

what we found

in brief:

Some of the findings at **Loughrea**.



1. Male skeleton

An adult male skeleton from **Tullagh Upper** - one of four individuals buried in a wayside ditch during the incessant warfare of late 16th-century.



2. Penknife, spoon and halfpenny

A penknife, spoon and halfpenny (1742) from the excavated 18th-century house site at **Tullagh Upper**.



3. Field oven

An earthcut 'field oven' in **Fairfield** contained wood charcoals and deer antler.

background

The new **Loughrea Bypass** extends around the north side of this historic town.

It will relieve traffic congestion on the existing N6 Galway to Dublin road, which currently passes through the town, and will greatly enhance the environment of the town itself.

In 2004, An Bord Pleanála approved the design of the road and also approved an order by the Council to make a compulsory purchase of the lands required to

build it. Construction of the bypass was underway by the Autumn of that year, to be completed by the end of 2005.

A programme of archaeological investigations on the route of the Loughrea Bypass was completed by the end of 2004 prior to the construction of the road by archaeologists funded by the **National Roads Authority** and **Galway County Council**.



The excavation site at **Tullagh Upper** where remains of an 18th-century house were investigated.



A mass of burnt stones and charcoal indicates a Bronze Age campsite or cooking place in a narrow stream valley in **Greeneenagh**.

N6 LOUGHREA BYPASS,
County Galway



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archaeological DISCOVERIES

front cover images

LEFT: The excavation site at **Tullagh Upper** where remains of an 18th-century house were investigated.
RIGHT: An earthcut 'field oven' in **Fairfield** contained wood charcoals and deer antler.
MIDDLE: An adult male skeleton from **Tullagh Upper** - one of four individuals buried in a wayside ditch.



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historic loughrea



Close up view of the remains of an 18th-century house under excavation at **Tullagh Upper**.

Loughrea has a long history. When the Normans invaded the west of Ireland in the early 13th-century Richard de Burgo established a town by the lake and made it the capital of his Lordship of **Connaught**. His castle is long gone but the town ditch can still be seen and there is a later medieval gate arch at the east end of Barrack Street.

Connaught was not an empty land when De Burgo crossed the Shannon with his small army of knights, foot soldiers and camp followers. The main street of the medieval town was laid out on part of an ancient road from **Ballinasloe** towards the sea at **Kilcolgan**. This was the road through the ancient Gaelic kingdom of Uí Máine. There are numerous ringforts or cahers in east Galway and these were the common dwelling places of that time. A crannóg or lake dwelling was considered a superior dwelling. Several small islands on the lake are remains of crannógs of the Uí Máine and Loughrea was already an important gathering place in their kingdom before the Normans took control.

In time **Loughrea** became a prosperous market and cathedral town. By the early modern period most of the houses and businesses in the town were the property of the Earl of Clanricard, a descendant of Richard de Burgo. A British army barracks was established in the 1780s. In the 1880s a light railway line was built to carry livestock and other trade goods from Loughrea to the main Galway/Dublin line. Loughrea continues to be an important population centre in east Galway and the bypass represents a new chapter in the history and development of the town.

archaeological investigations

The archaeological investigation of the bypass route combined several different methods that aimed to capture as much information as possible.

At the outset, early maps and aerial photographs were examined and the route was inspected in the field by a 'walkover' survey. Also, a geophysical survey aimed to discover any buried features that could not be seen by surface inspection alone. Following this, archaeological test-trenches were opened in every field by mechanical excavators working under archaeological supervision. Arising from all this, new archaeological sites were discovered at three locations and were excavated by a team from Galway County Council. The three new sites were in the townlands of **Tullagh Upper**, **Fairfield** and **Greeneenagh**.



Archaeologists from Galway County Council examine features exposed in machine-cut test trenches in pasture.

tullagh upper

The remains of an early 18th-century house were found in **Tullagh Upper**.

Scarcely anything of the house itself survived - just outlines of the walls, some rough paving for the floor and sub-floor drains - but a number of associated objects were found.

These included a bone-handled penknife, a glass ink bottle, a ceramic wig curler, fragments of clay tobacco pipes and a halfpenny coin (1742) minted in the reign of George II. This was a time when most of the population were uneducated agricultural labourers who lived in simple cabins and had few personal possessions. In contrast, the people who lived in this house in **Tullagh Upper** were literate and could buy manufactured goods. Despite this we know nothing else about them because there are no detailed

records of who lived around **Loughrea** in that period and no detailed maps to show the individual houses and farms.

Some human skeletal remains were found in **Tullagh Upper** close to the site of the house. Expert analysis revealed that these were the bones of a middle-aged man, a younger woman, a teenage girl and a child. The man and woman both had congenital spinal defects and were probably related to one another. All four individuals had suffered from a poor diet and hard lives. They had certainly led short lives. These four individuals died in the late 16th-century at a time when **Connaught** was in great disorder. There was continual warfare between local Gaelic lords and English armies or between the Gaelic lords themselves. It was probably in such troubled times that the four people found at Tullagh Upper starved or died of disease and were buried in a roadside ditch.



A penknife, spoon and halfpenny (1742) from the excavated 18th-century house site at **Tullagh Upper**.



The excavation site at **Tullagh Upper** where remains of an 18th-century house were investigated.



An adult male skeleton from **Tullagh Upper** - one of four individuals buried in a wayside ditch during the incessant warfare of the late 16th-century.

fairfield

At **Fairfield** the geophysical survey revealed magnetic traces of the broad-ridge cultivation that was typical of medieval landscapes but also detected traces of intense burning.

Excavation discovered a small pit cut deep into the subsoil and the underlying rock. The sides were scorched and the pit contained wood charcoals and fragments of deer antler. A radiocarbon date for the antler is awaited and until this is known it is not otherwise possible to say how old this pit may have been, but it may have been an improvised medieval field oven.



An earthen 'field oven' in **Fairfield** contained wood charcoals and deer antler.

greeneenagh

The investigation at **Greeneenagh** recorded another kind of improvised 'field kitchen' but this one was much, much older than the medieval period. Here, a large spread of burnt, heat-shattered stones and charcoals indicated a campsite of Bronze Age date (c. 2000 BC to 500 BC). This occurred in a low-lying, narrow stream valley where there would have been shelter and water. It seems that hot water was required in abundance for some particular purpose -

probably cooking meat or perhaps softening vegetable fibres for textiles or even for brewing beer.

First stones were roasted in a fire and then immersed in water. The water simmered but the stones shattered. Hence the great spread of small, angular, heat-shattered stones and charcoals that acted as a 'tell-tale' to indicate the presence of this site to the archaeological team.