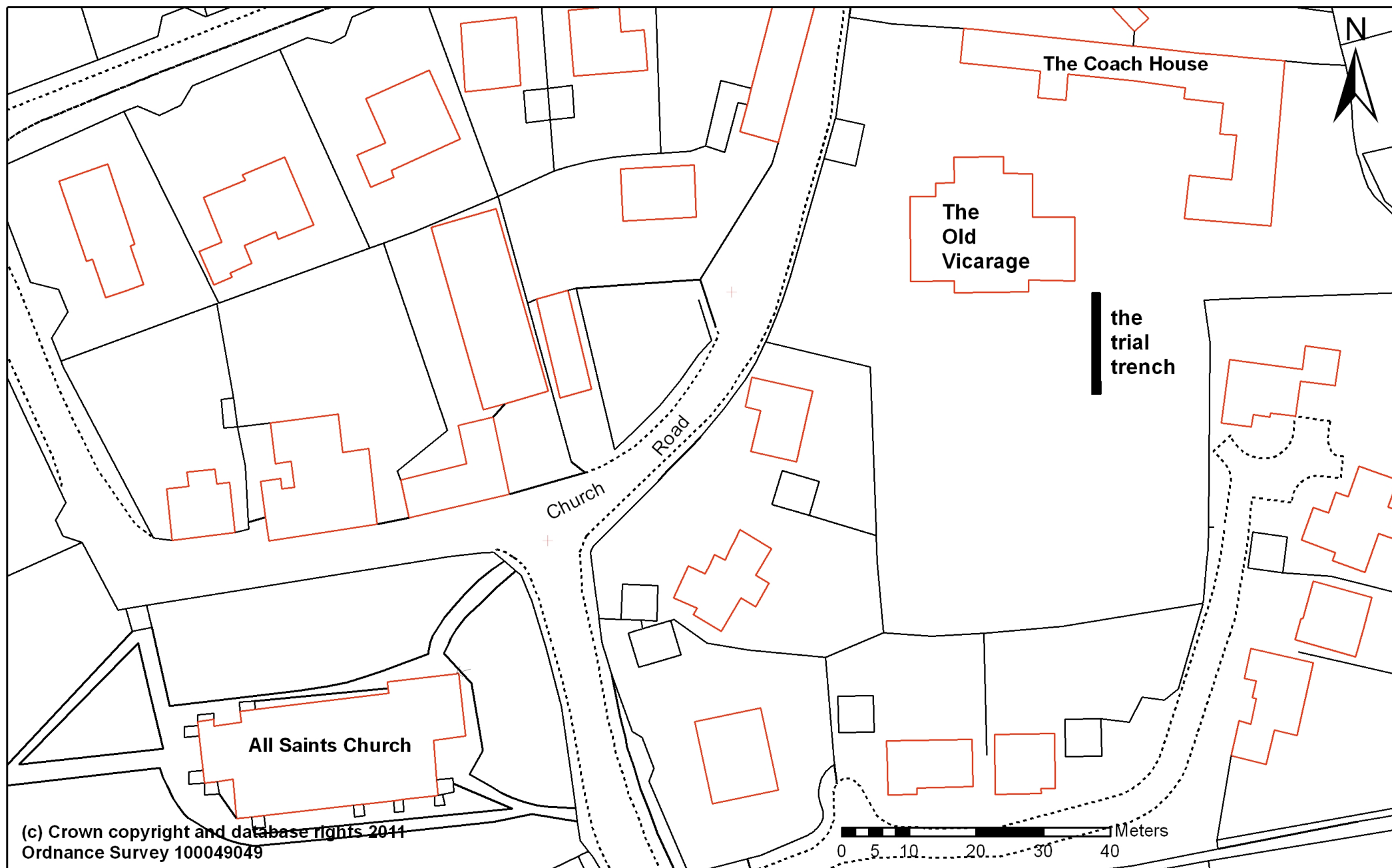
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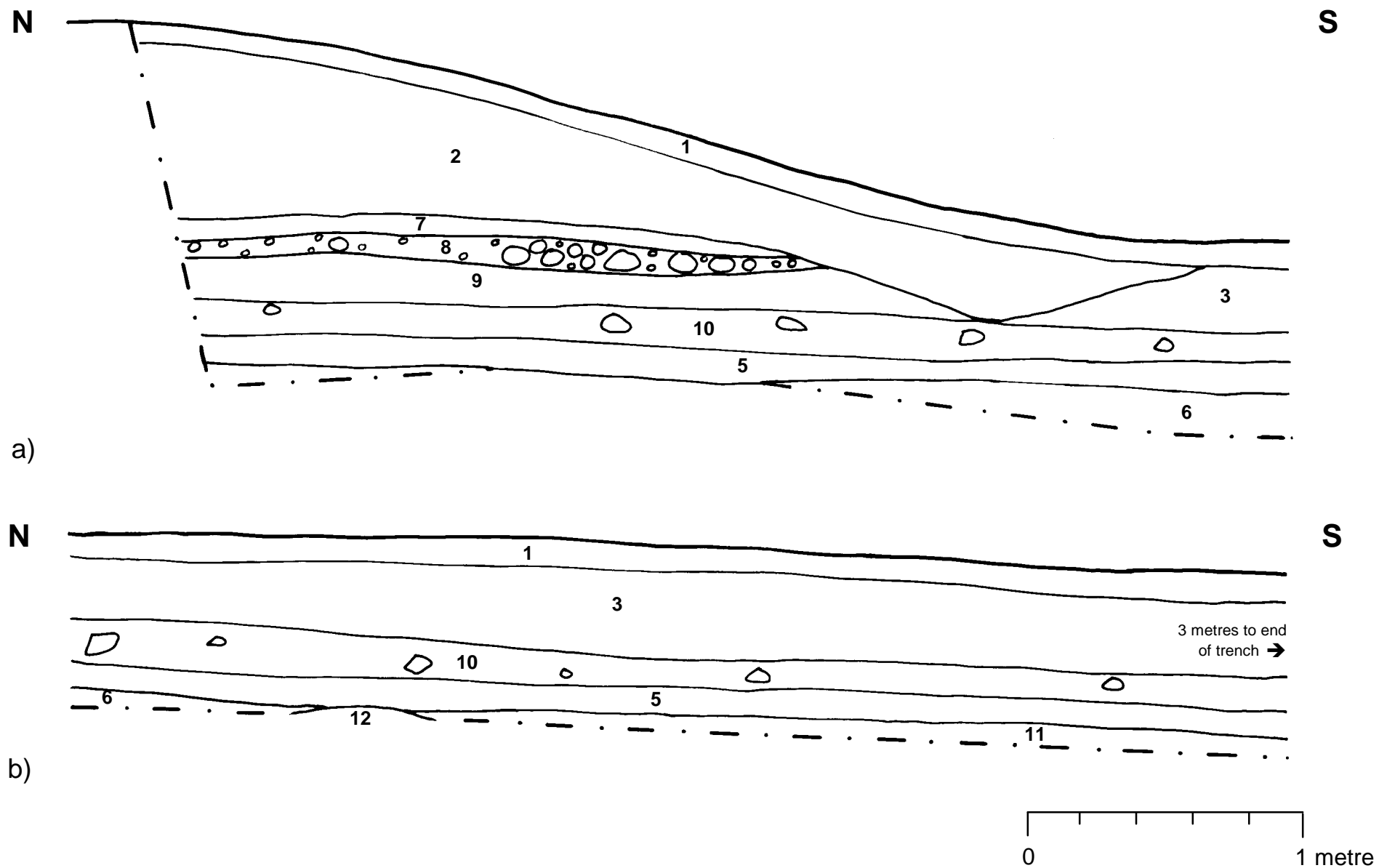
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THE OLD VICARAGE, BASCHURCH 2011

Figure 3: Extract from Plan of the Parish of Baschurch, 1794 (SA ref. P22/L/1/1)





THE OLD VICARAGE, BASCHURCH 2011

Figure 6: West-facing sections through the trench, a) north end & b) south end; 1:20 scale



Photo 1: The study area, looking northwest



Photo 2: The sequence at the northern end of the trench, looking east



Photo 3: The sequence at the central part of the trench, looking east