

# what we found

## in brief:

Some of the findings in and between **Dublin and Ashbourne**.



1. Early medieval burial site  
Excavation of a burial uncovered at the early medieval settlement at **Raystown**.

2. Basket  
Wooden basketry artefact uncovered at **Muckerstown**. (Photo CRDS Ltd.)

3. Toe-rings  
Close-up view of toe-rings found on a female burial at **Rath**. (Photo CRDS Ltd.)

4. Neolithic enclosure  
Archaeologists excavating the layer of animal bone uncovered during excavations at **Kilshane**. (Photo Hawkeye)

5. Souterrain  
View of stone souterrain uncovered at the early medieval settlement at **Raystown**. (Photo CRDS Ltd.)

6. Millhouse  
View of the millhouse uncovered at the early medieval settlement at **Raystown**. (Photo CRDS Ltd.)



# background



Burial with a Food Vessel pot uncovered at **Harlockstown**. (Photo CRDS Ltd.)



Aerial view of early medieval site uncovered at **Raystown**. (Photo StudioLab)

The **N2 Finglas-Ashbourne Road Scheme** is approximately 17km long commencing at the M50 Interchange in **Dublin** and extending to Rath Roundabout north of **Ashbourne**, County Meath.

Archaeological testing was carried out by **Judith Carroll Network Archaeology Ltd.**, along the entire route between August and November 2003 in order to investigate a series of possible sites identified in the Environmental Impact Statement and in the subsequent archaeological geophysical survey. Approximately 22 new sites were identified and they were excavated by **CRDS Ltd.**, between October 2003 and January 2005. The archaeological work was carried out on behalf of the **National Roads Authority** and **Meath County Council**.



© Ordnance Survey Ireland & Government of Ireland permit number 8067.

For more information please contact:

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

Tel: +353 | 660 2511  
Fax: +353 | 668 0009  
Email: [info@nra.ie](mailto:info@nra.ie)  
Web: [www.nra.ie](http://www.nra.ie)

# archaeological DISCOVERIES

## front cover images

**LEFT:** Burial with a Food Vessel pot uncovered at **Harlockstown**. (Photo CRDS Ltd.)  
**RIGHT:** Excavation of a burial uncovered at the early medieval settlement at **Raystown**.  
**MIDDLE TOP:** Aerial view of the medieval forge uncovered at **Cookstown**. (Photo Hawkeye)  
**MIDDLE LEFT BOTTOM:** Archaeologists excavating the layer of animal bone uncovered during excavations at **Kilshane**. (Photo Hawkeye)  
**MIDDLE RIGHT BOTTOM:** Aerial view of early medieval site uncovered at **Raystown**. (Photo StudioLab)



# neolithic

One of the earliest and most significant sites was a Neolithic enclosure (37m x 27m in size) discovered at **Kilshane** at the southern end of the scheme.

The irregular enclosure was formed by the excavation of a series of inter-connecting ditch segments. A

# bronze age/ iron age

Excavations at the townland of **Harlockstown**, initially identified during the geophysical survey, revealed a multi-phase and multi-functional site. The site comprised a circular enclosure of Early Bronze Age date partly cut by an Iron Age sub-square enclosure. The circular enclosure was a burial monument with a cremation pit and two burials within the interior. The individuals were placed on their sides in a crouched position within stone-lined graves and accompanied by intact Bronze Age Food Vessel pots. The presence of a windbreak and two bowl furnaces within the sub-square enclosure would suggest that this enclosure was also the site of metalworking activity. This is supported by the recovery of a considerable amount

unique feature of this site was the discovery of an extensive deposit of cattle bone around the base of the enclosing ditch. Initial analysis of the bone indicates that c. 60-70 immature cattle were deposited in part or in whole in the ditch soon after its excavation. It seems likely that the animals were a deliberate ritual sacrifice at the site.

of slag from the enclosing ditch and the furnaces.

An extensive Bronze Age/Iron Age complex of features was revealed in the townland of **Rath**. These features reflect a diverse range of human pursuits including funerary or ritual activity, as well as domestic and industrial activity extending over an extensive area. Four ring-ditches of varying sizes were revealed at the site. One of the larger examples contained a female burial wearing three copper-alloy toe-rings. This find is to date unique in Ireland and is paralleled by a small group of high-status male burials in southern England. It raises the possibility that the woman buried at Rath was originally from there, or at the very least had strong cultural connections with that region.

