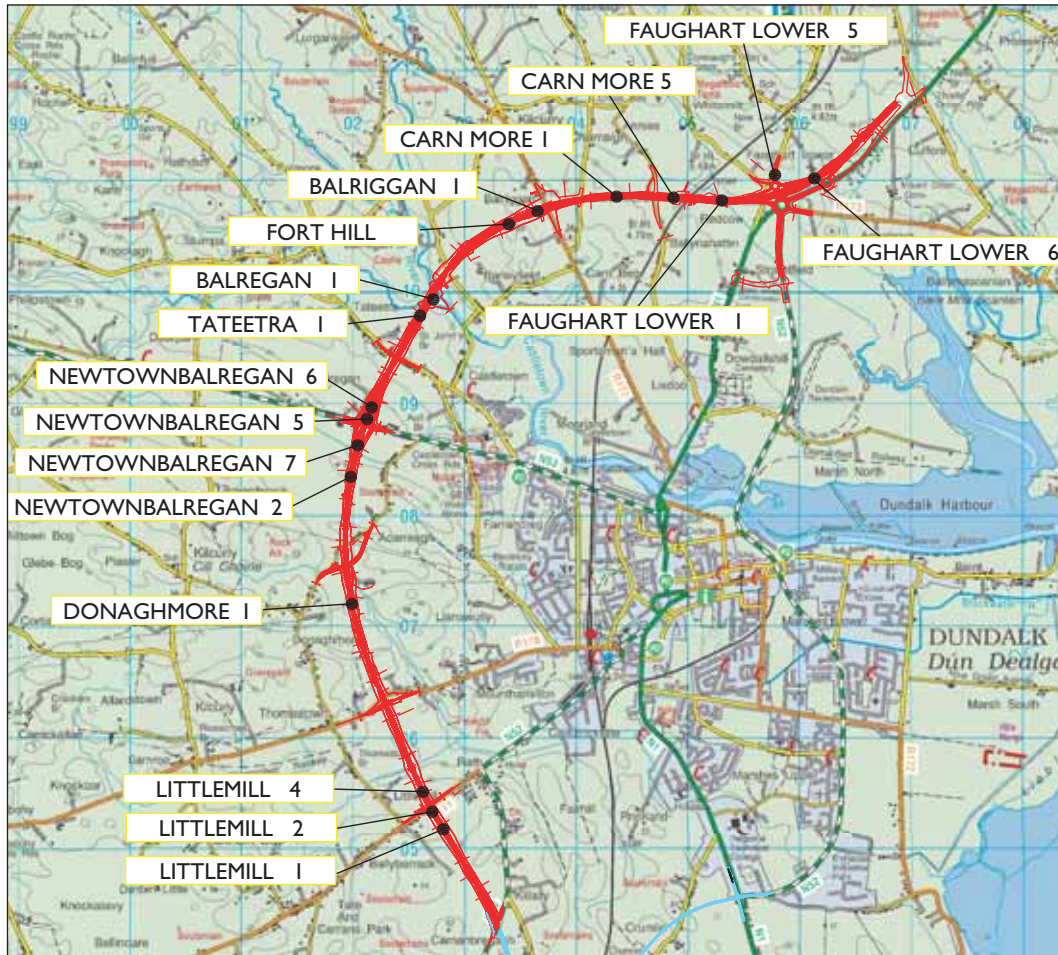


7. Around the bay on the Great North Road: the archaeology of the M1 Dundalk Western Bypass

Niall Roycroft



Illus. 1—General site location map showing excavated sites along the route of the M1 Dundalk Western Bypass (Meath County Council National Roads Design Office, based on the Ordnance Survey Ireland map)

Dundalk is a beautiful place. The bay and harbour sweep in from the Irish Sea, overlooked by the south-facing slopes of the Cooley Mountains, Black Mountain and Slieve Gullien. Castletown-Dundalk nestles in a sheltered spot on the ancient Gap of the North/Great North Road (roughly the present N1), controlling a port and a fertile, rolling hinterland. This area is immensely rich regarding archaeological sites and the land is steeped in legends of Cú Chullain, Fin MacCool and the Cattle Raid of Cooley (*Táin Bó Cúailnge*), as well as medieval conflict such as the Battle of Faughart, which ended the Bruce invasions in AD 1318.

The M1 Dundalk Western Bypass is part of the northern end of the M1 motorway, which currently comes from Dublin Airport and will soon reach the border with Northern Ireland at County Armagh, before continuing to Newry. The advance archaeological works were commissioned by Louth County Council and the NRA, and the main construction

works were undertaken by Celtic Roads Group Dundalk Limited. The bypass is approximately 9.4 km long, comprising 85 ha of green field land, arcing about 3 km around the western side of Dundalk (Illus. 1).

