The N7 Naas Road Widening and Interchanges Scheme extends 14.4 km from Rathcoole, County Dublin to Naas, County Kildare. From 2003 to 2005 archaeological works were carried out on the scheme by Irish Archaeological Consultancy Ltd (IAC Ltd) and The Archaeological Company Ltd on behalf of the National Roads Authority and Kildare and South Dublin County Councils.

The Environmental Impact Assessment had revealed areas of archaeological potential along the route and also highlighted the medieval origins of the villages of Johnstown and Kill within Co. Kildare, and the village of Rathcoole within Co. Dublin, which lie close to the route of the scheme. The research also drew attention to Blackchurch, an area within Co. Kildare, which would be impacted by the widening of the existing road and the construction of a bridge. Blackchurch is reputed to be the site of the original Blackchurch House and skeletal remains are said to have been discovered in the cellar in the past.

The archaeological works were undertaken in two phases. IAC Ltd carried out the first phase, which consisted of archaeologically testing the entire scheme. Non-intrusive geophysical testing was also undertaken in certain areas, including those considered to lie in areas of high archaeological potential. All 11 archaeological sites revealed were excavated prior to construction.

Further archaeological works were undertaken during construction, when monitoring by The Archaeological Company Ltd revealed a small number of archaeological sites and a cobbled portion of what may have been the old coach road within Kill village.

The sites revealed range from the prehistoric up to the late medieval period and testify to the wide span of human occupation within South County Dublin and Co. Kildare.

A full architectural survey was carried out on all structures impacted by the scheme. The fine entrance gates and a bridge within the setting of Palmerstown Demesne were drawn and recorded.

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Co. Kildare.
Archaeologists excavating cremation pits at Co. Kildare, a small urn was revealed during the stripping of the topsoil and carefully excavated. This Co. Dublin, during the testing phase. Further (Photo IAC Ltd)
bronze age
knight, county kildare
bronze age
steatstown, county dublin
bronze age
ring-ditch uncovered during excavations at the Bronze Age complex at Steelstown, Co. Derry. During the testing phase, further archaeological remains were also revealed during the archaeological monitoring of the construction phase. The site comprises of a series of shallow curvilinear trenches with associated post-holes and groups of pits, which have been interpreted as a ritual Bronze Age sanctuary. Many of the pits contained prehistoric pottery fragments, while small stones placed on the mounds of earth may have been offerings. In many cases, small stones and fill appear to have been burnt in situ. Many of the sites also contained burnt bone which may represent sacrificed individuals. There would appear to have been a ritual placing of the pottery and fill within many of the pits, a form of ritual deposition which was also recovered.
Ritual site
A prehistoric site was uncovered in the townland of Steatstown, Co. Derry. During the testing phase, further archaeological remains were also revealed during the archaeological monitoring of the construction phase. The site comprises of a series of shallow curvilinear trenches with associated post-holes and groups of pits, which have been interpreted as a ritual Bronze Age sanctuary. Many of the pits contained prehistoric pottery fragments, while small stones placed on the mounds of earth may have been offerings. In many cases, small stones and fill appear to have been burnt in situ. Many of the sites also contained burnt bone which may represent sacrificed individuals. There would appear to have been a ritual placing of the pottery and fill within many of the pits, a form of ritual deposition which was also recovered.
Cremation pit excavated at Steelstown. (Photo IAC Ltd)
archaeologists working on the Bronze Age complex at Steelstown. (Photo IAC Ltd)
A single burial, in the form of a truncated inhumation, was also discovered during work on the site. Although no above-ground remains were visible, the name itself ‘Blackchurch’ indicated a possible ecclesiastical settlement or church there. While no evidence was revealed for such a settlement - with the possible exception of the semi-circular barn-shaped structure - archaeological features and artefacts discovered during testing and subsequent excavations indicate a highly organized settlement in the period in this area of Co. Kildare. Although no above-ground remains were visible, the name itself ‘Blackchurch’ indicated a possible ecclesiastical settlement or church there. While no evidence was revealed for such a settlement - with the possible exception of the semi-circular barn-shaped structure - archaeological features and artefacts discovered during testing and subsequent excavations indicate a highly organized settlement in the period in this area of Co. Kildare.
post-excavation work is currently being undertaken at the Bronze Age complex at Steelstown. (Photo IAC Ltd)
archaeological finds from the site include...