

what we found

in brief:

Some of the findings from the scheme:



1. Water-wheel paddle
Water-wheel paddle from mill at **Kilbegly**.
(Photo: Studio Lab)



2. Water-wheel hub
Broken water-wheel hub under excavation
(Photo: K Beachus, Jacobs Engineering)



3. Lignite bracelet
Lignite bracelet fragment from **Kilbegly**.
(Photo: Studio Lab)

background

The N6 Ballinasloe–Athlone Road Scheme is part of the major inter-urban route connecting **Dublin** and **Galway** and stretches from the townland of **Tulrush**, immediately south-east of **Ballinasloe**, to the townland of **Monksland**, immediately west of **Athlone**.

Archaeological works on the route of the scheme began in September 2006 and were completed in August 2007.

Archaeological works were carried out in two phases on behalf of the **National Roads Authority** and **Galway and Roscommon County Councils** by **Valerie J Keeley Ltd (VJK Ltd)**. Phase 1 involved prospecting for previously unknown archaeological remains by machine-excavating trenches at regular intervals throughout the road corridor. This was coupled with other investigations at sites of known or probable archaeological, cultural and architectural heritage interest. This investigation phase of works revealed 10 sites of prehistoric, early medieval and early modern date and these were fully excavated during the Phase 2 works.

Post-excavation work on finds and samples from these sites was completed in May 2008.



Ring-ditch at edge of road corridor in **Ardagawna**. (Photo: Martin Jones)

N6 BALLINASLOE–ATHLONE ROAD SCHEME, Counties Galway and Roscommon



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archaeological DISCOVERIES

front cover images

LEFT: A view down the flume of **Kilbegly** Mill. (Photo: K Beachus, Jacobs Engineering)
RIGHT: Surveyors recording foundations of an early modern cottage at **Rathpeak**. (Photo: Martin Jones)
MIDDLE: Archaeologist excavating part of the post-and-wattle mill-race. (Photo: Studio Lab)



prehistoric

A burnt mound is an outdoor cooking site consisting of a water-filled trough (or troughs). Hot stone was used to heat the water and this was dug out and discarded after use, forming the mound. A number of such sites, and their associated features, were found along the route of the road in the townlands of **Ardagawna**, **Culliaghmore**, **Taduff East** and **Kilbegly**.

The mound at **Ardagawna** had a simple trough and, slightly upslope to the north, the site of a hearth for heating stone for the mound. The mound at **Culliaghmore** had two troughs, one of which contained burnt animal bone. This site was probably used for longer or more intensively than the mound at **Ardagawna**. Two mounds were found close together in the townland of **Taduff East**. Each had two troughs with the poorly preserved remains of a circular hearth to the immediate west. The mound at **Kilbegly** was heavily damaged by modern agricultural activity. Despite this, a well-preserved, wattle-lined trough was



Skeleton of a young adult uncovered at **Ardagawna**. (Photo: VJK Ltd)

found. A moss lining seems to have been used in the trough to prevent water loss and as a simple filter to improve water quality.

A cluster of pits and other cut features, one containing the skeleton of a young adult, were found in the townland of **Ardagawna**. The earliest archaeological activity on site is represented by the digging of a ring-ditch. Crushed fragments of cremated human bone and a perforated stone were found during excavation. Two sherds of prehistoric pottery and a small fragment of worked flint were also found nearby. The skeleton was found towards the centre of the site in a narrow grave.

early medieval

By far the most interesting site found during the excavations was that of an early medieval horizontal mill, which was among the best preserved examples in Europe.

Work on this site is allowing archaeologists to piece together specific details of medieval milling technology and carpentry techniques. The site, probably some 1,200–1,300 years old, was found in the townland of **Kilbegly**. Post-and-wattle mill-races, a millpond, the near complete remains of the lower floor of the undercroft (or mill-house lower level), a flume (which was used to channel the water onto the water-wheel) and a large tail-race, to allow for the exit of water from the wheel area, all survived.



View of millpond, flume and undercroft of **Kilbegly** Mill. (Photo: Studio Lab)

Two mill-races were found, though these did not align fully with the flume and undercroft and may be remnants of a slightly earlier mill at the site. The races were used to channel water towards the flume with moss used as a lining to prevent leakage.

The adjacent millpond—apparently fed by naturally occurring springs—had an estimated area of 340 m². The main structural elements were two large timbers, each over 5 m in length, apparently re-used from some earlier structure. The millpond fed directly into the wooden flume, which was found in an excellent state of preservation.

The flume was constructed of a large hollowed-out piece of timber, worked into a long, box shape. The flume was wider at the top, where it was fed by water from the millpond, and narrowed and dropped to increase the pressure of the water as it exited onto the water-wheel within the undercroft. The end of the flume had a wooden plated aperture that would have let the operator to both direct and control the flow of water.

The undercroft had three upstanding, plank-built walls. The southern side of the undercroft appeared to have been left open to allow water to exit into the tail-race. Two wooden wheel paddles and a bell-shaped wheel-hub were found within the undercroft area.

A number of artefacts were recovered from the site and these give a glimpse of early medieval milling and carpentry as well as diet, agricultural practices and dress in the period. Finds include a copper-alloy ring-

pin, leather fragments, a whetstone, a preserved wooden shovel, lignite bracelet fragments and a gaming piece.

Some 250 m to the west, and still in the townland of **Kilbegly**, a cereal-drying kiln and several other cut features were identified. These, and the mill, may well have been part of a milling 'complex' associated with a nearby church.

Early medieval activity was also noted in **Ardagawna** townland. Here another cereal-drying kiln and three circular bowl furnaces were found, though these are not related to activity at the mill.



Undercroft and flume of **Kilbegly** Mill with millpond to rear. (Photo: Studio Lab)



Post-and-wattle mill-races of **Kilbegly** Mill under excavation. (Photo: Studio Lab)

early modern

Only a few early modern sites were found along the route of the scheme.

A limekiln was found in the townland of **Belrea**. This type of structure was used in the manufacture of lime through the burning of limestone. The kiln was largely of drystone construction with a draw-hole situated to the north to allow for the circulation of oxygen. Lime, ash and fuel remnants were found during excavation. Pottery finds suggest a possible 19th-century date for the kiln.

Features associated with the Rathpeak Estate were found in the townland of **Rathpeak**. These included a



Detail of plank-built undercroft of mill at **Kilbegly**. (Photo: Martin Jones)

portion of the cobbled avenue leading to the House. Finds from the excavation (post-medieval pottery sherds and a small iron hammer head) all support an 18th- or 19th-century date for the construction of the avenue. Nearby, the foundations of an early modern cottage were found. The cottage was constructed of mortared limestone blocks and divided into three rooms. There was no evidence of a fireplace within the structure. Post-medieval pottery sherds, glass fragments, iron agricultural tools, domestic ware, clay pipe fragments, a fine-toothed bone comb, a bone-handled pocket knife and a 1902 King Edward VII threepence coin all point to a late 19th- or early 20th-century date for the building.