The route was reasonably small in terms of current national road projects and was fully trial trenched by Irish Archaeological Consultancy Ltd (IAC) in Spring 2002, well in advance of any road construction. Subsequently, extensive archaeological excavations were undertaken with a fairly small team from IAC between 2002 and the end of 2003. These excavations involved topsoil stripping 13.3 ha of land over 31 archaeological sites. Twenty-six sites turned out to be significant. During monitoring of construction works by Aegis Archaeology Ltd in 2004 and 2005, three further significant archaeological sites were found.

Archaeological background

The land around Dundalk is gently rolling and lies between 3 m and 44 m OD. The strip of the bypass curves around the head of Dundalk Bay, crossing the Castletown and Kilcurry rivers where they converge, 3 km inland from Dundalk harbour. There are relatively few previously recorded archaeological sites on the low-lying land around Dundalk, but this probably reflects archaeological sites being consistently swept away by intensive agriculture connected with the urban focus of Castletown-Dundalk since the medieval period.

In early medieval times this part of Louth was the territory of the *Uí Connaille Mhuirthemne*. This territory stretched from between the Dee and Glyde Rivers in south County Louth to the highlands of the current County Armagh/Louth border. To the west it seems the territory included the relatively flat lands of Louth but did not pass far into the drumlins of County Monaghan. This territorial base of around 30 km by 30 km had a focus near to present Dundalk and almost certainly reflects a much more ancient tribal area.

The two map sheets (LH004 and LH007) of the statutory Record of Monuments and Places (RMP) traversed by the M1 Dundalk Western Bypass has 280 sites marked. This works out as a distribution of one archaeological site per 43 ha. Of these sites, 22.5% are prehistoric, 62.8% are early medieval, 11.4% are medieval and 3.2% are post-medieval. The M1 Dundalk Western Bypass had an archaeological site worthy of record for every 3.5 ha of the landtake for the road. Of these, 53% were prehistoric, 15% were early medieval, 3.8% were medieval and 26.9% were post-medieval. By comparing the results from the bypass works to the RMP maps, it could be argued there may be up to 10 times as many archaeological sites in this lowland area of Louth than are presently marked.

Ritual sites of the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age (3500–1500 BC)

The first two major sites for discussion are in Balregan and Carn More townlands. Both are close to river confluences. The first, Balregan, is at the major confluence between the Castletown and Kilcurry Rivers west of Dundalk harbour and the second, Carn More, is close to a minor confluence of two streams to the north-west of the bay. During the Neolithic/Early Bronze Age, both these river confluences would have been on or near the sea coast at the head of Dundalk harbour.



Illus. 2—Aerial view of the Balregan site showing the curving henge bank. The barrow and river confluence are in the background (Studio Lab)

Balregan archaeological complex

The excavated site partly lay within an ‘Archaeological Complex’¹ identified by the RMP. Within this complex Thomas Wright’s *Louthiana* (1758) illustrated two cairns, three standing stones, a stone alignment, two or three stone circles and a tower house. The prehistoric monuments present here had been a source of raw materials during the early medieval period, when many stones were taken from this complex to be split and re-used as capstones for the nearby souterrains at Tateetra (see below). By the time of the first Ordnance Survey of 1835, all the Balregan monuments, except the ruined tower house, had been swept away.

The line of the road was thought to pass fairly close to Wright’s ‘Site B’—illustrated as a stone circle of 13 stones—which he confusingly described as a ‘burying place or sort of family sepulchre’. On the basis of this description, it was not known what Wright’s ‘Site B’ actually was; it could have been a folly or specially constructed cairn relating to the nearby tower house. Once the site was stripped, however, remains of several monuments were visible.² The first was a curving part of a ceremonial enclosure or henge, flanked by external satellite activity; the second was a barrow; and the third was a standing stone socket (Illus. 2).

Ceremonial enclosure/henge

The ceremonial enclosure or henge was identified from a curving length of bank, 5 m wide, that would have formed a broken circle 80–90 m in diameter internally and up to 110 m wide externally. Only 10–15% of this monument was actually located on lands acquired for the road. The bank would have had a break in it 20 m wide giving views to the south, towards the nearby lone hill of Dún Déalgan (see footnote 17 below). It is thought that Wright’s Site B stone circle was located in the centre of the enclosing ring as this

¹ RMP LH007-001.

