

what we found

in brief:

Some of the findings from the scheme.



1. Stone axehead

Polished stone axehead uncovered during excavations at **Steelstown**. (Photo IAC Ltd)



2. Bronze Age urn

Bronze Age urn found during excavations at **Kill**. (Photo IAC Ltd)



3. Burnt material

Burnt material from pit at early medieval site at **Blackchurch**. (Photo IAC Ltd)



4. Ringed pins

Two ringed pins found during excavations at **Blackchurch**. (Photo IAC Ltd)

background



Aerial view of the excavations at the medieval site of **Blackchurch**.

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

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 a reputed church site, close to the original **Blackchurch House**, and skeletal remains are said to have been discovered in the vicinity 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 be 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.

N7 NAAS ROAD WIDENING AND INTERCHANGES SCHEME, Counties Dublin and Kildare



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archaeological DISCOVERIES

front cover images

LEFT: Bronze Age urn found during excavations at **Kill**. (Photo IAC Ltd)

RIGHT: Early medieval artefacts including ringed-pins, a lignite bracelet and spindle whorls found at **Blackchurch**. (Photo IAC Ltd)

MIDDLE: Archaeologists excavating curvilinear feature at **Steelstown**. (Photo The Archaeological Company)



bronze age

kill, county kildare

Late Bronze Age Burial Complex

A Bronze Age burial complex was revealed at **Kill**, Co. Kildare, close to a large Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age hillfort. Three burial monuments were revealed during testing consisting of ring-ditches, within which a low mound of earth may have been originally placed. On two of the sites the cremated human remains were found in shallow pits. In one case, a vase-type cinerary urn accompanied the cremated remains, and although disturbed, it may originally have contained those ashes.

Other fragmented remains of pottery vessels were also discovered. The pottery vessels and cremated

bone are undergoing analysis and conservation.

The location of these three sites, which skirt the hillfort, highlight the importance of Kill in the prehistoric period. The individuals within the burial complex were of sufficient standing within a community to warrant burial close to an important site. Time and agricultural practices may have removed any above-ground traces of these archaeological sites, but the testing regime successfully located this burial complex.

It is unclear whether a small kiln uncovered close to the burial complex, had any association with the burials.



Ring-ditch uncovered during excavations at the Bronze Age site at **Kill**.



Archaeologists working on the Bronze Age complex at **Kill**.

bronze age

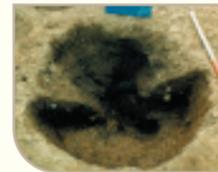
steelstown, county dublin

Ritual site

A prehistoric site was uncovered in the townland of **Steelstown**, Co. Dublin, 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 ritual Bronze Age funerary activity. Many of the pits contained prehistoric pottery, possibly Bronze Age, together with flint artefacts. In many cases the pottery sherds and flint appear to have been burnt *in situ*.

Many of the pits also contained burnt bone, which may represent cremated individuals. There would appear to have been a ritual placing of the pottery and flint within many of the pits. A portion of a polished stone axe was also recovered.



Cremation pit excavated at **Steelstown**. (Photo IAC Ltd)



Ditch under excavation at Bronze Age ritual site uncovered at **Steelstown**.



Archaeologists excavating cremation pits at **Steelstown**. (Photo IAC Ltd)



Bronze age pottery uncovered during excavations at **Steelstown**.

medieval

blackchurch, county kildare

Five archaeological sites were revealed during pre-construction testing at **Blackchurch**, Co. Kildare. Three of these sites were located close to Blackchurch Bridge, and the existing N7 Naas Road and revealed evidence for medieval activity.

The largest of the Blackchurch sites was excavated by a team of up to 40 archaeologists. In a geophysical survey, it was found to consist of a variety of archaeological features, one of them a sub-circular enclosure. Although no evidence for the purpose of the enclosure was discovered, a portion of a lignite bracelet was recovered from the bottom of the ditch. Many of the other features consisted of a variety of post-holes and pits, a considerable number of which contained oxidized material, perhaps associated with smelting. Additional evidence for smelting was also revealed in the many furnaces which were excavated.

All of these furnaces contained lots of charcoal and highly oxidized soil, demonstrating the fierce temperatures necessary for such industrial activity. The site also contained many gullies and narrow linear features, which may have channeled water to and from various quenching pits, and which were possibly used in a cooling process.

Archaeological finds from the site include 13 fragments of lignite bracelets. This high number of

bracelets suggests that they may have been made on the site. Other finds included bronze ring-headed pins, a stone spindle whorl, blue glass beads, which may date to the early medieval period, together with an amber bead.



Early medieval site at **Blackchurch** under excavation. (Photo IAC Ltd)

medieval

blackchurch, county kildare

A single burial, in the form of a truncated inhumation, was also discovered during work on the site. The remains were in very poor condition and do not appear to have any stratigraphic relationship with any other features. A stone structure, possibly a house, which may date to a later period was also fully excavated.

Two other sites excavated at Blackchurch revealed evidence for medieval activity. These two sites, while not revealing any structural remains, contained many ditches, gullies, pits and other areas of activity. Most of the archaeological features would appear to be

associated with drainage and all had a high content of medieval pottery.

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 poorly preserved truncated inhumation - the archaeological features and artefacts disclosed during testing and subsequent excavations indicate a highly organized society during the period in this area of Co. Kildare.

miscellaneous site

At **Kill**, Co. Kildare, a small urn was revealed during the stripping of the topsoil and carefully excavated. This small ceramic urn may have contained cremated remains.

ongoing work

Post-excavation work is currently being undertaken. Specialist analysis is being carried out on all the artefacts revealed during archaeological excavation. A full environmental analysis, together with radiocarbon dating, is also taking place. Detailed reports will incorporate the results of the analysis of the human bone, both inhumations and cremations as well as animal bone. Results of this post excavation work will be published in full.



Archaeologists carrying out a geophysical survey on the scheme.