

what we found

in brief:

Some of the findings from the scheme.



1. Bronze tweezers

Bronze tweezers found during excavations at the medieval site at **Cherryville**.

(Photo Valerie J Keeley Ltd)



2. Stone axes

Stone axeheads and arrowhead found during excavations at **Cherryville**.

(Photo Valerie J Keeley Ltd)



3. Medieval buckle

Medieval buckle found on medieval site uncovered at **Cherryville**.

(Photo Valerie J Keeley Ltd)

background

The **M7 Kildare Town Bypass**, built in 2001, extends 12 km and skirts the large town of **Kildare**.

In 1993 the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the scheme recommended that a small number of high potential areas be tested for archaeological remains before construction. An aerial survey in 1996 identified seven areas of possible archaeological potential. The subsequent investigations at the **Curragh** and other areas revealed no archaeological features or sites.



Archaeologists excavating features under a polytunnel at **Cherryville**.

The EIS had also recommended that the entire scheme be subject to archaeological monitoring during construction. The archaeological work was undertaken by **Valerie J Keeley Ltd** on behalf of the **National Roads Authority** and **Kildare County Council**.

The archaeological monitoring took place during 2001 and 2002 and resulted in 18 sites being revealed. Those considered to be of archaeological potential were located within the townlands of **Cherryville, Loughlion, the Curragh, Frenchfurze, Grey Abbey, Mooretown, Mayfield** and **Tully East**. Half of the archaeological sites revealed were burnt mounds which typically date to the Bronze Age. The remainder dated from the Neolithic up to the medieval period.

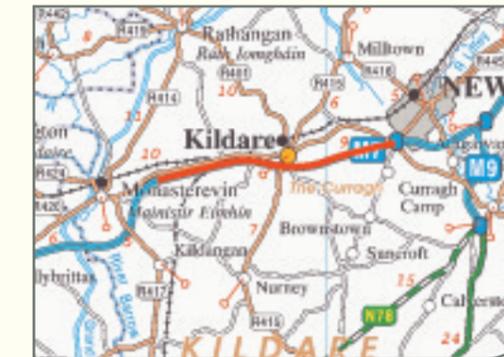


Excavations at the Bronze Age site uncovered at **Frenchfurze**.

M7 KILDARE TOWN BYPASS, County Kildare



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For more information please contact:

Archaeology Section
National Roads Authority
St. Martins House
Waterloo Road, Dublin 4

Tel: +353 1 660 2511
Fax: +353 1 668 0009
Email: info@nra.ie
Web: www.nra.ie

archaeological DISCOVERIES

front cover images

LEFT: Medieval pot found during excavations at **Cherryville** prior to its removal.

RIGHT: Pit uncovered at **Cherryville** after excavation.

MIDDLE: Archaeologists excavating one of the burnt spreads uncovered on the scheme.



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neolithic & bronze age

Cherryville

Most of the archaeological sites revealed on the scheme lay within the townland of **Cherryville** and five of them were burnt mounds. A recent radiocarbon date for one of these burnt mounds, obtained from a piece of alder charcoal from the fill of a pit, suggests that the site was used during the first few centuries of the second millennium BC, the Bronze Age period. Many of these sites also revealed clusters of pits and stake-holes under the spread of burnt stone and charcoal.

While monitoring the removal of soil next to two adjoining sites at Cherryville, two fine stone axeheads were uncovered, together with a fine lancehead, as well as a possible rubbing stone.

A further burnt mound at Cherryville has produced some unusual dating results. The site was first noted as a low mound in a boggy area measuring 10 m in diameter and 0.50 m high. There were five main layers in the mound, which lay on a layer of peat. A single sherd of Early Neolithic pottery was found at the base of the mound, in the natural peat, so it may pre-date the mound material. To the south-west of the mound an area of unburnt, roundish stones, appear to have been laid down to create a firm surface. A further sherd of prehistoric pottery and a leaf-shaped

arrowhead were found here. Radiocarbon dates suggest that this mound is contemporary with the Early Neolithic pottery which is typical of shouldered carinated bowls from this period, 3800 – 3500 BC. The mound contained layers of white marl, and there was no evidence for the usual pits, stake-holes or troughs so often associated with burnt mounds. There has been increasing evidence to suggest that burnt mounds, one of the most common site types discovered on road schemes, are not confined to the Bronze Age, but possibly have earlier beginnings. The site at Cherryville appears to confirm this.