² Balregan 1, NGR 302674, 309977. Height 10.5 m OD. Excavation Licence No. 03E015.

arrangement occurs at the only other known ceremonial enclosure in County Louth, the 'Ballynahattin' henge (actually in Carn More townland). This henge is only 1.5 km away from Balregan and consisted of a double stone circle (i.e. of two concentric rings) surrounded by a large bank with external standing stones.

The Balregan henge bank was founded on a layer of water-rolled stones collected from the adjacent rivers. These stones would have secured the base to a very high, probably turf, bank. It is a technique made famous by the Romans on parts of Hadrian's Wall. The land surface beneath this bank was strewn with thin burnt spreads and over 1000 sherds of Neolithic pottery, clearly showing some form of foundation ritual. A large pit was excavated at the bank terminal and is interpreted as a possible standing stone socket. An external ditch to the bank was found but seems to have been deliberately infilled very soon after it was excavated. There was also an internal ditch and, in contrast, this was left open for a considerable period and an accumulation of burnt deposits was found in its base. Immediately outside the bank was a series of burnt hollows interpreted as cooking sites and a layer of river-rolled stones interpreted as a foundation to a probable tumulus/tomb.

Barrow and standing stone

The newly discovered barrow was 90 m east of the henge, outside the area of the recorded site. The barrow was about 20 m in diameter, built on a flat terrace cut into the rising ground directly above the river confluence. The base of this terrace contained a cooking pit, a few post-holes and layers of charcoal and burnt stones, perhaps representing feasting prior to raising the barrow mound. The isolated standing stone socket, 25 m from the barrow, was nearly 3 m across and was not placed centrally between the two rivers.

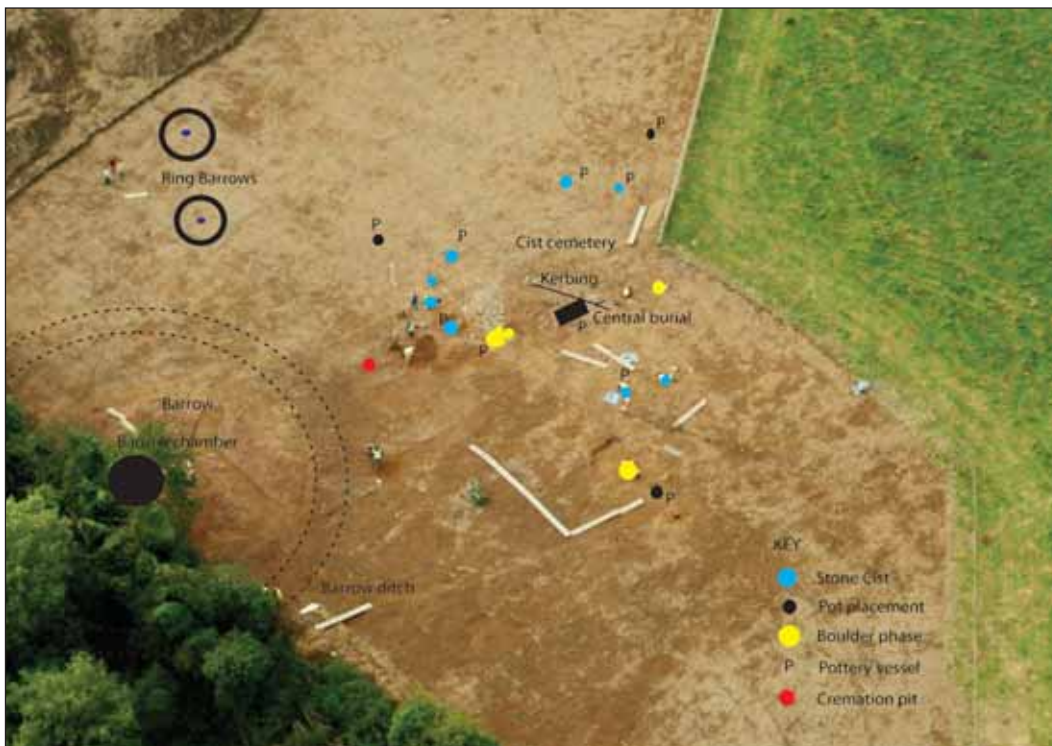
Carn More cemetery

Truncated by the 19th-century Dublin–Belfast railway was part of a Bronze Age and possibly Iron Age cemetery.³ The area within the road was approximately 50 m by 50 m and was placed on a very slight gravel ridge around 200 m west of the confluence of two streams. The main monuments consisted of a barrow with a central stone chamber; a form of 'flat' cist cemetery monument; a phase of boulder burials, probably related to a group of cists; and two small ring barrows, each with a central cremation (Illus. 3). There was also a pit filled with charcoal and burnt bone which could have been where bodies were actually cremated. Ten complete Food Vessel-type pots and a broken Encrusted Urn were recovered, along with a number of bronze artefacts.

