

8. The quiet landscape: archaeological discoveries on a road scheme in east Galway

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The quiet landscape

This paper is about the archaeological investigations on the N6 Galway to East Ballinasloe PPP scheme. At about the time these investigations commenced I was in conversation with Dr Stefan Berg, a lecturer in archaeology at NUI Galway, exchanging news of our work. Stefan was engaged in fieldwork in the mountain and maritime parts of Mayo and Sligo. He described these as 'loud landscapes that speak with a very strong voice' about the ways in which soils and rivers, mountains and coast, have influenced human communities in the past. Then he remarked, as an afterthought, that 'east Galway, where you are working now, is a very quiet landscape that only speaks with a whisper about its past'.

At the time I readily agreed. West of Lough Corrib, Galway also has a loud and very beautiful landscape. Unsurprisingly, the popular image of the county is a postcard view of Connemara's mountains and beaches. In contrast, east of the Corrib, in the interior, Galway is low-lying and often poorly drained, and has more in common with Ireland's midlands than with the Atlantic coast (Illus. 1).

Throughout east Galway glacial deposits have created a mosaic of low rounded hills and knolls that are moderately well drained and suitable for pasture and tillage. These are interspersed with very frequent pockets of poorly drained ground forming peat bogs and, in some locations, extensive raised bogs. Underlying the soils is limestone bedrock, fissured and soluble, so that the watercourses of east Galway are not the fat brown rivers found in the south and east of Ireland but meagre, narrow rivers that can never accumulate much water—because so much of it is lost to underground limestone aquifers. Dry cattle with some sheep dominate today's farming practices, but every bit of dry ground has been tilled at some time in the past and a much more mixed farming economy would have existed until about 30 years ago.

In this eastern part of the county there is one area of elevated ground between Loughrea and Ballinasloe. This rises gradually to about 120 m and forms a major watershed. To the east is the River Suck—forming the boundary with County Roscommon—and other tributaries of the Shannon. To the west are innumerable small rivers and streams that disappear frequently into limestone solution holes and reappear a mile or two away, without apology or explanation, under an entirely different name.

This is the territory traversed by the N6 Galway to East Ballinasloe road scheme (Illus. 2a–b). It would have been known to medieval annalists as the early historic kingdom of Uí Máine. In the 1230s the Uí Máine were themselves subjugated by Norman invaders and east Galway became the core area of Richard de Burgo's lordship of Connacht, afterwards known as Clanrickard country, with principal walled towns established in Loughrea and Athenry. What we now call County Galway has its origins in the 'shiring' of the west by Elizabethan administrators in the last quarter of the 16th century.

This is not a loud landscape. It lacks prominent or striking natural features and, on first acquaintance, does not appear to have shaped past human movements or settlement patterns



Illus. 1—St Colman’s churchyard on Inishbofin looks back to the loud landscape of Connemara in west County Galway (above), in contrast with the quieter landscape of low-lying east Galway (below) (Galway County Council)



in any very obvious way. But in the months since our investigations got under way on the N6 scheme a good deal of evidence that lay concealed in pasture fields and bogs has been brought into the light. Even a summary account of all the work would not be possible here; instead, this paper will describe four excavation sites as examples of the diversity of this new evidence and as testimony that even a quiet landscape can be invested with human stories and significant events.

