

# what we found

## in brief:

Some of the findings from the scheme:



1. Wooden animal trap  
Top view, from **Prumplestown Lower**.  
(Photo: Headland Archaeology Ltd)

2. Wooden animal trap  
Base view, from **Prumplestown Lower**. (Photo: Headland Archaeology Ltd)

3. Wooden axe handle  
Haft for a Late Bronze Age socketed axe from **Prumplestown Lower**.  
(Photo: Headland Archaeology Ltd)

4. Pottery beads  
Pottery beads from **Burtown Little** separated from cremation deposit.  
(Photo: Headland Archaeology Ltd)

5. Drinking horn terminal  
Silver plated drinking horn terminal from the fill of a souterrain at **Ballyvaas**.  
(Photo: John Sunderland)

6. Bone and antler objects  
from medieval enclosing ditch, early Bronze Age cemetery site, at **Moone**.  
(Photo: Headland Archaeology Ltd)



# background

This section of the N9/N10 Kilcullen to Waterford Scheme involves the construction of 27 km of High Quality Dual Carriageway linking the existing M9 motorway at **Kilcullen** to the northern end of the Carlow Bypass, just south of **Castledermot**. Also incorporated is an 11 km single carriageway Athy Link Road, which will link **Athy** town with both the existing and new N9 roads.

Preliminary test excavation were undertaken by **Irish Archaeological Consultancy Ltd (IAC Ltd)** between October and November 2005 and by **Cultural Resource Development Services Ltd (CRDS Ltd)** between May and August 2006. These works identified a total of 102 archaeological sites, which were fully excavated by **Headland Archaeology Ltd** between March and December 2007. All of the archaeological works were carried out on behalf of **National Roads Authority** and **Kildare County Council**. Up to 310 archaeologists were on the ground at any one time, divided into 10 separate excavation teams, with an international flavour, as up to 20 nationalities were represented.



Ringfort at **Ballyvaas** with souterrain and pits in the interior. (Photo: AirShots Ltd)

**N9/N10 KILCULLEN TO WATERFORD SCHEME:  
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# archaeological DISCOVERIES

## front cover images

**LEFT:** Early Bronze Age crouched burial with Food Vessel at **Moone**. (Photo: Headland Archaeology Ltd)  
**RIGHT:** Twisted bronze ring, possibly an earring, from the prehistoric cemetery at **Woodlands West**. (Photo: Headland Archaeology Ltd)  
**MIDDLE:** Prehistoric pit-circle in **Prumplestown Lower** mid-excavation. (Photo: AirShots Ltd)



# prehistoric

Important Early Bronze Age cemetery sites were discovered either side of the River Lerr, close to Castledermot.

In **Prumplestown Lower**, to the south of the river, a concentration of features incorporated a prehistoric pit-circle of 10 large pits and a ring-ditch, along with associated inhumations and cremations.



Prehistoric ring-ditch, pit-circle and linear ditches in **Prumplestown Lower** pre-excavation. (Photo: AirShots Ltd)

On the opposite side of the river in **Woodlands West**, three further ring-ditches and a horseshoe-shaped ditch were revealed, with numerous associated cremations. A cremation central to the horseshoe-shaped ditch yielded three small bronze pennisular rings, two of which

displayed twisted decoration—possible earrings that would have adorned the body of a person committed to a funerary pyre. Two tiny blue glass beads accompanied the rings. Animal bone from the ditch fills included much deer antler and the jaws of young cattle.



Prehistoric ring-ditch, pit-circle, grave cuts and linear ditches in **Prumplestown Lower** post-excavation. (Photo: AirShots Ltd)

The intervening low-lying, boggy river basin demonstrated evidence that may link the two cemetery areas and give an exceptional insight into an overall prehistoric landscape focused on the river. Crude structures and pathways would have allowed the wetlands to be accessed, used and traversed. Very significant wooden artefacts were discovered here, including the haft for a Late Bronze Age axe, a finely made spear and an intricate composite animal trap.



Early Bronze Age crouched burial with Food Vessel at **Moone**. (Photo: Headland Archaeology Ltd)

A prehistoric cremation deposit from **Burtown Little** on the Athy Link Road, yielded further evidence of body adornment in the form of pottery beads. Originally thought to have been a necklace, conservation work showed that there were 24 beads in total and would have made up a complete bracelet.

