

# what we found

## in brief:

Some of the findings from the scheme.



### 1. Stone axehead

Stone axehead found during excavations at **Russellstown**.



### 2. Medieval pottery

Medieval pottery found during excavations at **Moyle Big**.



### 3. Skeleton

Post-medieval skeleton found during excavations at **Ballybar Upper**.



### 4. Bone comb

Early medieval bone comb found during excavations at **Moyle Big**. (Photo ArchCon)

# background

The 18.5 km **N9 Carlow Bypass Dual-Carriage**, which is part of the **N9/N10 Kilcullen to Waterford Scheme: Kilcullen to Powertown** runs to the east of **Carlow** town. It extends from the existing N9 at **Prumplestown**, just south of **Castledermot**, back to the N9 at **Powerstown**, some 7 to 8 km south of Carlow town.

Initial paper research was carried out to ensure that known archaeological features and landscapes in the area of the proposed route were avoided as far as possible by the road designers. Extensive geophysical surveys were also undertaken by **Bartlett-Clark Consultancy**, **Earthsound Archaeological Geophysics** and **Target Archaeological Geophysics** on sections of



Ecclesiastical road and late 17th-century house at **Busherstown**. (Photo Headland Archaeology Ltd).

the route as part of the Environmental Impact Assessment process.

These were closely followed by the excavation of centerline and offset test-trenches between June and August 2005.

A total of 64 sites were identified by both the geophysical survey and the test-trenching works and recommended for resolution through excavation. Resolution excavation works started in early January 2006 and were completed by mid-August 2006. All of the on-site test excavation and resolution works were undertaken by **Headland Archaeology Ltd** on behalf of the **National Roads Authority**, **Kildare** and **Carlow County Councils**.

## N9/N10 KILCULLEN TO WATERFORD SCHEME: KILCULLEN TO POWERSTOWN

Counties Kildare and Carlow



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# archaeological DISCOVERIES

## front cover images

**LEFT:** Archaeologists excavating skeleton uncovered at **Cloghristick**. (Photo Headland Archaeology Ltd)  
**RIGHT:** Post-excavation analysis underway on bones found on the scheme. (Photo Headland Archaeology Ltd)  
**MIDDLE:** Medieval brooch found during excavations at **Ballybannon**.



# prehistoric



Elevated view of Neolithic enclosure and house at **Russellstown**.

## Settlement

Carlow's first Neolithic house was uncovered while excavating at **Russellstown** and is therefore the county's earliest house known to date. It was set within a large sub-rectangular enclosure measuring 80 by 60 m. The house was built of large split timbers, set upright in a deep foundation trench and strengthened by packing stones. The roof was supported by large internal posts. Early Neolithic pottery was recovered from the trench fill.

Excavation evidence showed that the house burnt down. The enclosure apparently stayed as a feature on the landscape until relatively recently. Evidence from the First Edition Ordnance Survey map seems to show that it was modified to form an 18th century landscaped tree-ring within the grounds of **Russellstown Park House**.

Other sub-rectangular, early prehistoric houses were recovered at **Burtonhall Demesne** and **Busherstown** townlands - also consisting of linear foundation trenches, with post-holes to accommodate large upright timber posts.

The Burtonhall Demesne house yielded early prehistoric pottery and flints, along with a broken stone axehead from the fill of a corner post-hole. The prehistoric habitation at **Busherstown** was surrounded by a 30 m diameter circular perimeter enclosure.

Large post-holes provided evidence of four possible wooden round houses, probably dating to the Bronze Age - two were uncovered in **Rathcrogue** townland and the other two in **Tinryland**.

Many *fulachta fiadh* - commonly found sites generally regarded as cooking places belonging to the Bronze Age - were uncovered along the scheme, but a few of them were significantly different from the norm. At **Ballyburn Lower**, a large funnel-shaped depression incorporated a double ring of stake-holes along the slope, indicating that it was roofed with a tent or canopy structure and may have been used as a sweat-house.

A site at **Ballybar Lower** contained a sluice feature for regulating water flow and may have been used in medieval times and associated with a nearby moated site. Artefacts from here included scraps of leather, worked antler; an alder shovel; but also a tanged arrowhead, a javelin head and a large flint scraper.