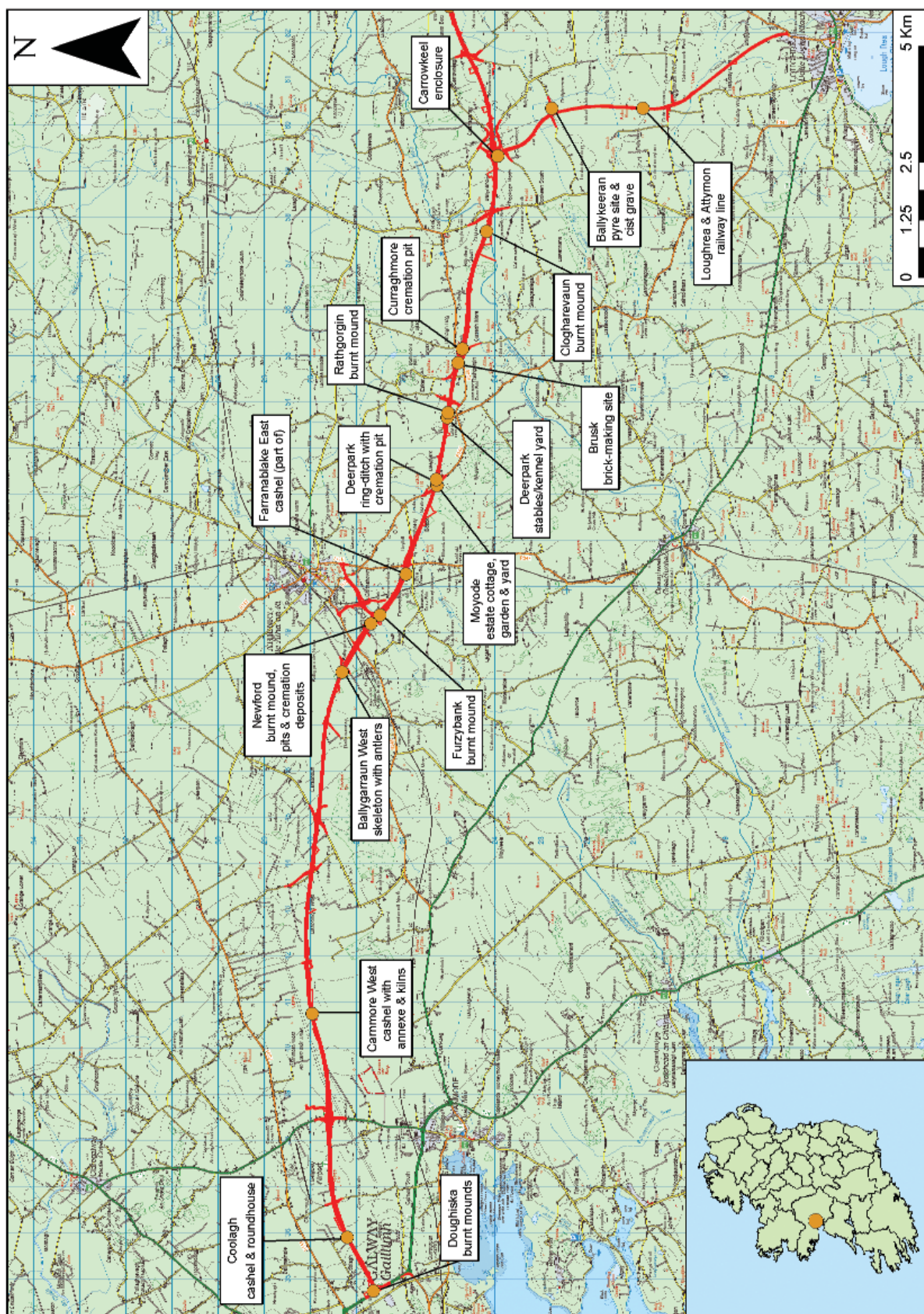
About the road scheme

The N6 Galway to East Ballinasloe PPP scheme will form part of a major arterial route between Dublin and Galway and will also be part of a new web of transport infrastructure in the west of Ireland that is to include a reopened Western Rail Corridor. The road will consist of 56 km of dual carriageway, with a 7 km link road to the town of Loughrea and approximately 23 km of side roads, with four major junctions and 36 bridges. As the road is to be built and operated under a PPP (Public Private Partnership) agreement there will also be a toll plaza, at Cappataggle. The Compulsory Purchase Order and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the scheme were published by Galway County Council in August 2004 and were approved by An Bord Pleanála in June 2005. The archaeological excavations described here were authorised by ministerial directions (A024 & A041) from the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. They have all been completed and post-excavation analyses and reporting are ongoing at the time of writing. The contract to build and operate the road was awarded by the National Roads Authority (NRA) to a consortium of financial and construction companies called ICON in April 2007 and construction will be under way before the end of the year.

