

what we found

in brief:

Some of the findings from between **Kinnegad** and **Kilbeggan**.



1. Medieval kiln
Medieval kiln excavated at **Clonfad**.
(Photo Valerie J Keeley Ltd)



2. Bone artefacts
Bone artefacts uncovered during excavations at **Clonfad**. (Photo Valerie J Keeley Ltd)



3. Bone comb
Bone comb uncovered from excavations at **Clonfad**. (Photo Valerie J Keeley Ltd)



4. Cillín burial
Cillín burial of an infant showing shroud pins (arrowed) at **Ballykilmore**.
(Photo Valerie J Keeley Ltd)

background



Aerial view of centreline test trenching carried out on the scheme. (Photo Markus Casey)

The **N6 Kinnegad to Kilbeggan Dual Carriageway**, is part of the major inter urban route connecting **Dublin** with **Galway**. Archaeological investigation and excavation works on the scheme began in summer 2004 and were completed in May 2005.

The initial investigations were carried out by **Eachtra Archaeological Projects** and **CRDS Ltd**. They involved centreline test trenching, site specific testing, geophysical, topographical and bogland surveys as well as written, drawn, and photographic architectural assessments of various vernacular buildings.

The vast array of archaeological sites and features uncovered included more than 30 burnt mounds some of which had possible troughs, 35 burnt pits and hearths, a pit with prehistoric pottery, three iron working sites, two trackways (one timber and one brushwood), a cillín (i.e. a burial ground mainly used for the interment of unbaptised children), a prehistoric complex, a late medieval field system, two lime kilns and two post-medieval buildings.

Full excavation of the various sites uncovered during testing were carried out between October 2004 and May 2005 by **CRDS Ltd**, **Eachtra Archaeological Projects** and **Valerie J Keeley Ltd** on behalf of the **National Roads Authority**, **Westmeath** and **Meath County Councils**. A total of 52 sites proved to be archaeological with burnt mound sites predominating. Post-excavation works are on-going and are due to be completed by the end of 2007.

Preliminary results from two of the excavations are beginning to offer a tantalizing view of the early historic Westmeath.

N6 KINNEGAD TO KILBEGGAN DUAL CARRIAGEWAY,
Counties Westmeath and Meath



N6 KINNEGAD TO KILBEGGAN DUAL CARRIAGEWAY,
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archaeological DISCOVERIES

front cover images

LEFT: Aerial view of excavations on site of **Ballykilmore**. (Photo Valerie J Keeley Ltd)
RIGHT: Flexed inhumated burial of a child uncovered during excavations at **Ballykilmore**. (Photo Valerie J Keeley Ltd)
MIDDLE: Bone artefacts uncovered during excavations at **Clonfad**. (Photo Valerie J Keeley Ltd)



early medieval

clonfad monastic site

This significant ecclesiastical site is located on a low hillside close to the shores of the historically and geographically important **Lough Ennell** in Co. Westmeath, once the residence of the **Clann Cholmain** Kings throughout the early medieval period.

The site was initially identified in the Environmental Impact Statement carried out for the scheme as a site listed in the Record of Monuments and Places about 30 m to the west of and outside the N6 road corridor, north of **Tyrrellspass**. It was visible as a simple ruined church within a circular graveyard enclosed by stone walling.

A team of archaeologists, who excavated from November 2004 to March 2005, revealed two large concentric ditches enclosing about 1.25 hectares of the innermost church and graveyard. Excavations were confined to the archaeological remains within the roadworks, which encroached on roughly 10% of this large monastic site.

Ecclesiastical occupation dating throughout the medieval period, and later secular occupation in post-medieval times was uncovered. Historical documents record the foundation of this monastery in the sixth century, by Bishop Etchen and the burning and desecration of the site in AD 887.

Evidence for this early monastic phase consisted of an area bounded to the south by a stream and the north

by a large curving ditch with two further enclosing ditches in the interior. Structural occupation evidence comprised of wells, refuse pits and post-holes. A large range of artefacts were retrieved typical of a large, high status early medieval site. They included iron tools, blades, a ringed pin, a bronze ring pin, bone pins, antler combs, rotary querns and a lignite bracelet.