Ring barrow

The ring barrow was around 25 m in diameter and partly surrounded by a shallow ditch containing stones. The barrow had been cut in half by the 19th-century railway. The central burial chamber was 2 m across and was made after the mound had been constructed and took the form of a stone-lined pit with a low partition in the base. Along with loose, cremated bone fragments, finds from this chamber include pieces of a Collared Urn and fragments of pottery on which cremated bone had become fused. This shows that the chamber contained multiple burials, some in pottery vessels.

³ Carn More 5, NGR 304912, 310860. Height 10.5 m OD. Excavation Licence No. 03E0873.



Illus. 3—Aerial view of the Carn More 5 site under excavation, annotated to show the burial monuments (Niall Roycroft)

Illus. 4—Detail of the granite 'animal' under excavation in the central burial pit of the Carn More cist cemetery (Niall Roycroft)

Cist cemetery

The cist cemetery was 40 m in diameter, centred on a main burial associated with a large irregular pit, an oven and a storage pit. The central burial had a form of altar built on top of it and this formed the centre to an inner circle marked with eight stone-lined, 'short' cists. Up to 21 m away from the centre were three cremations in pots, placed in unlined pits.

The central burial pit contained a highly decorated Food Vessel pot placed in a niche of stones. The rest of this large pit was filled with a mix of stones and silts. Slumped into the top of the pit was a granite 'animal' 1.5 m long (Illus. 4), paired with a stone slab with a row



Illus. 5—Detail of the large, granite-capped cist at the Carn More cemetery (Niall Roycroft)



Illus. 6—Decoration on a prehistoric stone re-used within the Täteetra souterrain (Niall Roycroft)

of shallow cups running down the upper side. The 'animal' stone was made of a solid, modified, granite boulder and appears as a resting sheep or cow with a deep hole pierced into one side. A small cairn 5 m in diameter was subsequently built over the central burial and a copper-alloy and apparently iron-filled pommel from a probable ceremonial dagger, and a bronze pin with a twisted faience glass coating were recovered from this cairn.

Eight cists were found in a ring around the central burial. Of these eight, five contained cremations and three contained inhumations (bones only surviving in one of the inhumation cists). Five cists contained pottery Bowl or Vase Food Vessels of c. 1900–1700 BC. All the cists were stone-lined and appear to have contained single individuals. There was no evidence for an extensive large mound or cairn. If the cists were later or secondary, then it is difficult to understand why they were placed in this ring if there was no physical



Illus. 7—Detail of the decorated stone found within the Newtownbalregan souterrain (B O'Connor)

barrier to prevent them being placed closer to the central burial. It seems the cists and central burial were part of a single construction plan.

Boulder burial phase

A second phase of construction on the cist monument comprised of a pair of granite boulder burials and a granite boulder-capped cist (Illus. 5). This cist had multiple interments over a basal layer of bone with a Food Vessel pot. Once the granite boulder-capped cist was full, two 'overflow' cists were dug next to it. In one of these cists an Encrusted Urn of around 1700 BC had been inverted over a plain pot. Unfortunately, this cist had been damaged but over 140 sherds of the urn were recovered and it can be reconstructed. The main multiple burial cist's granite capstone presumably acted as an above-ground marker, so it could be found easily for re-use. Two large, granite 'boulder burials' (neither of which had associated burials) may therefore be linked to the granite boulder-capped cist.

Small ring barrows

Probably the latest phase of the cemetery was represented by two small ring barrows, between 3 m and 4 m in diameter. Each of these barrows had an unlined central pit containing cremated bone. Both of these mounds may have been contained within dry-stone walls, as seen by collapsed stone in the associated ditches.

Decorated stones

Re-used in the early medieval souterrain at Tateetra (see below) was a stone showing an engraved lozenge pattern (Illus. 6). Set on display within the early medieval souterrain at



Illus. 8—Aerial view of the ringfort and souterrain at Newtownbalregan (Studio Lab)

Newtownbalregan⁴ was a wonderfully decorated stone (Illus. 7). This broken stone displays motifs that are known from 'megalithic art' (c. 1800 BC) such as a 'trumpet' pattern, but is not typical of such stones. The 'paisley' pattern could show Iron Age additions.

Prehistoric society

Six unenclosed Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age domestic settlement sites were found on the project.⁵ All buildings were small, being rectangular or circular, not more than 4 m in diameter. Two more sites⁶ revealed similarly dated cooking pits, pottery, cremated human bone but no evidence for buildings. In addition, four burnt mounds were excavated⁷, one with a platform of sticks upon which the hearth had been set.⁸ All these sites give a solid presence for the people who actually created, used, lived and died at the Balregan and Carn More ritual and ceremonial sites.