Scope of the investigations

This road scheme is one of the biggest public projects in the west of Ireland since the Shannon new town development or the construction of the Ardnacrusa dam. The archaeological investigations on the scheme were conducted on a correspondingly grand scale. Test excavations were carried out by hand on a dozen known or suspected archaeological sites and by machine at the locations of 49 anomalies identified by geophysical survey (see below). Test trenches were also opened by machine in an intensive random pattern (so-called ‘centreline and offset trenching’) throughout the remainder of the road scheme. In effect, the footprint of the new road became a vast archaeological test trench extending over a total site area of 588 ha, from the outskirts of Galway city at Doughiska to the east bank of the River Suck in Tulrush. Apart from test excavations a range of other investigative methods was deployed. Much of this is standard practice now for large development projects—including desk-based studies, aerial reconnaissance and field-walking—but the programme also included building surveys, an underwater or dive survey on the crossing of the River Suck, a metal-detecting survey on part of Aughrim battlefield, pollen analysis of selected peat cores and an extensive geophysical survey throughout the scheme.

The last two methods warrant special mention here because they are not always employed on large development projects. (There will be more to say on metal-detecting at



Illus. 2a (this page)—b (opposite page)—The route of the N6 Galway to East Ballinasloe PPP scheme, showing locations of the archaeological sites (based on the Ordnance Survey Ireland maps)

Aughrim below.) The geophysical survey was performed in 2004 by ArchaeoPhysica Ltd on selected sectors amounting to about half of the route and formed part of the environmental impact assessment for the scheme. The aim here was to discover buried soil anomalies that might be of archaeological origin. A number of the anomalies did prove to be archaeologically significant and were excavated. Another and unexpected outcome of the survey was evidence for spade-dug broad ridges of early modern date (c. 1700–1850) throughout east Galway. This method of tillage was preferred to ploughing in the west until the mid-19th century (Bell & Watson 1988, 21–7). The full extent of this can no longer be gauged from visible remains, but traces of this cultivation regime were found almost everywhere by the geophysical survey, so that the current dominance by grass pasture masks an earlier dominance by intensively cultivated tillage crops.

The Palaeoecology Unit at NUI Galway is contributing to the investigations by examining pollen and other plant fossils trapped in peat bogs adjacent to the scheme. The aim is to characterise changes in the landscape in antiquity as, for instance, woodland was cleared to make way for cultivation plots or cultivated plants gave way to pasture grasses. The principal site being examined is a large raised bog in Ballinphuill townland, near New Inn. The results will be of particular interest because the bog is adjacent to a newly discovered hillfort at Rahally, and there is more to say about that below. The work commenced in 2006 and is ongoing at the time of writing.

By the autumn of 2005, when all of the predictive methods had been tried and exhausted, it was time to get dirty and do some digging. We had identified quite a few potential targets for excavation by then, but things did not entirely follow the predictive script. Some geophysical anomalies were not discovered to be archaeological sites and, conversely, some archaeological sites not detected in the geophysical survey were discovered by testing. Several sites turned out to be quite significant monuments though they had not been previously recorded in the national Sites and Monuments Record (University College Galway & Office of Public Works 1997), and at least one site in the Sites and Monuments Record turned out to be nothing at all.

In all, we ended up conducting full excavations at 36 locations (Illus. 2a–b). These were very diverse in terms of type and period, ranging from Bronze Age burnt mounds at Doughiska, near Galway city, in the west, to early modern *cillín* burials in a ringfort at Mackney, near Ballinasloe, in the east. Along the way were burial-grounds and brick kilns, enclosures on hilltops and platforms in bogs, estate cottages, smithing sites and mill remnants. Despite this diversity we cannot say that all of antiquity is represented because there are biases in what was discovered. The scheme has added nothing to the existing meagre evidence for early prehistoric hunter-gatherers in County Galway and scarcely any new evidence for the earliest prehistoric farmers. Bronze Age remains were found at a dozen locations at least, and early medieval settlements and burial-grounds are also well represented. We discovered only one settlement site of probable later medieval date, at Newcastle (Record of Monuments and Places no. GA087-196), but have excavated several post-medieval or early modern sites, including settlements and industrial remains. All in all, this is a rich body of new data on the early history and archaeology of east Galway.

