

Motorway

Archaeological investigations on the **Kinnegad–Enfield–Kilcock** motorway scheme

Ronan Swan,
archaeologist with
the National
Roads Authority,
provides an
overview of
recent excavations
on the
Kinnegad–Enfield
–Kilcock
motorway

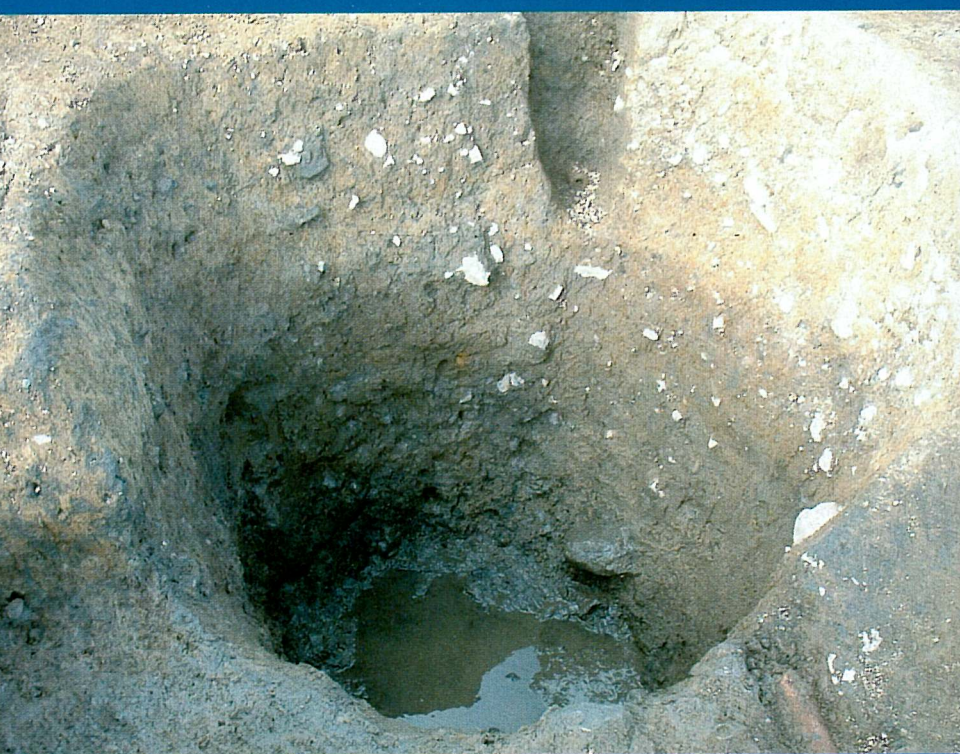




An extensive programme of archaeological works has been undertaken as part of the M4 Kinnegad–Enfield–Kilcock Motorway Scheme. These have been commissioned by Westmeath County Council and are being funded by the National Roads Authority. The M4 Kinnegad–Enfield–Kilcock scheme (M4 KEK) is a proposed four-lane motorway, about 37km long. It will link the N4 Dublin–Sligo and the N6 Dublin–Galway national primary routes, west of Kinnegad, to the existing M4 motorway at Kilcock. This new motorway will run to the south of the existing N4 road. Three grade-separated interchanges, at Kinnegad, Enfield and Kilcock, will provide access between the motorway and local roads, towns and villages.

As groundworks are not expected to commence until 2003, it has been possible to facilitate advance archaeological testing and excavation throughout 2002. Two archaeological consultancies were engaged to undertake this work: Archaeological Consultancy Services Ltd and Irish Archaeological Consultancy Ltd.

Aerial views of the centreline trench with alternate offsets used to sample the site.



Top: Centreline trench in wheat field
 Above: Circular pit (possible cistern?) at Killickaweenee

Photography:
 All aerial photographs by Ian Russell, Archaeological Consultancy Services
 Other photographs by Fintan Walshe, Irish Archaeological Consultancy

Advance testing commenced in January and was completed by April. The purpose was twofold: firstly to establish the archaeological significance of the 'known' sites that were identified in the environmental impact statement by Valerie J. Keeley Ltd (2001) and the aerial survey by Valerie J. Keeley Ltd (2001), and secondly to assess the archaeological risk arising from any 'unknown' sites through an extensive testing programme (in effect, a single, central test-trench throughout the scheme corridor, with offset trenches at alternate sides) and to agree and pursue strategies for the resolution of all archaeological sites identified by these investigations.

As a result of these investigations a total of 46 sites were identified as requiring excavation along the length of the scheme. The majority of these were revealed to be isolated areas of burning. However, it is possible that many may relate to woodland management and in some instances to charcoal production, either in the historic period or in the prehistoric period. Other sites identified include *fulachta fiadh*, kilns, furnaces and other industrial sites, both prehistoric and medieval, and two post-medieval farmsteads. A number of possible trackways were also identified, but on excavation these proved not to be archaeological.

Linda Clarke of ACS has undertaken extensive excavations at a cillín burial-ground in Johnstown townland that was identified during the EIS; this has since proved to be an early medieval occupation site that was reused as a burial-ground. The burials have been provisionally dated to the early medieval period. Investigations at this site commenced in January 2002 with a geophysical survey, followed by a testing programme and subsequently by excavation. In total 488 skeletons were recovered, including adults, juveniles and infants. Artefacts from the site include ring-pins, bone pins and beads.

Fintan Walsh of IAC is currently excavating an early medieval occupation site at Killickaweenee townland. In the aerial survey a crescent-shaped feature with associated field systems was

identified in this area. During testing this was revealed to be a possible early medieval occupation site. Excavation has revealed it to be an enclosure with at least three structures, two circular and one square. Many of the artefacts recovered in the vicinity of these structures are high-status and include ring-pins, glass beads, bone pins and points. Also identified are numerous pits and gullies, many of which would appear to be related to industrial processes associated with metalworking. Artefactual material associated with metalworking includes a tuyère, crucible and quantities of slag, as well as a possible whetstone.

It is anticipated that all site work will be completed before the end of November 2002, while the post-excavation work has already commenced. ■



Top: House site at Killickaweenee
 Middle: House site under excavation at Killickaweenee
 Below right: Excavating the circular pit (cistern?) at Killickaweenee
 Below: Whetstone from Killickaweenee