Prehistoric society is brought further into focus through the artefact assemblage. This major collection includes two polished stone axes, around 2000 sherds of Neolithic to

⁴ Newtownbalregan 6, NGR 302156, 308928. Height 37 m OD. Excavation Licence No. 03E0115.

⁵ Littlemill 1, NGR 302783, 305237. Height 33.5 m OD. Excavation Licence No. 02E175. Littlemill 4, NGR 302632, 305532. Height 28.5 m OD. Excavation Licence No. 02E183. Donaghmore 1, NGR 301980, 307190. Height 38 m OD. Excavation Licence No. 02E1330. Newtownbalregan 2, NGR 301993, 308377. Height 37.5 m OD. Excavation Licence No. 02E0113. Newtownbalregan 5, NGR 302115, 308829. Height 26 m OD. Excavation Licence No. 03E0114. Carn More 1, NGR 304357, 310846. Height 23 m OD. Excavation Licence No. 03E0867.

⁶ Faughart Lower 5, NGR 305805, 310996. Height 17 m OD. Excavation Licence No. 03E1574. Faughart Lower 6, NGR 306190, 311042. Height 8 m OD. Excavation Licence No. 04E0811.

⁷ Littlemill 2, NGR 302721, 305350. Height 29 m OD. Excavation Licence No. 02E1753. Newtownbalregan 5, NGR 302115, 308829. Height 26 m OD. Excavation Licence No. 03E0114. Newtownbalregan 7, NGR 302064, 308661. Height 26 m OD. Excavation Licence No. 04E0817. Faughart Lower 1, NGR 305326, 310851. Height 5.5 m OD. Excavation Licence No. 03E1397.

⁸ Faughart Lower 1 (above).



Illus. 9—Penannular brooch (41 mm diameter) found in the enclosure ditch at Newtownbalregan (Studio Lab)



Illus. 10—Newtownbalregan souterrain under excavation with the Cooley mountains in the background (Studio Lab)



*Illus. 11—
Souterrain 1 at
Tateetra, drophole
near Chamber 1
under excavation
(Niall Roycroft)*

Early Bronze Age pottery, 13 virtually complete Bronze Age pottery vessels (the 12 from the Carn More cemetery plus a polypod vessel from Newtownbalregan 2),⁹ more than 450 struck flints, nine metal items and seven worked or decorated stone objects. Much of the pottery is from the Balregan henge and it is likely that many intact pots were deliberately smashed during a foundation ritual for this site. This impressive assemblage of roughly contemporary artefacts from a variety of different sites and contexts is an excellent collection for study.

Early medieval sites, AD 400–1169

Jumping forward a few thousand years, four major early medieval sites were excavated in the townlands of Newtownbalregan, Tateetra, Balriggeran and Carn More.¹⁰ From these sites, four superb souterrains were recorded and large assemblages of pottery, struck flint, charred seeds and metalworking evidence were found.

Newtownbalregan ringfort and souterrain

Located on a high ridge overlooking the broad Castletown and Kilcurry river valley to the west of Dundalk as well as the Cooley mountains of the Carlingford Peninsula, was a ringfort and associated souterrain (Illus. 8). The ringfort was 45 m in diameter and the souterrain was 45 m long. This was a high status site, whose main phase dated to the sixth or seventh centuries AD.

⁹ Newtownbalregan 2, NGR 301, 308377. Height 37.5 m OD. Excavation Licence No. 02E0113.

¹⁰ Newtownbalregan 6, NGR 302156, 308928. Height 37 m OD. Excavation Licence No. 03E0115.

Balriggeran 1, NGR 303656, 310724. Height 15 m OD. Excavation Licence No. 02E132. Carn More 1, NGR 304357, 310846. Height 27 m OD. Excavation Licence No. 03E0867. RMP LH004-067. Tateetra 1, Scheme sub-number A010/001. NGR 302603, 309828. Height 11 m OD.



Illus. 12—Souterrain 2 at Tateetra under excavation (Niall Roycroft)



Illus. 13—Detail of the cross-inscribed stone re-used within the Tateetra Souterrain 2 (Niall Roycroft)

Inside the ringfort, a cluster of pits and post-holes indicated the main domestic buildings were on the southern side. The northern side of the interior was empty and probably used for corralling stock. Over 200 pieces of struck flint were recovered from the ringfort ditch, possibly connecting the site with leather working; very sharp cutting edges being useful in hide working. A small copper-alloy penannular brooch (Illus. 9) was discovered in the enclosure ditch, along with some superbly decorated glass beads, Souterrain Ware pottery and other dress pins.