Four examples

There is a variety of ways to interrogate such a large body of data. One might ask, for instance, about the influence of soils, drainage and topography on human settlement patterns, or look for evidence of boundaries and conflicts between early or historic peoples, or ask about changes through time in the use of raw materials and the importation of manufactured goods. For present purposes I intend merely to illustrate the diversity of the discoveries on this scheme with four examples, described below in chronological order. (Gerry Mullins provides a full discussion of another site excavated on the N6—a hilltop cemetery at Cross—in the following paper.) If there is any other lesson from these, it is that places can be invested with significance by the human communities that occupied them, even in a quiet landscape.

A hillfort at Rahally

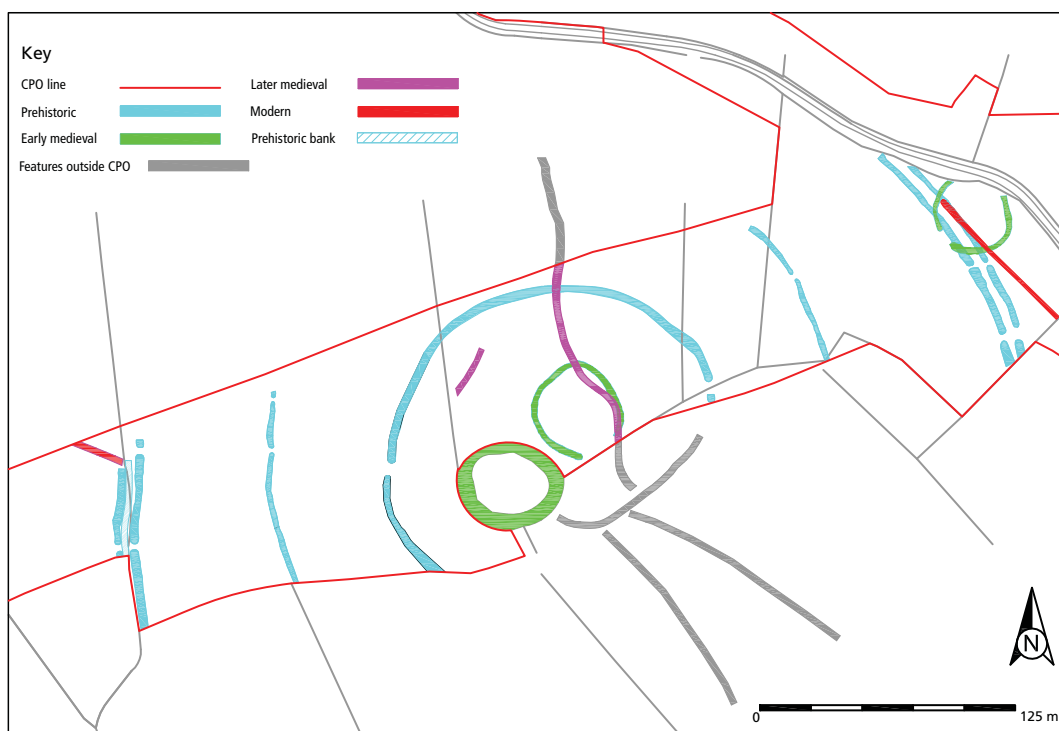
A hillfort may seem an odd discovery in a landscape described above as low-lying and lacking in pronounced landscape features, but in selecting a site for the construction of a hillfort it seems that an extensive view over the surrounding lands was a more important consideration than the prominence of the hill when seen from below (Grogan 2005, 121). A very large multivallate enclosure was discovered in the course of archaeological test excavations on a low rounded hilltop at Rahally, near New Inn (Illus. 3). The site is at an elevation of about 100 m OD and the enclosure, consisting of concentric ditches, had an overall diameter of 450 m (NGR 162027, 224798; ministerial direction nos A024/008 & A041; excavation reg. no. E2006).