Pit uncovered at **Cherryville** after excavation.

bronze age

Loughlion

A truncated burnt spread at **Loughlion** revealed some post-holes, pits and areas of burnt stone. A series of post-holes may form a square or rectangular structure. The archaeological artefacts from this site include medieval and post-medieval pottery, slag, some flint and chert, together with a musket ball. Much of this site had been extensively disturbed by the construction of drains and field boundaries. There was no trace of any mound as there had been at other locations such as Cherryville. A whetstone was found in an isolated group of features in one of the cuttings. Could this have had a votive significance, that is an object left in a sacred place for ritual purposes? Or, indeed, could it have been simply refuse? A piece of alder charcoal provided a firm radiocarbon date of 2490 – 2120 BC, placing this site in the Early Bronze Age.

Greyabbey

During archaeological monitoring at **Greyabbey**, a small spread of charcoal-rich soil and shattered stone was revealed. A second burnt spread was also revealed close by, together with two large ditches which extended to the east. Two pits were found in conjunction with the burnt spreads which may have been the remains of a burnt mound. The spreads were 4 m x 4 m approximately and shallow. One of the shallow deposits excavated in conjunction with the burnt spreads yielded 12 sherds of medieval pottery, some waste flints and an iron nail.

A flint blade was recovered from another context. The ditches, one of which ran for 23 m, appear to be the remains of later field boundaries.

Frenchfurze

The site at **Frenchfurze** covers an area about 70 m long and revealed a concentration of post-holes and two possible hearths. To the south-west of the main site three circular pits were excavated together with a linear pit. A stake-hole and a series of north-west–south-east agricultural plough furrows were also revealed in this area.



Archaeologists recording and excavating features at **Frenchfurze**.

bronze age

Other areas consisted of clusters of shallow pits. The post-holes suggest that there may have been a prehistoric structure on the site, possibly a house, with associated features.

As the topsoil was stripped from the site prior to excavation, many finds were retrieved, namely: post-medieval and medieval pottery sherds, animal bone, clay pipe fragments, and a large amount of flints. A stone loom weight was also recovered. During the full excavation of the site some prehistoric pottery was also found.



Archaeologists working at the Bronze Age site uncovered at **Frenchfurze**.

iron age & medieval

Cherryville

A 70 m strip of the roadtake excavated in **Cherryville** townland uncovered a number of bowl furnaces and possible associated miscellaneous archaeological features. Bowl furnaces usually consist of a small bowl-shaped depression cut into the existing ground then filled with ore, together with the necessary fuel for heat. A clay 'roof' often covered the furnace and would have been broken when the smelting process was complete.

The bowl furnaces may have been associated with iron-working, dating from the Iron Age or early medieval periods. A large amount of slag (iron-working waste) was retrieved from the furnaces. Other features comprised of a group of ditches and pits. While a number of linear features may have been the remains of field boundaries and drains, there were post-holes for a potential structure, and two small hearths. The archaeological finds from all of these features suggest extensive medieval occupation in the area.

iron age & medieval

More than 250 sherds of medieval pottery were recovered from the site, together with two pieces of important metalwork: a portion of a decorative bronze buckle, and a pair of bronze tweezers with incised decoration.

The large amount of medieval pottery and the pair of tweezers, which may date from the 12th century, suggest the other features on the site are also medieval, and post-excavation analysis will confirm if the bowl furnaces, ditches and pits are contemporary.



Medieval pot found during excavations at **Cherryville** prior to its removal.

miscellaneous site

The Curragh

The Curragh within Co. Kildare has an extensive archaeological and historical pedigree with many of the sites dating from the Bronze Age and Iron Age, with ring-ditches and barrows visible in the landscape. The Curragh has also been a military base for many centuries. Extensive monitoring of the construction works at the western end of the Curragh, just off the existing N7 road, revealed a series of archaeological features. A shallow hearth-filled with sandy silt with charcoal flecks and some stone inclusions was uncovered.

Several pits were also excavated and have been tentatively interpreted as roasting pits. There was also evidence for linear features, post-holes and stake-holes and the remains of a possible shelter in the form of a crescent-shaped alignment of stake-holes. Full analysis during post-excavation will, no doubt, allow for a more definite interpretation of this site.

Further work

Post-excavation work is now almost complete, with radiocarbon dating and environmental analysis results being incorporated into the final archaeological reports.