Illus. 14—Aerial view of the Balriggan settlement, the main enclosure is in the foreground, the stock enclosure is in the middle ground. The hill to the rear is Fort Hill (Studio Lab)

Although the souterrain was identified through a collapsed section, once it had been excavated to a certain depth a series of intact galleries was suddenly revealed. The whole souterrain was then exposed and recorded (Illus. 10). The souterrain was pitched on the sloping hillside with several low galleries or passages and two much larger corbelled chambers with associated external air vents. The whole was excellently made using quarried stone for all parts except for the lowest gallery, which was made of fieldstone.

Tateetra souterrains

Two conjoined and intact souterrains were discovered during archaeological monitoring of road construction in Tateetra townland, adjacent to the Castletown River, and overlooking the Balregan Archaeological Complex described above. No enclosure was found with these souterrains but it is likely there was a significant high status site near to the spot.

Both souterrains were made with quarried stone and were entered via a central chamber whose west-facing door could be barred with double braces from the inside. The southern side of the entrance chamber contained the start of Souterrain 1; the northern side led to Souterrain 2. Souterrain 1 consisted of two very low and narrow galleries, linked by a drop-hole (Illus. 11), two small chambers and was around 40 m long in total. Souterrain 2 (Illus. 12) consisted of two galleries separated by a massive, double-braced door and was in total about 32 m long. Internally, Souterrain 2 was very large, being up to 1.6 m high by 2 m wide at the base. The walls corbelled in significantly at the top.

Souterrain 2 was capped by re-using prehistoric standing stones, presumably taken from the much older Balregan Archaeological Complex (see above). These included a pillar stone—possibly an early medieval altar—inscribed with five Greek crosses (Illus. 13) and a more simple cross-inscribed tomb slab. These stones may indicate the presence of a previously unknown church and cemetery at the Balregan site or in the vicinity.

The sequence appears to have been that small Souterrain 1 was built and this was followed by Souterrain 2. The souterrains were clearly meant to be locked from the inside with the entrance door and internal door both showing evidence for large cross braces, very



Illus. 15—Early medieval grave at Balriggan under excavation (Niall Roycroft)

similar to an internal door at Newtownbalregan. In the gallery of Souterrain 1 a broken Souterrain Ware vessel was recovered, probably acting as a lamp, and in the backfill of the joint entrance chamber a copper-alloy pin of around 11th-century date was found.

Both the Tateetra souterrains had the capstones recorded and lifted. The galleries and chambers were then recorded before being filled with gravel to preserve them *in situ*. The capstones were then replaced and the whole structure has been preserved underneath the new road embankment.

Balriggan settlement

This 2.5 ha site at Balriggan is a multi-vallate and multi-phase enclosed settlement with an outlying stock enclosure and field system (Illus. 14). The site also draws security from two nearby patches of wetland that are linked by large ditches to give protection. At least three phases were evident, the latest of which included over 800 sherds of Souterrain Ware. At its maximum extent the main focus for the site was around 100 m across.

The original enclosure was around 50 m in diameter and was entered by a grand entrance driveway, plus two subsidiary entrances. There was an external D-shaped annex, later subsumed into the expanded site. Internally there was a cemetery (Illus. 15), an area comprising wood-lined troughs linked to gullies for water intake/disposal, a four-post and a nine-post structure (possibly granaries) and two huge storage pits. Buildings, possibly of stone with shallow foundations or horizontal timber beams, probably occupied the blank areas. External to the main enclosure, a large animal enclosure and a large ore-roasting furnace were revealed and hundreds of kilos of bog iron slag were collected. Further away,



Illus. 16—Main enclosure at Balriggeran under excavation in the snow looking in the direction of the Great North Road (Niall Roycroft)

a large corn-drying kiln, still full of charred seeds, and two charcoal clamps were found. No souterrain was located within the lands made available.

The cemetery consisted of 49 Christian-style graves in a small area 15 m by 15 m with two clear phases of use before it became a children's burial ground (*cillín*). Some of the graves were lined with stone but the general condition of the skeletal material was very poor. The acidic soil, combined with a rising and falling water table, meant that in many cases only teeth were left in the graves. The cemetery limits must have been well defined (possibly with a hedge) and its compact area and re-use seems to indicate it was contemporary with the main site occupation.