Illus. 3—The hillfort at Rahally seen from the north; the relatively low elevation of 100 m OD is typical of Irish hillforts but the site still affords panoramic views of the countryside to the north, west and south-west (Galway County Council)



Illus. 4—Aerial view of the hillfort at Rahally; the excavated area corresponds to the lands acquired for the new road (Markus Casey)



Illus. 5—Plan of the excavated parts of the hillfort at Rahally, showing the extent of the enclosure ditches and also some later earthworks that were discovered, including a ringfort on the eastern flank of the hill and a ringfort annexe (centre) by the surviving bivallate ringfort on the summit (CRDS Ltd)

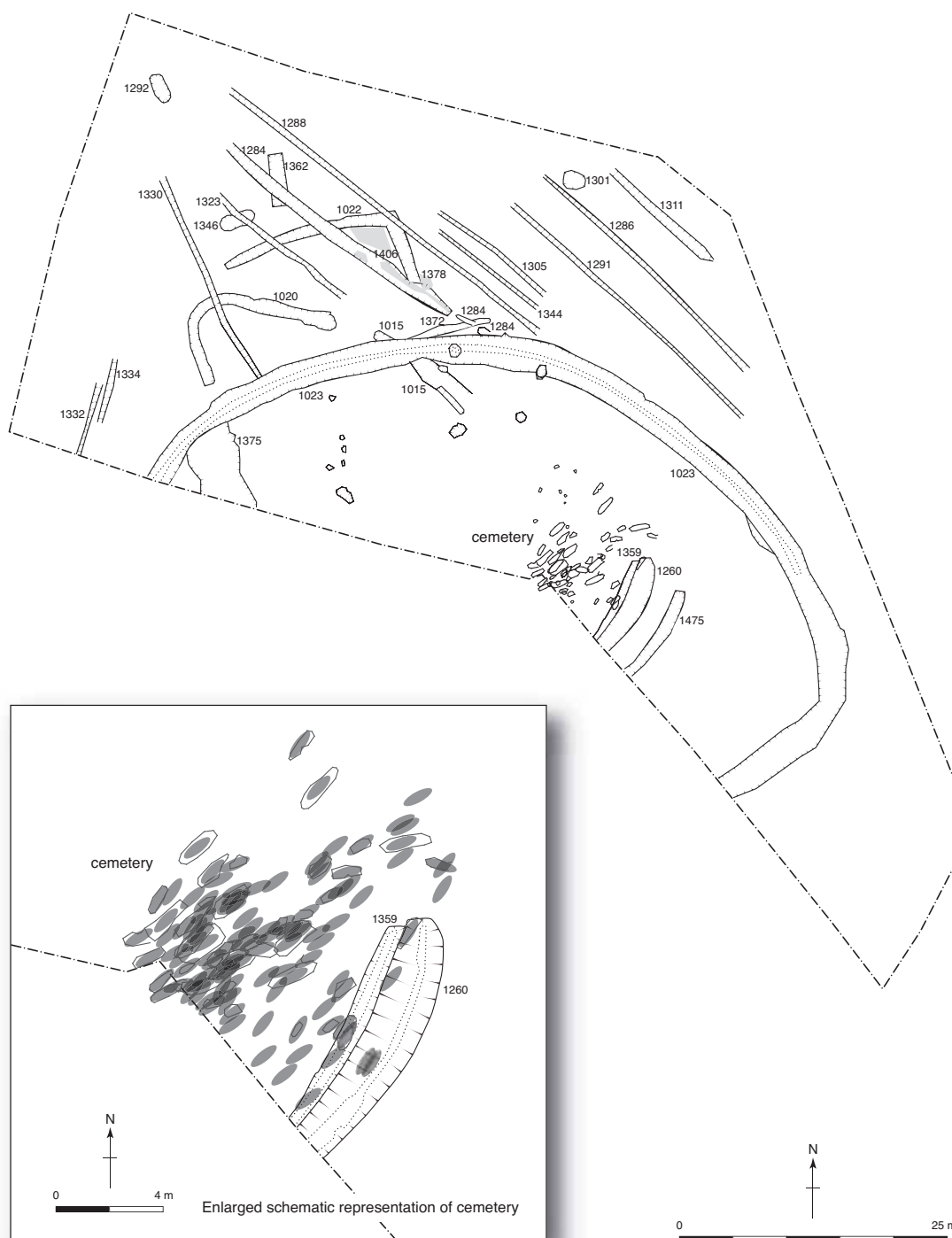
The route of the new road traverses the hill at Rahally. It was designed to preserve an existing bivallate ringfort (GA086-211) on the hill summit, as well as another ringfort in neighbouring Cloonyconaun townland (GA086-089), but would affect some remnant field banks of possible medieval date (GA086-213) (Illus. 4). But non-invasive methods, including field-walking, a desk study and geophysical survey, had failed to discover that there was a much larger monument straddling the same hill. When test excavations began to discover earth-cut ditches on the hill flanks we began to reconsider all of the available evidence, and I must give credit to Gerry Mullins of Cultural Resource Development Services Ltd (CRDS Ltd) for recognising that the excavated portions could be projected to form the concentric ditches of a hillfort that was very large indeed. With hindsight, there are visible hints of the outermost ditch in the landscape but, overall, the earthworks are very denuded and it took an amount of further test excavations and topographic survey in the early summer of 2006 to establish the full extent of the hillfort (Illus. 5). In November 2006 the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government designated the hillfort a National Monument and gave consent for the excavation of the part of it that would be affected by the road scheme, or about 30% of the monument.

