

**Bicester Retail Village  
(Phase 2B), Bicester,  
Oxfordshire: an  
Archaeological Watching  
Brief**

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit  
**Project No. 668**  
January 2000

**Bicester Retail Village (Phase 2B), Bicester, Oxfordshire:  
an Archaeological Watching Brief**

by  
Lesley-Ann Mather

*For further information please contact:*  
Simon Buteux, Iain Ferris or Gwilym Hughes (Directors)  
Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit  
The University of Birmingham  
Edgbaston  
Birmingham B15 2TT  
Tel: 0121 414 5513  
Fax: 0121 414 5516  
E-Mail: [BUFAU@bham.ac.uk](mailto:BUFAU@bham.ac.uk)  
Web Address: <http://www.bufau.bham.ac.uk>

# **Bicester Retail Village (Phase 2B), Bicester, Oxfordshire: an Archaeological Watching Brief**

by Lesley-Ann Mather

## **Summary**

*An archaeological watching brief was undertaken at Bicester, Oxfordshire (NGR SP 580219) in January 2000, during groundworks for the phase 2B development of Bicester Retail Village. Earlier archaeological work to the east had demonstrated the survival of previously-unrecorded Late Iron Age and Romano-British settlement remains within the flood plain of the Langford Brook. The results of the watching brief showed that the subsoil horizon had been significantly reduced prior to the present development and as such no archaeological features had survived.*

## **Introduction**

This report details the results of an archaeological watching brief, undertaken prior to the construction of Phase 2B of Bicester Retail Village (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Lyons+Sleeman+Hoare on behalf of Value Retail and was undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit in January 2000. An archaeological evaluation was carried out to the east of the Phase 2B development area in 1993 (Bevan and Leach 1993), followed by an excavation in 1995 (Mould 1996). As a result of this work, a planning condition was placed on the development proposals which required that an archaeological watching brief should be maintained during any groundworks taking place on the site. The watching brief was carried out in accordance with a specification produced by BUFAU (Leach 1997).

The topsoil had already been stripped from the site during the creation of a temporary car park. The Phase 2B development involved subsoil stripping across the entire site, followed by the excavation of foundation and service trenches. Archaeological monitoring was to be carried out throughout the subsoil stripping operation in order to record any significant remains encountered, and to assess the need for any further monitoring required during the excavation of the foundation and service trenches.

## **The Site**

The site is located on the southern outskirts of Bicester (centred on NGR SP 580 219), to the south of Pringle Drive, between the existing Bicester Retail Village Development to the east and the Tesco food store fronting the A421 road to the west. The land was in use previously as a temporary car park and prior to that as a rough pasture field.

The site lies to the west of the confluence of the Langford and Pringle Brooks, within the upper reaches of the Thames Valley gravel terraces. The area is recorded as being Cornbrash Limestone, Oxford Clay and Great Oolite, all of Jurassic age (BGS 1930). The ground level of the site appeared to be lower than the surrounding area, the original topography having been destroyed by the construction of the car park.

### **Archaeological background**

Prior to the evaluation of 1993, there were no recorded sites of archaeological interest in the immediate development area. The County Sites and Monument Record did contain reference to several sites within the wider locality:

- 1) A ditched earthwork (SP 586218) destroyed in the 1980s, interpreted as fishponds, but could equally be compared to flax-retting beds at Cogges.
- 2) Cropmarks (SP 577221) suggestive of late prehistoric or Romano-British trackways and field systems lie within 400m to the northwest of the site.
- 3) The Towcester to Alcester Roman Road runs under the present A421 to the west.
- 4) The Roman town of Alcester lies just over 1km to the southwest of the Oxford Road.
- 5) A group of ring ditches (SP 576221) lies to the west of the site.

The evaluation in 1993, consisting of trial trenches, defined three zones (Fig. 2). Zone 1, immediately to the east of the Phase 2B development area, contained the remains of medieval cultivation earthworks, beneath which were traces of suspected earlier, though undated, archaeological features. Zone 2 consisted of a post-medieval dump and Zone 3 revealed archaeological features dating to the Late Iron Age/Romano-British period. The subsequent excavation in Zone 3 demonstrated the survival of an extensive Late Iron Age/Romano-British settlement within the flood plain of the Langford Brook (Mould 1996).

