The N30 Enniscorthy to Clonroche scheme is located in County Wexford approximately 3km west of Enniscorthy Town. The total length of the scheme is 5.3km, and the associated archaeological works were carried out by Archaeological Development Services Ltd., and Valerie J. Keeley Ltd., on behalf of the National Roads Authority and Wexford County Council.

The scheme runs through rich agricultural land that is particularly suitable for tillage crops. This area is situated between 50-60m above sea level and is drained by the Boro River, a tributary of the River Slaney. The foothills of the Blackstairs Mountains rise to the north of the scheme. Archaeologically this area is notable for the large number of surviving ringforts (defended enclosures) dating between the 6th and 11th centuries AD, which are mostly found on the higher land in the west and north. There are also many monuments dating to the period of the expansion of the Norman colony in the 13th and 14th centuries. A small number of Bronze Age barrows and image-stones are evidence for prehistoric settlement in this area.

Initial archaeological investigation to assess the impact of this scheme on the archaeological heritage involved the compilation of a desk-based archaeological assessment and a walkover survey. One known archaeological site, a medieval church (Rossdroit Church) was identified that lay in close proximity to the scheme. Subsequently, Archaeological Development Services Ltd., carried out a programme of test excavation along the length of the scheme. A total of ten previously unknown sites of archaeological potential were identified as a result of this work. Valerie J. Keeley Ltd., undertook the excavation of these ten sites in 2004 and to date preliminary analysis of the excavation results has been carried out. This work is still ongoing.

The sites uncovered span a significant period of County Wexford’s history and prehistory, dating from as recently as the eighteenth century and as far back as several thousand years BC.

1. Timber base plates
   Timber base plates of the entrance structure for the Coolamurry moated site. (Photo Valerie J Keeley Ltd.)

2. Copper-alloy dividers
   Chain of copper-alloy dividers found in a pit within the Coolamurry moated site. (Photo Valerie J Keeley Ltd.)

3. Medieval pottery
   Rimsherd of medieval pottery vessel found in the ditch of the Coolamurry moated site.

4. Fulacht fiadh
   A trough from the fulacht fiadh in Coolamurry. The reddened soil in the background marks the location of the hearth.
Fulacht féidhí
coolamurry townland

The earliest site identified, located at the base of a low rise in the townland of Coolamurry, is a Fulacht fíadh or Bronze Age cooking place. Here, hot stones were used to heat stones, or clay-lined troughs to hold water, hearths to cook meat; in folklore associated with hunting exploits of Fionn and the Fianna. However, it is quite possible that the hot water was required for whatever activity was being carried out upslope. A sherd of prehistoric pottery was found associated with the possible site.

Moated site
coolamurry townland

A moated site dating to the Anglo-Norman period was discovered in Coolamurry townland. This site consisted of a large rectangular ditch (c. 4m wide) enclosing a rectangular area (c. 35 x 27m). In their lifetime these large ditches would have been filled with water from a nearby stream and along with an internal bank and palisade (clearly cut and tightly packed palisade) would have enclosed the settlement of a single family. The enclosed area was divided into almost two equal halves by a shallow ditch. It is thought that the ditch separated the long area from the area which may have been used for livestock and other farming activities. Shallow trenches uncovered in the long area suggest that the house would have been constructed on large timber base plates. Large worked flints discovered in the base of the ditch represent the remains of the entrance to the site. It is possible that this entrance would originally have been by way of a drawbridge. A cobbled path led from the entrance to the south-western corner of the ditch. The only medieval pottery to be discovered was recovered from the ditch and internal habitation area. The lack of finds from these structures makes it difficult to make an immediate estimation of date, however further specialist analysis of soil and charcoal samples collected during excavation may throw light on their date. Further analysis may also clarify the function of all four structures. Further study may also be carried out on the first edition Ordnance Survey map (OSM) to clarify the extent of the ditch and internal habitation area. Aerial photography suggests that this excavation revealed the remains of a probable 18th-century house which consisted of a stone wall with enclosing a mortise-and-tenon joint. This house would have faced onto the Coolamurry-Gorey road.

Vicinity of rossdroit church

The remains of a medieval church stand in the graveyard of St. Peter’s Church (built 1795), the Church of Ireland parish church of Rossdroit. The remains of a medieval church stand in the graveyard of St. Peter’s Church (built 1795), the Church of Ireland parish church of Rossdroit. A moated site dating to the Anglo-Norman period was discovered in Coolamurry townland. This site consisted of a large rectangular ditch (c. 4m wide) enclosing a rectangular area (c. 35 x 27m). In their lifetime these large ditches would have been filled with water from a nearby stream and along with an internal bank and palisade (clearly cut and tightly packed palisade) would have enclosed the settlement of a single family. This enclosed area was divided into almost two equal halves by a shallow ditch. It is thought that the ditch separated the long area from the area which may have been used for livestock and other farming activities. Shallow trenches uncovered in the long area suggest that the house would have been constructed on large timber base plates. Large worked flints discovered in the base of the ditch represent the remains of the entrance to the site. It is possible that this entrance would originally have been by way of a drawbridge. A cobbled path led from the entrance to the south-western corner of the ditch. The only medieval pottery to be discovered was recovered from the ditch and internal habitation area. The lack of finds from these structures makes it difficult to make an immediate estimation of date, however further specialist analysis of soil and charcoal samples collected during excavation may throw light on their date. Further analysis may also clarify the function of all four structures. Further study may also be carried out on the first edition Ordnance Survey map (OSM) to clarify the extent of the ditch and internal habitation area. Aerial photography suggests that this excavation revealed the remains of a probable 18th-century house which consisted of a stone wall with enclosing a mortise-and-tenon joint. This house would have faced onto the Coolamurry-Gorey road.

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Metalworking site
coolamurry townland

Another site discovered in Coolamurry was a post-medieval site which consists of three townland boundaries containing material associated with metalworking. One of the furnaces was partially excised by a trench, which may be the remains of a furnace bank for a wall or window sill. The site contains a spread of soil containing iron slag. It is possible to correlate with material disclosed at subsequent metalworking activity. One of the furnaces was exposed from the site.

Post-medieval settlement
templescoby townland

A post-medieval settlement site that may be associated with structures marked on the first edition Ordnance Survey map (OSM) was discovered in Templescoby. This consisted of the remains of a possible house and related field boundaries. In addition several features have been identified along the scheme that relate to post-medieval agricultural practices and woodland character activity.