The excavation was directed by Gerry Mullins for CRDS Ltd and was concluded in April 2007. The hillfort was found to consist of a multivallate enclosure with simple entranceways at east and west. The outermost of three enclosing elements was a double ditch and the inner two were single ditches. Only one radiocarbon date from the ditch fills has been returned at the time of writing: a charcoal spread from the base of the innermost ditch was dated to 994–827 BC (UB-7244; for details of radiocarbon dates see Appendix 1). There was no evidence of permanent occupation in prehistory, in the form of building remnants for instance, but the ditch fills contained some butchered animal bone, a polished stone axehead, sherds of coarse pottery of probable late Bronze Age date and a fragment of an unusual late La Tène artefact of unknown function. This evidence suggests at least occasional activity on the site in prehistory—perhaps feasting associated with seasonal or ritual gatherings.

Other finds, including a penannular brooch, iron arrowhead and whetstone, are more likely to relate to the later ringforts on the same hill. In addition to the surviving ringforts on the hill summit and on its western periphery, two other small ditched enclosures were excavated that seem to post-date the hillfort. One was probably a third ringfort, on the eastern periphery of the site; the other appears to be an annexe to the ringfort on the summit (Illus. 5).

The proposed medieval date of the associated field banks was confirmed by radiocarbon dating. At least, a spread of unabraded charcoals lying on the old ground surface beneath one of the banks produced a date of AD 1043–1218 (UB-7245). The remains of a cereal-drying kiln were recorded on the more sheltered, eastern flank of the hill, and there were vestigial remains of a structure interpreted as a byre house, or cattle shelter, within the annexe to the ringfort on the hill summit. These features are also likely to be of medieval date.

Why was the hillfort built in this location? The monument itself is not impressive now, being very denuded, but in a low-lying landscape even this modest hilltop affords panoramic views to the north, west and south. The hill is part of a western spur of the elevated area, described above, that forms a watershed between the Suck/Shannon system to the east and the small 'losing' streams of the lowland plain to the west. The ancient



Illus. 6—Carrowkeel cemetery-settlement enclosure; the extent of the excavation corresponds with the boundaries of the road scheme (Headland Archaeology Ltd)

roadway known as the *Slí Mór* is believed by some commentators to pass by a few kilometres to the north, along the line of the existing R348 from Ballinasloe, via Kilconnell, New Inn and Kiltullagh, and passing near Athenry on its way to the coast at Clarenbridge (Geissel 2006, 142; O’Keeffe 2001, 81). The site is within view of a point where the boundaries of three baronies converge—Athenry, Loughrea and Kilconnell—hinting at the possibility that the division of the baronies in medieval times perpetuated already ancient tribal boundaries.

There are about 90 known hillforts in Ireland. Only a handful have been investigated. Their distribution and typology were defined by Barry Raftery (1972) and the current state of knowledge was most recently reviewed by Eoin Grogan (2005, 111–32). Irish hillforts were built in Late Bronze Age times but seem to have been used for at least several centuries after their construction. Some excavated examples have produced little evidence for occupation and seem more likely to have been assembly places—vacant for much of the year, but teeming with life when people came from all over the surrounding tribal lands, perhaps to witness a royal inauguration, hear new laws being declaimed or old ones reiterated, renew the tenure of their lands or simply to trade.