A range of industrial activities were carried out there, with significant evidence of iron smithing, fine bronze metalworking, bone/antler comb and button/bead manufacture and textile working.



Archaeologists excavating the outer enclosing ditch at **Clonfad**. (Photo Valerie J Keeley Ltd)

early medieval

clonfad monastic site



Aerial view of **Clonfad** enclosure with the church and graveyard in the background. (Photo Valerie J Keeley Ltd)



Archaeologist excavating kiln uncovered at **Clonfad**. (Photo Valerie J Keeley Ltd)

What kind of metalworking went on? Well, the site yielded unique evidence of the production of wrought iron handbells. Fragments of vitrified clay have been identified by a specialist as coating from brazing of type 1 wrought iron handbells.

More than two metric tonnes of archaeometallurgical residues recovered provide evidence of large-scale iron working. Fine bronze metalworking is also suggested by the recovery of ringed-pins, crucible fragments, ingots, moulds, sheets and corner strips and stone moulds.

The later monastic period is represented on the site by two stone lined corn-drying kilns and by the existing medieval church outside the roadworks. Analysis of the evidence from Clonfad is still in progress. Further studies will provide us with a more in depth insight into early monastic life in the Midlands and the wider landscape.

early medieval

ballykilmore ecclesiastical site



Aerial view of ecclesiastical enclosure and burial ground uncovered at **Ballykilmore**. (Photo Valerie J Keeley Ltd)

The **Ballykilmore** site, on a glacial ridge, 800 m to the south of **Tyrrellspass**, Co. Westmeath, was previously undocumented. It was initially identified from local knowledge, as a cillín site and archaeological test trenching carried out by **CRDS Ltd** in 2004 confirmed it.

Full excavation by **Valerie J Keeley Ltd**, which started in November 2004 and continued to May 2005, uncovered a curvilinear ditched enclosure within which the remains of a possible church, metalworking areas, and human burials were found.

About two thirds of the enclosure was excavated while the remainder of the site extended outside the route corridor and was preserved *in situ*.

The curvilinear ditch enclosed an area of about 7,700 m² with an entrance causeway in the east. The ditch was quite substantial with a maximum width of 3.3 m and depth of 1.61 m. It is likely that an internal bank formerly existed with a similar circumference to the ditch.

The foundations of a possible church building were discovered within the enclosure on the eastern edge consisting of a rectangular structure of drystone wall foundations. Other features close by included pits and post-holes, which suggest a timber structure. These features contained both metalworking residues and domestic waste.

A large number of burials were excavated within the enclosure, which included over 800 intact inhumations. A preliminary analysis of the burials has identified three phases. Phase 1 was comprised of east–west orientated burials with mainly unlined graves and stone head supports.

Phase 2 burials were also orientated east–west, some directly aligned with the church. Many were laid out resting on their backs, face upwards. Some of these were also buried within coffins or within loosely stone lined graves with stone head supports.

Phase 3 consisted of the use of the site as a cillín, where traditionally unbaptised children and strangers to a locality were interred. This tradition existed from

early medieval

ballykilmore ecclesiastical site



Multiple burial cluster uncovered during excavations at **Ballykilmore**. (Photo Valerie J Keeley Ltd)



Excavating at the **Ballykilmore** enclosure during winter. (Photo Valerie J Keeley Ltd)

the 18th to the 20th century with many in living memory. The cillín at Ballykilmore consisted of mainly newborns and infants buried in wooden coffins or wrapped in shrouds fixed with copper alloy pins.

Osteological, or bone analysis, is still ongoing and will produce further information in the near future on the health, living conditions and life expectancy of the medieval communities at Ballykilmore over several hundred years. It is, however, clear that the people at Ballykilmore showed great compassion and respect in the burial of their dead which is reflected in the time and effort invested in the construction of their graves and the careful placement of the bodies.

A small number of artefacts were recovered which included coffin nails, shroud pins, medieval and early post medieval pottery and 18th-19th century delft, glass beads, a bone comb fragment, knife blades and an arrowhead. Flint artefacts included a thumbnail scraper, debitage and a possible core.



Osteoarchaeologist examining skeleton found at **Ballykilmore**. (Photo ODK Resources)



Crouched burial excavated at **Ballykilmore**. (Photo Valerie J Keeley Ltd)