# prehistoric

A range of high status artefacts including three segmented faience beads, an Iron Age fibula and some prehistoric wooden vessels, including a composite vessel formed from wood and bark strips, were recovered from other features at this site.

A unique assemblage of wooden/basketry artefacts was also recovered from a prehistoric site at **Muckerstown**. The features on the site included two very large, deep pits possibly excavated to extract water from beneath the water table. These pits produced considerable quantities of organic material



Aerial view of a Neolithic enclosure uncovered at **Kilshane**. (Photo Hawkeye)



Wooden basketry artefact uncovered at **Muckerstown**. (Photo CRDS Ltd.)

including some worked wood as well as a large collection of wooden/basketry artefacts dating to the Early Bronze Age period. They comprise a bundle of woody twigs secured by a twisted withy looping around it. Their function is enigmatic but one possibility is that they represent the remains of roofing or packing material. They also compare well to a type of broom called a besom traditionally used in Irish folklore. It is certainly intriguing why c. 120 of these artefacts were deposited into a pit/well during the Early Bronze Age in Ireland.



Archaeologists excavating the layer of animal bone uncovered during excavations at **Kilshane**. (Photo Hawkeye)

# early medieval

Early medieval activity in the **Finglas-Ashbourne** area was represented by a large settlement site at **Raystown** and by a kiln site at **Cherryhound**.

Archaeologists spent over a year excavating the extensive early medieval **Raystown** settlement. This site was initially identified by geophysical survey - although it comprises a series of large ditched enclosures, nothing was visible above ground or known about the site in advance of the road scheme. The site was occupied from the 5th-12th centuries AD and central to the site was a cemetery containing the remains of c. 130 men, women and children. Some individuals were accompanied by personal items such as a blue glass bead, an iron knife, a ring pin and a copper-alloy spiral finger ring.

Outside of the designated burial area, there was evidence for early medieval settlement manifested by a structure with a large hearth, a large metallated area and two souterrains (i.e. underground passages), including one of stone and one of timber construction. The site also served as an important local food production centre, as evidenced by a series of small grain-drying kilns and the remains of eight horizontal mills which harnessed local waterpower for grinding grain.

Also dating to the early medieval period was a small industrial site identified on a slight rise in ground in the townland of **Cherryhound**. Two main phases of activity were carried out at this site; a phase of



Excavation of a burial uncovered at the early medieval settlement at **Raystown**.

metalworking at the east and a subsequent phase of kiln activity at the western end of the site. The houses of the people who used this site were not discovered and were presumably located nearby but outside the area excavated for the road.

The metalworkers carried out their activities under the protection of a windbreak erected to provide a buffer against the prevailing southern and eastern winds. They left behind some pieces of a broken crucible and some fragments of copper-alloy. The inhabitants subsequently chose an adjacent area for the location of the kiln. A considerable amount of charred grain was uncovered confirming that the kiln was used to dry grain. The kiln was repeatedly cleaned out and reused but during its last firing, the wooden platform on which the grain was laid collapsed and was preserved *in situ*.

# medieval

Human activity in the medieval period is manifested by a rural medieval settlement (with early medieval origins) at **Cookstown** and two sites (**Muckerstown** and **Baltrasna**) that are interpreted as outlying activity from farms of medieval and late medieval date.

The **Cookstown** site was initially identified during the geophysical survey of the route, which revealed a circular enclosure. The subsequent excavations revealed a multi-period site with an important phase of medieval rural activity and settlement. Numerous sherds of 13th-14th-century pottery have been recovered from the fills of the enclosing ditch. With the exception of modern drains and furrows, few features of archaeological significance were identified within the enclosure but most of the interior ground is located to the west of the new road. However, a row of medieval structures including a forge where intensive metalworking activity was carried out was identified c. 30m-50m east of the enclosure adjacent to a medieval laneway. The forge produced a substantial portion of a 13th-14th-century pot from its enclosing slot-trench.



Aerial view of the medieval forge uncovered at **Cookstown**. (Photo Hawkeye)

The excavation at **Muckerstown** uncovered the yards, kitchen gardens and nearfields of a medieval/post-medieval settlement. Approximately 2000 sherds of pottery were also recovered from the site, the majority of which appear to be local type wares of pottery dating from the 13th-14th centuries.

Excavations at **Baltrasna** also indicated that this site was the location of a farmstead during the late medieval/post-medieval period. The site comprises an area of substantial intersecting ditches identified as a field system. Other features on site include a metallated laneway possibly giving access to outlying fields.