The newly discovered hillfort at Rahally occupies a commanding position but, in truth, we do not know by whom it was built or even how it was used. It may have been a place where the prehistoric peoples of the plain to the west and the Suck valley to the east came together at given times of the year, or from which a particular group expressed their dominance over the entire hinterland. Three ringforts occupied the hill afterwards, and there are also remains of field banks, a kiln and byre building. These late remains attest the continuing importance of the hill at Rahally as a focal place in the landscape until at least the medieval period.

An early medieval cemetery-settlement at Carrowkeel

The second example is a burial-ground, but also a settlement, at Carrowkeel. It is part of a fascinating new story about early medieval burial customs that has been unfolding in recent years. The site occupies the west end of a low ridge. It was recorded in the Sites and Monuments Record (GA097-066) as an enclosure that had been mapped in the 1830s on the first edition of the Ordnance Survey but, since then, was completely ploughed away. The backfilled ditch of the enclosure showed clearly in the results of the geophysical survey and we believed it to be a ringfort or some similar early medieval settlement. There are extensive and well-preserved remains of an early medieval settlement complex within view of the site, also in Carrowkeel townland (GA097-068), and medieval churchyards to the north-west and south, at Kiltullagh (GA097-114) and Tooloobaun (GA097-148), both at a distance of about 2 km.

The site was excavated in 2005–6 by Brendon Wilkins for Headland Archaeology Ltd (NGR 159336, 223924; height 45 m OD; ministerial direction no. A024/001). The excavation uncovered a palimpsest of several intercutting ditches. The main ditch enclosed a subcircular area with a diameter of about 60 m. There was some evidence for settlement in the enclosure—in the form of butchered animal bone, a few poorly defined pits and post-holes and some iron slag—but there was much more substantial evidence for burials. A concentration of human skeletal remains was discovered in the eastern quadrant of the



Illus. 7—Osteologist Susan Lalonde excavating human skeletal remains at Carrowkeel; the burials were concentrated in the eastern quadrant of the enclosure (Headland Archaeology Ltd)

enclosure. This crowded burial-ground was not entirely excavated because some of it lay beyond the boundaries of the road scheme (Illus. 6). The portion that was excavated contained 128 human skeletons. Preliminary analysis undertaken by Susan Lalonde has revealed that about 84% of these were skeletons of infants, children or juveniles, but there were also some adults. There were two crouched inhumations among the earliest adult burials. Otherwise, the skeletons were all extended, oriented and supine, in the usual Christian manner. Despite all of these burials there is no evidence that the enclosure was an early church site. So what was going on here?

Only 20 years ago Irish archaeologists would have made a clear-cut division between early church sites or monasteries and the contemporary farmstead enclosures commonly known as ringforts. It was believed that most of the secular population lived in raths or cashels and that, when they died, they were taken to the monasteries for churchyard burial. Then Elizabeth O'Brien began to examine the documentary sources for early burial practices and noted a concern by the Church that, as late as the early eighth century, some communities were not bringing their dead for churchyard burial but were still preferring to bury them in ancient family burial-grounds (e.g. O'Brien 1992; forthcoming). Evidence for this unorthodox preference is now emerging in the archaeological record too. It is typically expressed as a ditched enclosure on a low hill or ridge, with some settlement evidence and with a concentration of burials in the east or south-east quadrant.

At Carrowkeel 40 of the skeletons have been radiocarbon-dated (for details see Appendix 1). The combined radiocarbon dates span several centuries and the pattern of use of the cemetery seems to have varied within that period. The greatest concentration of dates, from both adults and children, occurs around the last part of the first millennium,