So why is this site here and who lived in it? The local early medieval kingdom was of the *Uí Connaille Mhuirthemne* and a double ditch is the traditional symbol for a high status site in this period. In contrast to a typical ringfort position on elevated ground, the Balriggeran site occupies the centre of a large, saucer-shaped depression 1.5 km across, almost directly on the old Gap of the North road (Illus. 16). The Gap of the North road was a key north-south strategic, trade and communications link. As such, the Balriggeran site would benefit from controlling passing trade. The site is not unprotected. Located around the lip of the broad depression are at least two subsidiary ringforts.¹¹ The site was not occupied during the medieval period but the earthworks appeared to have remained visible until the 17th or early 18th century, when they were levelled for the creation of parkland.

Carn More ringfort

The ringfort excavated at Carn More (Illus. 17) was only 800 m from Balriggeran and had commanding views to the north. About 50% of the monument lay within the lands acquired for the road. Internally the ringfort had a large W-shaped souterrain, 19 m in

¹¹ One of two ringforts overlooking the Balriggeran site is the Carn More 1 site (03E0867) described below.



Illus. 17—Ringfort and souterrain at Carn More under excavation (Studio Lab)

length, constructed wholly with field-collected stones. The entrance sloped down to a zig-zag gallery with no breaks or internal features. It seems that there was an exit from the souterrain up through the encircling ringfort bank. Found inside the souterrain backfill were fragments of human skull and teeth, but it is not known how they came to be there or whether, for instance, there is an unknown burial ground close by.

Early medieval society

The excavations have revealed an enormous amount of information about high status domestic settlement, burial, industries and landscape control in this area in the early medieval period. Economic indicators include souterrains, pottery, jewellery, struck flints, remains of livestock and cultivation, and metalworking.

The recorded souterrains were obviously status symbols and exhibit great architectural and construction skills. Designs were made using re-used plain and decorated stones, fieldstones and quarried stones. Chambers were square, rectangular, circular and included flared ends of galleries. Lighting alcoves were either at the base of a gallery wall or at the top. Sumps, drains and steps were used to control internal drainage. The major souterrains had large storage facilities just inside the entrance and, further in, could only be closed and fully secured by people on the inside. All the souterrains sloped down, internally, from the entrance. This ensured that fresh air would always be drawn in through the lower air shafts. The large souterrains of Newtownbalregan and Tateetra appear too large to simply hide in and it is possible that animals could also be put in them in times of crisis. Perhaps the crises were often triggered, not so much by feuding Irish clans, but by invading, slave-hunting Danes who first over-winter in Ireland at the end of the eight century at Annagassan (12 km south of Dundalk). A continued Danish presence is suggested at Annagassan throughout



Illus. 18—Aerial view of medieval Fort Hill motte and bailey (Studio Lab)

the ninth and early tenth centuries—the apparent period of most frequent souterrain construction.

Early medieval pottery of native manufacture in Ireland is largely limited to ancient Ulster and consisted of coarse, hand-made, bucket-shaped Souterrain Ware. Over 1000 sherds of Souterrain Ware were recovered, including a broken but mostly complete pot from Tateetra Souterrain 1. Over 800 sherds came from Balriggeran, a further 100 small sherds from Carn More and less than 50 sherds from Newtownbalregan. Such an unusually large quantity should allow a local pottery development sequence to be identified. Souterrain Ware pottery has a classic date range in the 8th to 10th centuries AD, but it is hoped that this assemblage, coupled with metal and glass finds from the 6th to 7th centuries, will push back the manufacturing date for this poorly studied pottery type.

Few items of dress or ornament were found considering the large scale of some of the sites and the Newtownbalregan penannular brooch of probable seventh century date stands out as a superb example. However, some of the glass beads also recovered from Newtownbalregan ringfort are equally excellent. Balriggeran, while being such a large site, only yielded a small jewellery collection of blue glass beads and three stick pins.

Due to acid soil conditions, almost all of the animal bone had dissolved across the whole project and the collection was often limited to teeth fragments. The large 'stock' enclosure at Balriggeran indicates animals being kept and the usual cattle, sheep, goats and pigs were probably all present in the livestock economy of the site. Spindle whorls from Balriggeran are the only evidence for wool working.

A collection of 446 stratified struck flints from these early medieval sites shows that flint use was still strong in this period, perhaps connected with animal hide working. A series of wood-lined troughs full of burnt stone and charcoal were found at Balriggeran inside the

main enclosure. These troughs may have had a role in cooking or curing large quantities of meat, since this area was not associated with large quantities of metalworking waste.

A 'figure-of-eight' corn-drying oven full of charred seeds was found at Balriggeran. Otherwise there was little evidence for arable agriculture, unless the four-post and nine-post structures at Balriggeran are interpreted as simple, elevated granaries. However, no seeds were found preserved in the post-holes for these structures.