A geophysical survey carried out in 1997 at Whitelands Farm, Bicester Leisure Park, across the A421 to the west of the Tesco site, revealed a complex of linear and discrete cut features, suggesting the existence of a small settlement site, such as a farm, in this area (Barker 1997).

### **Aims**

The aim of the archaeological watching brief was to record any archaeological remains uncovered during the course of the development, in order to contribute to an

understanding of the nature, extent and significance of archaeological remains within the area.

Specific objectives were:

- i. to monitor groundworks in the development area for the purpose of locating and recording any archaeological deposits or remains which may have survived.
- ii. to sample and recover any contextual evidence which may assist in the interpretation of such remains.
- iii. to report upon and make public, as appropriate, the results of any such discoveries.

### **Methodology**

The site was stripped intermittently using mechanical excavators and then almost immediately covered with a mantle of aggregate. The tarmac was removed using a toothed bucket and then the subsoil was removed using either a toothless or toothed bucket. The depth of material removed ranged from between 1-2m. The subsoil stripping was to be constantly monitored by an archaeologist, and observations made at this stage of the work would identify any requirement for further monitoring during the excavation of foundation and service trenches. Any significant archaeological deposits were to be excavated by hand and recorded on *pro-forma* record cards supplemented by scale plans, section drawings and photographs, where appropriate. Where no archaeological deposits were identified, the stratigraphy was to be recorded and photographed. These records comprise the site archive, which, at the time of writing, is stored at Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit.

### **Results**

The area stripped under archaeological supervision, the southern half of the site, revealed that the subsoil horizon had been significantly reduced prior to the laying down of the temporary car park, and, as such, the stripping being monitored was below any level at which archaeology would occur. The stripping did, however, reveal some interesting geological features, providing vivid examples of periglacial events. These occurred as circular, square and oblong gravel-filled shapes within a blue-grey clay natural. These features had a halo of iron panning indicative of this geological phenomenon, with some displaying concentric circles, a result of thawing and freezing. Following a monitoring visit by the County Archaeologist, it was decided, on the basis of the observations made so far, that there was unlikely to be any significant archaeological remains surviving on the site and therefore the watching brief was discontinued.

## **Discussion**

Although previous work has shown that there was an extensive Late Iron Age/Romano-British settlement to the east of the development area, and another potential settlement site to the west, it is clear that the Phase 2B site has been subjected to considerable modern disturbance and no archaeological evidence has survived.

## **Acknowledgements**

The watching brief was sponsored by Lyons+Sleeman+Hoare on behalf of Value Retail and carried out by Lesley-Ann Mather and James Taylor. The report was written by Lesley-Ann Mather and edited by Lucie Dingwall, and the illustrations were prepared by Nigel Dodds. The project was managed by Lucie Dingwall for BUFAU and monitored by Paul Smith for Oxfordshire County Council. Thanks are due to Chris Stevens, the Site Manager, for his assistance during the project.

## **References**

Barker, P. 1997 *A Geophysical Survey at Whitelands Farm, Bicester Leisure Park*, Stratascan.

Bevan, L. and Leach, P. 1993 *Archaeological Field Evaluation at Oxford Road, Bicester*, BUFAU report no. 277.

Mould, C. and Rosseff, R. 1994. *Oxford Road, Bicester, Oxfordshire. An Archaeological and Environmental Assessment with Research Synopsis*, BUFAU report no. 330.

Mould, C. 1995. *An Archaeological Excavation at Oxford Road, Bicester, Oxfordshire*, BUFAU report no. 330.

Mould, C. 1996. 'An Archaeological Excavation at Oxford Road, Bicester, Oxfordshire, *Oxoniensia*, Vol. LXI, 65-108.

## **List of Figures**

Fig. 1            Location of site.

Fig. 2            Location of 1993 evaluation, 1995 excavation, 1997 Geophysical survey and 2000 watching brief.

