what we found

in brief:

Some of the findings from the scheme:

1

1. Prehistoric stone tools
From the **Suck** and **Melehan** river valleys.
(Photo: John Sunderland for Eachtra Archaeological Projects)

2

2. Storage pit
Storage pit at **Gortnahoon**.
(Photo: CRDS Ltd)

3

3. Human remains
Excavating human remains at **Carrowkeel**.
(Photo: Headland Archaeology Ltd)

background

At 56 km the N6 Galway to East Ballinasloe PPP Scheme will be one of the biggest public construction projects in the history of County Galway. After initial reconnaissance work along the entire route, 36 archaeological sites were fully investigated, ranging from a prehistoric cremation cemetery to an early modern tenant's cottage

Souterrain in the ringfort at **Mackney**.
(Photo: Eachtra Archaeological Projects)

The pictures in this leaflet offer glimpses of some of these. The archaeological excavations were conducted by **Valerie J Keeley Ltd (VJK Ltd)**, **Headland Archaeology Ltd**, **Cultural Resource Development Services Ltd (CRDS Ltd)** and **Eachtra Archaeological Projects** on behalf of the **National Roads Authority** and **Galway County Council.**

This new road traverses all of east County Galway, from Galway City, on the Atlantic, to the county boundary at Ballinasloe, on the River Suck. Commencing in the west, it will cross a windswept landscape of grass pasture and drystone field walls, then rise gradually over the watershed known as the Kilreekill Ridge, at about 110 m above sea level, before descending again into the more sheltered valley of the Suck.

Burton Persse's stableyard at **Moyode**.
(Photo: Galway County Council)

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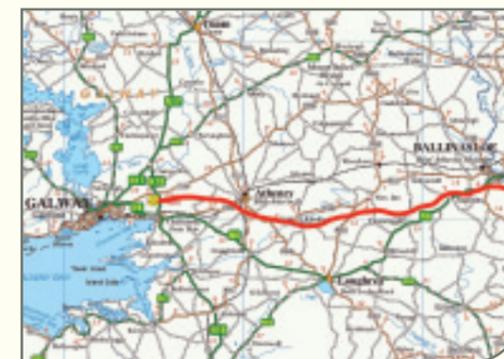
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archaeological
DISCOVERIES

front cover images

LEFT: Victorian engine shed on the old **Loughrea–Attymon** railway line. (Photo: Headland Archaeology Ltd)
RIGHT: Prehistoric stone tool from the **Suck** and **Melehan** river valleys. (Photo: Eachtra Archaeological Projects)
MIDDLE: Excavating a modern mill at **Coololla**. (Photo: Eachtra Archaeological Projects)

transport21
progress in motion

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peoples

This landscape has been inhabited for about 10,000 years but the historical record only accounts for the latest peoples.

In early history this was the territory of the Uí Maine. Their kingdom extended across the Suck into south Roscommon. In the 13th century they were subjugated by the Norman Richard de Burgo who gave lands to his followers. The Cromwellian plantation of Connaught brought another wave of immigrants, many of them former officers in his army or displaced Catholic gentry being resettled in the West. But before these historic populations there were other, different peoples whose languages we have forgotten and whose names and stories we will never know. But they have left traces in the archaeological record. The earliest evidence from our road scheme is some chipped stone tools from the Suck and Melehan river valleys that confirm the presence of Mesolithic hunter-gatherers—the first people to colonise Ireland—about 10,000 years ago.

a sense of place

A hillfort at **Rahally** was a remarkable discovery. It consists of a series of concentric ditched enclosures, about 430 m in overall diameter.

It was not a military fort but instead a place where people from all around the area congregated for their fairs, religious festivals and kingly inaugurations in Late Bronze Age times (c. 1000 BC). There are splendid views from Rahally all across east Galway.

Aerial view of the ringfort at **Mackney**.
(Photo: Hany Marzouk)

A ringfort at **Mackney** was also an impressive earthwork enclosure and this was probably the defended homestead of a big man of the Uí Maine. The ringfort was constructed around AD 600. Its deep wide ditch and earthen bank would have kept out wolves, wild pigs and raiders. From these ramparts the occupants had a wide view down the Suck river valley.