In **Moone**, another important Early Bronze Age cemetery site was revealed, but in this instance an outer curvilinear ditch, 48 m in diameter, enclosed the site. The interior yielded the graves of seven adults and eight juveniles, along with two cremations in a variety of burial forms including a cist, an inverted urn, shallow pits and crouched single and double inhumations.

Seven decorated Food Vessels, of both Bowl and Vase form, accompanied the burials. Finds from the enclosing ditch appear to date that feature to the medieval period, with no evidence at present to indicate that the ditch was a re-working of an earlier enclosure contemporary with the burials. Finds from the ditch



Early Bronze Age urn cremation in situ at **Moone**. (Photo: Headland Archaeology Ltd)

included a decorated bone handle and two notched antler objects. Interestingly, post-medieval lazy-bed cultivation respected and avoided the precise locations of the individual burials, yet there was no evidence to indicate any surface recognition of the burials at the time the lazy-beds would have been dug.

Not all of the prehistoric evidence related to ritual and ceremonial activities, as significant settlement sites were also uncovered, including a fine circular Bronze Age roundhouse, 7 m in diameter; at **Mullamast**. The structure consisted of a ring of evenly spaced posts around a central hearth and all surrounded by a drip-gully for the roof.

Other significant excavations included a prehistoric landscape and radial ditches associated with a barrow monument that is located outside the landtake in **Narrowmore**, numerous *fulachta fiadh*/burnt mounds and a variety of prehistoric ritual and settlement sites.

# early medieval

A portion of an early medieval enclosure was uncovered close to the brow of a gravel ridge in **Ballyvaas**.

Inside the enclosure, a large vertically-sided, rectangular cut had been dug into the underlying gravels. The cut is likely to have originally formed an underground chamber or souterrain, which was probably timber-lined. Finds were very significant and included an eighth/ninth-century silver-plated terminal for a drinking horn in the shape of a dog's head and a pinhead or clasp that was also silver-plated. Two fragmented bone combs, a metal spearhead and charred textiles were also recovered. The drinking horn, in particular, indicates that this site would have had quite important inhabitants. Nine burials were



Souterrain within the ringfort at **Ballyvaas**. (Photo: Headland Archaeology Ltd)

excavated at a separate site in **Ballyvaas**; these were generally aligned west-east and are likely to be early medieval or medieval in date.

# medieval/ post-medieval

At **Mullamast**, part of a large deserted medieval village was excavated, the original founder of which was probably Walter de Riddlesford, a grandson-in-law of King Henry I.

This planned medieval village consisted of sizable boundary ditches, roads and pathways, a central village-green type open area, other open spaces, cobbled surfaces, house plots and agricultural and garden plots. The houses would have been formed of wattle-and-daub or possibly sod structures. The majority were probably built on above ground foundations—timber frames on pad-stones. In excess of 10,500 artefacts were recovered, predominantly pottery sherds of 12th- to 14th-century date, including imported wares from south-west England and France. A silver long-cross penny of King Edward I would have been minted in Canterbury between 1294 and 1299. Another coin appears to be a Roman coin of Constantine Augustus dating to the third century AD, which may have been brought back from Rome by a returning medieval traveller or missionary. Other objects included brooch fragments, knives, a chest key and two metal arrowheads, possibly crossbow bolts.



Silver long-cross penny of King Edward I (front) from **Mullamast**. (Photo: Claudia Koehler)

Other significant excavations included a double-ditched ringfort in **Woodlands West** with artefactual evidence of medieval occupation, two rectangular medieval enclosures in **Mullamast** and **Hallahoise**, both of which abutted townland boundaries and may pre-date the boundaries, and a medieval settlement in **Timolin**. Two phases of burial were evident in eight child burials uncovered at a multi-period site in **Moone**. These burials are likely to date to medieval/post-medieval times, with the first phase represented by supine (laid on their back) and crouched neonates (babies from birth to four weeks) with grave goods and the second by juveniles in formal west-east aligned rectangular grave cuts. In addition, a later medieval ditch at the **Prumplestown Lower** prehistoric cemetery site, possibly focused on the River Lerr; and produced a pristine Viking Dublin-type bronze ringed pin. Evidence of extensive medieval and post-medieval rural industrial activity was also discovered along the scheme, including cereal-drying kilns, metal smelting areas and charcoal-production pits.



Silver-plated drinking horn terminal from the fill of a souterrain at **Ballyvaas**. (Photo: John Sunderland)