# prehistoric

At **Busherstown**, another large, water-filled, funnel-like depression incorporated a wooden platform supported by stakes, probably for ease of access to the water.

## Ritual

Numerous prehistoric ritual and burial features were discovered along the route probably dating from the early Neolithic to the Bronze Age. At **Ballybannon**, five ring-barrows were uncovered, some incorporating cremation deposits and pits, with others devoid of such features. Dotted around and outside the ring-ditches were other cremations, one of which was contained within a complete pottery vessel.

A small ring-ditch with a central cremation from **Busherstown** is likely to date to the Bronze Age.



Archaeologist excavating a Neolithic cremation at **Ballybar Lower**. (Photo Headland Archaeology Ltd)

Other cremation pits were discovered in **Russellstown**, **Ballyhade**, **Busherstown**, **Moyle Big**, **Ballybar Upper** and **Ballybar Lower**.

One of the pits at Russellstown contained a portion of a polished stone axehead, while the cremation at Ballybar Lower contained two miniature arrowheads. Two of the pits at Ballyhade contained 65 and 15 sherds of prehistoric pottery, respectively.



Archaeologists excavating a ring-ditch uncovered at **Busherstown**. (Photo Headland Archaeology Ltd)



Bronze Age house uncovered at **Busherstown**. (Photo Headland Archaeology Ltd)

# early medieval

At **Busherstown**, a curving ecclesiastical boundary ditch was excavated, which was related to an adjacent church, graveyard and bullaun stone. The ditch was cut into the solid underlying granite bedrock. Extending from this boundary were two parallel rock-cut ditches, which defined the edges of a probable early medieval/medieval roadway that led to the church site. This road is evident on the First Edition Ordnance Survey mapping from the 1830s, but was subsequently removed, probably through land reclamation and quarrying. A previously unknown ringfort of the early medieval period was discovered at **Ballybannon**. It had a diameter of about 30 m and only half of the site extended into the area of the roadtake. It was defined by a deep ditch. Outside the roadtake, the perimeter was evident as a green semi-circle in a field of ripe corn - a crop-mark resulting from the prolonged dry-spell of the 2006 summer.



Rock-cut ecclesiastical enclosure ditch excavated at **Busherstown**. (Photo Headland Archaeology Ltd)



Elevated view of ringfort at **Ballybannon** with cropmark visible outside line of road. (Photo Headland Archaeology Ltd)

# medieval

A medieval castle originally stood outside the line of the road in **Moyle Big** townland. Features probably relating to the occupation of that castle were located inside the line of the road, including a lime kiln, linear enclosure and field ditches, refuse pits, corn-drying kilns, smelting furnaces and charcoal production pits. Artefacts recovered included two bone combs, a rotary quern-stone, a spud-stone or stone lamp, medieval pottery including imported wares; but also a Neolithic stone axehead and an arrowhead.



Medieval lime kiln uncovered at **Moyle Big**. (Photo Headland Archaeology Ltd)

At **Ballybannon**, numerous prehistoric and medieval features were excavated, with some of the latter being possibly related to a nearby moated site.

These included a possible trackway that may have led to the moated site, a portion of a sub-circular enclosure, a corn-drying kiln and some pits. A tiny bronze medieval brooch was recovered from one of the pits, while the kiln was filled with charred grain. Metal production areas, corn-drying kilns and charcoal production pits were common occurrences along the scheme.

# post-medieval

Post-medieval features excavated included a culverted stream at **Burtonhall Demesne**, a landscaped avenue at **Johnstown**, granite quarrying at **Burtonhall Demesne** and **Busherstown** and linear ditches and a possible roadway at **Russellstown**. Isolated inhumations were located at **Ballybar Upper** and **Cloghrick**, also probably post-medieval.

## Ongoing work

Specialist examination and study of the excavation archive is on-going, including artefact and environmental analysis, radiocarbon dating and the study of both human and animal remains; along with processing of site plans, mapping, photography and written documentation of the sites. This will result in the compilation of preliminary and final excavation reports which in turn will lead to full publication of the excavation.