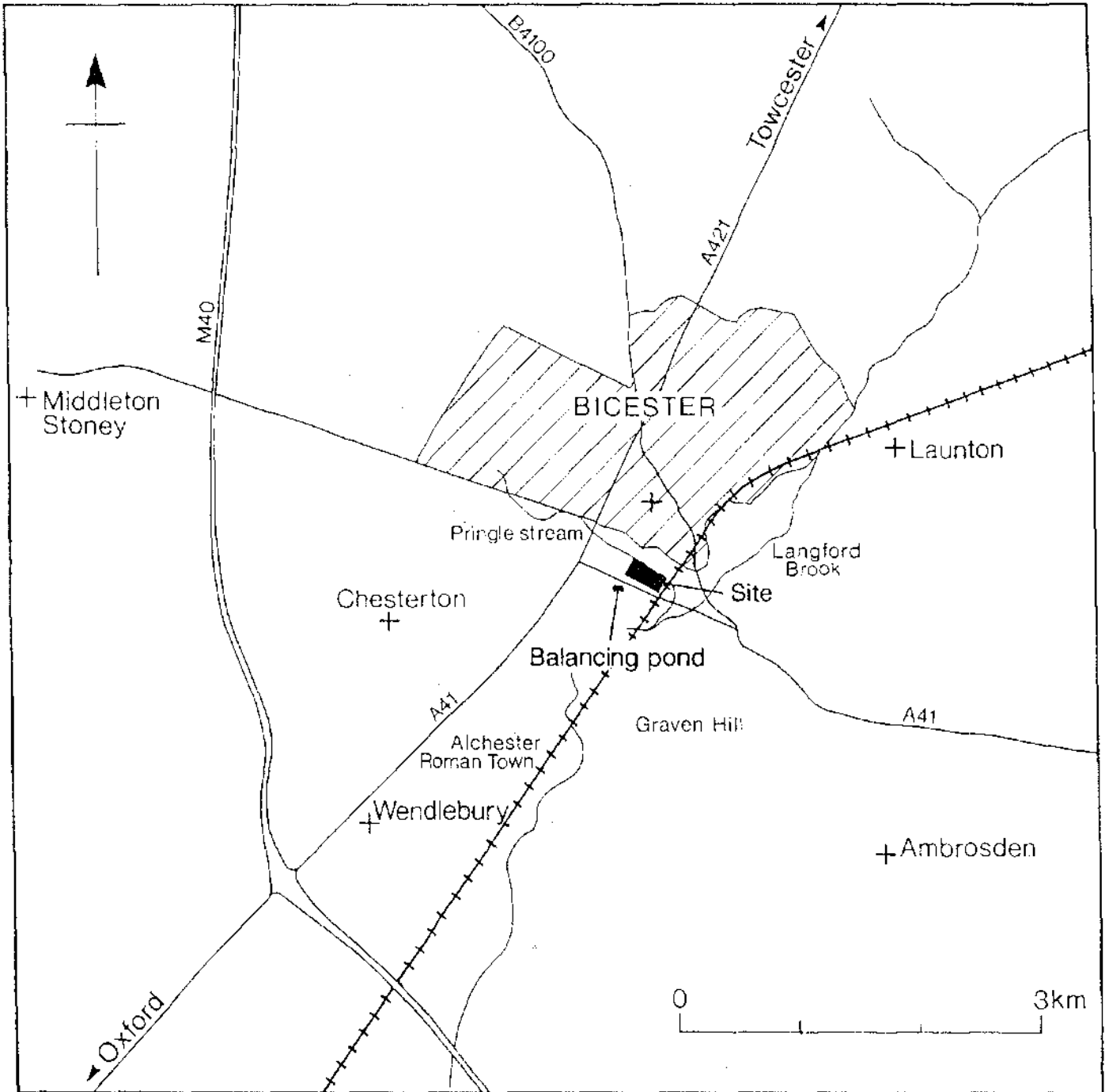
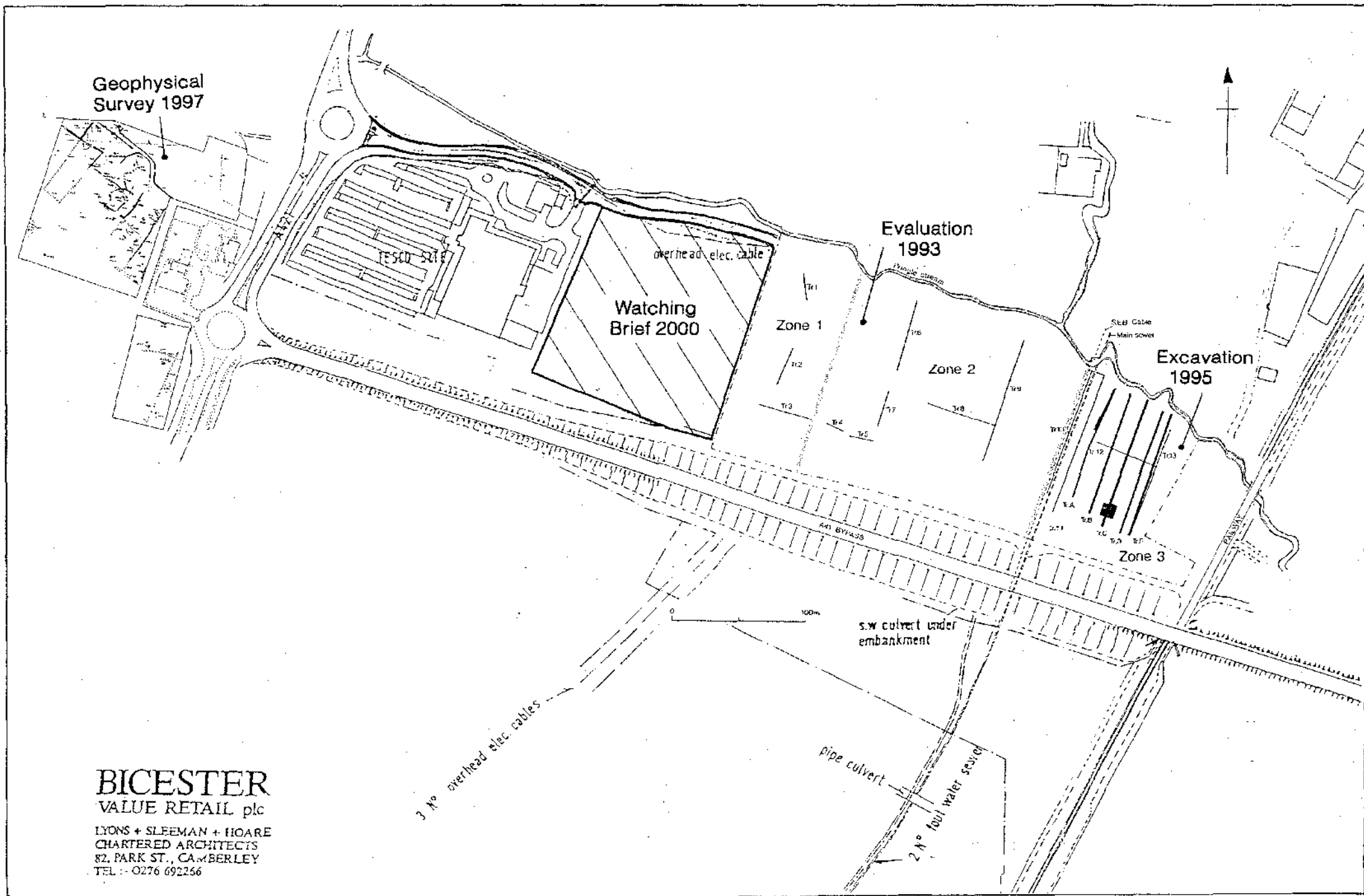


Fig.1



**BICESTER**  
 VALUE RETAIL plc  
 LYONS + SLEEMAN + HOARE  
 CHARTERED ARCHITECTS  
 82, PARK ST., CAMBERLEY  
 TEL : - 0276 692266

Fig 2