Balriggeran was clearly a metalworking centre, with over 500 kg of slag being recovered, including 250 kg from one oven alone. The position of this site on the Gap of the North road would have facilitated trade of both raw materials and products. Two probable charcoal clamps were also recorded at Balriggeran. No evidence for metalworking was found at Newtownbalregan, Tateetra or Carn More.

Medieval period

The land around Dundalk was granted to the Anglo-Norman Bertram de Verdon in AD 1185 and Castletown, the original military centre for the Dundalk area, was fortified with a large motte and bailey.¹² By the late 13th century a new town of Dundalk had developed 1.5 km to the east of Castletown, taking advantage of the port and deep water harbour. A subsidiary ring of villages and early church sites occurs at a distance of 3 km to 3.5 km from Castletown-Dundalk in the townlands of Kilcurry, Killin, Kilcurly, Dunbin Big and Ballybarrack. The M1 Dundalk Western Bypass lies between 2 km and 2.5 km from Castletown-Dundalk and the possibility that the area of the bypass works was largely open-fields during the later medieval period may explain why no domestic settlement evidence was found.

Medieval fortified site: Fort Hill

The isolated hilltop of Fort Hill,¹³ in the townland of Balriggeran, was remodelled into a motte and bailey style fort during the medieval period, obliterating any evidence for earlier occupations.¹⁴ Fort Hill is situated approximately 2.2 km from the Anglo-Norman motte at Castletown and 3 km from the motte at Faughart Upper.¹⁵ The Fort appears to have been constructed at the time of the Bruce invasions in the beginning of the 14th century, AD 1315–1318, when the invaders came down through the Gap of the North. The Battle of Faughart, in which Edward Bruce was killed, took place near Dundalk in AD 1318.

Only 50% of the Fort Hill site was located within the lands acquired for the road (Illus. 18). The inner, oval enclosure ('motte') on the highest point of the hill measured 700 sq m. The western half of the enclosure was defined by a deep, inner ditch with a V-shaped profile,

¹² The motte and surrounding area is RMP LH007-118.

¹³ Fort Hill, Balriggeran townland, NGR 303423, 310581. Height 36 m OD. Excavation Licence No. 02E1326. Despite being marked as a 'Fort' on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey, the site was not a recorded monument.

¹⁴ An unstratified Neolithic polished stone axe was found during the initial clean up.

¹⁵ RMP LH004-023.

¹⁶ No unusual pathologies or signs of trauma were observed on the skeletal remains.

but there was no ditch on the eastern hillside, as this area had been very steeply scarped to provide defence. The enclosed area contained a curving base to a circular, wooden tower 4 m in diameter, and a huge pit containing massive packing stones that may have been the base for a signal beacon—a brazier on a large pole. Also within this enclosed area was an articulated human burial, orientated north–south (head to the south). The very well preserved nature of the bones appeared to indicate that it was not too ancient (probably medieval or post-medieval in date) and is thus of the Christian era. Yet it was not buried in the conventional east–west manner of all Christian burials. The isolated nature and unusual alignment could indicate that the body was buried at a time, or the result of, crisis.¹⁶

An outer enclosure ditch encompassed the rest of the hilltop (some 2000 sq. m) and this formed the ‘bailey’. The bailey ditch was less substantial than the inner ditch, being roughly rectangular in plan with a U-shaped profile. A third ditch appears to have formed an external gated annex.

Medieval society

Medieval Castletown-Dundalk is an excellent control point for major roads. Because post-medieval turnpike roads were constructed on green field routes from this focal point, the earlier road system has probably remained pretty much intact. It is possible to trace potential medieval roads from the villages surrounding Dundalk and perhaps trace the infrastructure (focused on Castletown¹⁷) that could have been in existence when the Anglo-Normans arrived, establishing their first settlement core at Castletown and, later, establishing themselves fully at Dundalk.

The lack of medieval archaeological remains around Castletown-Dundalk suggests that landscape control was probably focused on a scattering of rural power points and strongholds. The Newtownbalregan ringfort appears to have been deliberately flattened during the medieval period. As this defensible site was only 1.1 km from the Castletown motte, it could potentially have been taken over, particularly during the Bruce Invasions.

From Fort Hill came over 150 sherds of medieval pottery and a good collection of animal bone. It is possible that the Fort was actively used until the end of the 17th century, before it was finally abandoned and the hill used for quarrying.

¹⁷ Castletown motte is founded on the hill of Dún Dealgan, named from the prehistoric standing stone *Dealg Fhinn* (RMP LH007-118-06) located on its north-eastern side. Dún Dealgan also includes a large early medieval site that underlies, and is incorporated within, the Anglo-Norman motte.