A cottage at **Moyode** was a much humbler dwelling, being the home of a herdsman on a country estate of the Persse family, in pre-Famine times. This was a comfortable and secure home, even if it was nowhere as grand as the mansion Burton Persse built for himself at the heart of the estate in the 1820s.
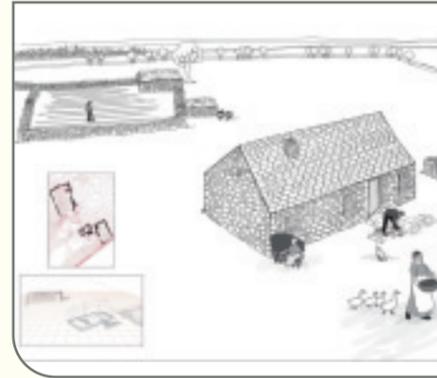
A reconstruction of the cottage at **Moyode**.
(Drawing: Headland Archaeology Ltd)

Aerial view of the Bronze Age hillfort at **Rahally**. (Photo: Markus Casey for CRDS Ltd)

making a living

Work is a constant for all but the rich and there is plenty of evidence of this from excavations on this scheme.

At **Gortnahoon** a complex of early medieval agricultural and industrial features included cereal-drying kilns, stone-lined storage pits and metalworking areas but elsewhere, at **Coolagh**, the emphasis was on livestock, as this early medieval enclosure seems to have been a very large corral with only one dwelling house inside it.

Building remains found at **Coololla**, near Aughrim village, were puzzling at first but were identified as the remains of a water-powered mill that specialised in the manufacture of farm tools. This 'spade mill' operated in the late 18th century when the rural population was expanding and tillage was still done by gangs of men with spades, instead of ploughs drawn by horses.

The cashel at **Coolagh**: a roundhouse and cattle corral?
(Photo: VJK Ltd)

old and new transport infrastructure

The new road is not the first major transport project in County Galway. Along its route it encounters some older transport infrastructure of 19th-century vintage. The old **Loughrea–Attymon** railway bed is providing a route for a link road between the new N6 and the town of Loughrea. Further east, at **Pollboy**, the new road will cross the Connaught extension of the Grand Canal, built in the 1820s for canal barges travelling between the Shannon and Ballinasloe.

An early 19th-century road bridge on the Connaught extension of the Grand Canal. (Photo: Studio Lab)

partings

Their treatment of the dead can be very revealing about past peoples.

A Bronze Age cemetery at **Treanbaun** was a very simple affair with cremated bone deposited in shallow, earth-cut pits. The burial pits were dispersed across an area of open ground to the east of a simple temple or shrine in the form of a circular wooden palisade.

There was no shrine or temple in the early medieval burial ground at **Carrowkeel**. In fact, this may have been a family farmstead, where the dead were laid out in grave pits in one quadrant of the ditched enclosure that formed the farmyard, instead of in a local churchyard.

Human skeletons were also found in the ringfort at **Mackney**, but these were poor people—especially infants and juveniles—who were buried in the ditch of the ringfort in the post-medieval period, long after it was abandoned as a farmstead. The wealthy and influential Trench family of Ballinasloe put a stop to this by filling the ditch with rubble when they laid out their estate at **Mackney**. Their fine Georgian mansion house stood nearby but was itself demolished in the 1970s and now only their farm buildings remain. Death is a constant for all, even the very rich, and so time deals with all of us.

Circular wooden temple or shrine at **Treanbaun**.
(Photo: Markus Casey for CRDS Ltd)
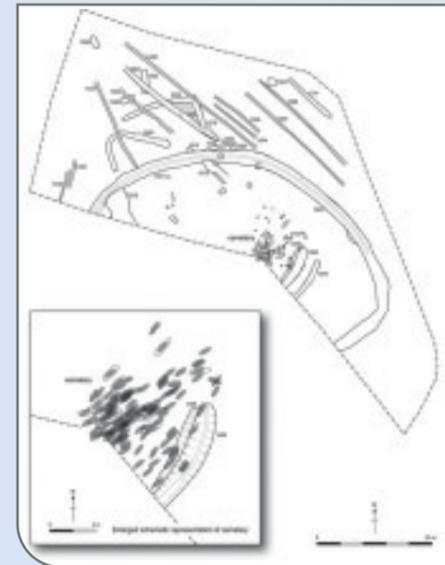
Graves in the ditched enclosure at **Carrowkeel**.
(Drawing: Headland Archaeology Ltd)