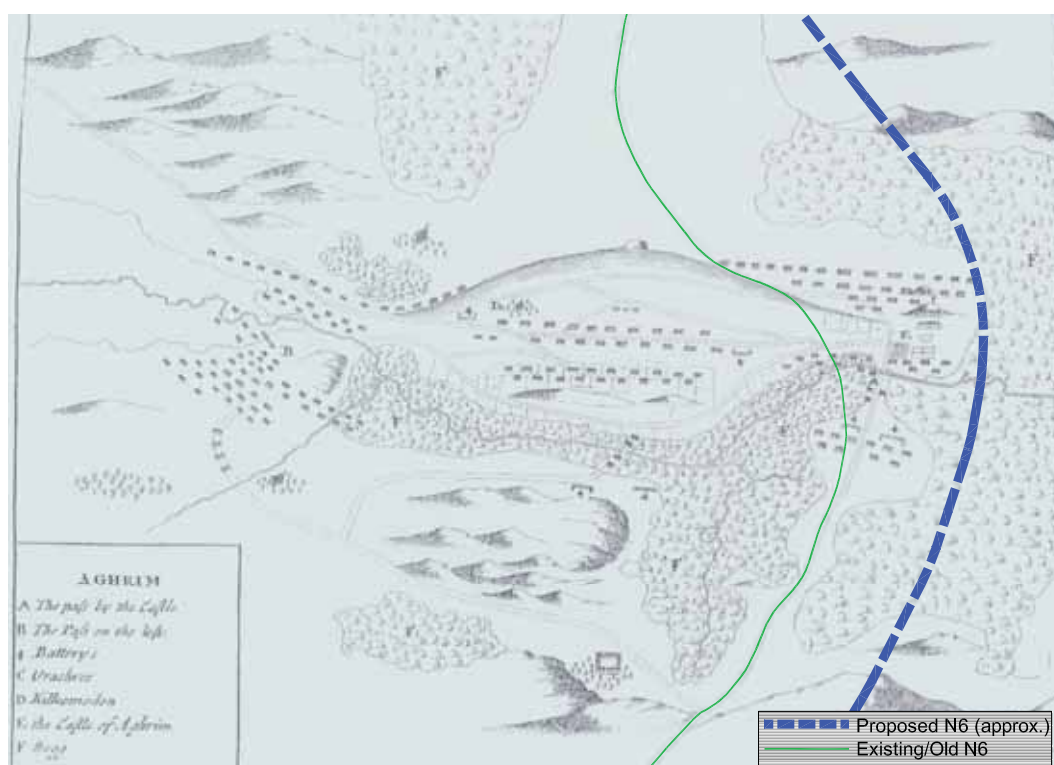
from the mid-seventh to the early 11th century AD. In that period the ditched enclosure was probably used both for habitation and for burials by a group that was bound by familial or kindred ties. No dates from adult burials occur after the early 13th century, but the enclosure continued to be used for children's burials until the late 15th century, when, on present evidence, burials ceased. In these latter years it seems that the enclosure had become a *cillín* burial-ground—i.e. a burial-ground for unbaptised infants, and perhaps others for whom churchyard burial was considered inappropriate.

How we dispose of our dead is a rich and fascinating subject. We put them in the ground, with prescribed ritual and in a dedicated place, as an investment in our belief system. We use them as a kind of token or currency to buy shares in a wished-for afterlife. When a community buries its dead within a settlement site perhaps it is also making an investment in its here-present. In Ireland the mid to late first millennium AD saw an explosion in population, changes in agriculture and a proliferation of farmstead enclosures all over the country. Within this period a sophisticated and sedentary society had ripened by at least AD 700. But its main economic stay was cattle husbandry and—like all pastoralist societies—the habit of nomadism persisted among its people. Some pre-Christian burial practices may also have persisted. When these people left their home places to graze their herds far afield in the summer, I suspect they regarded the dead they left at home as a kind of sacred and inviolable testimony to their tenure of their lands and permanent dwelling-places. Later generations continued to use the enclosure at Carrowkeel as a *cillín* burial-ground, probably long after it was abandoned as a dwelling-place. The enclosure would have had a strangely ambivalent character in that phase. It was both a special place for the innocents, bounded by an ancient earthwork, but also an inconvenient bit of marginal ground on the edge of tillage fields and pastures—literally a Limbo in the working landscape. (The Latin root of Limbo is *limbus*, a hem or border, presumably sharing a root with 'liminal', from the Latin *limen*, a threshold.)

The Battle of Aughrim, 1691

If the hillfort at Rahally and the burial-ground at Carrowkeel were lasting monuments, expressing long continuities between successive communities, then this next example is a place of sudden and violent discontinuity where an old order gave way to a new one on a single day. The Battle of Aughrim was fought in July 1691 almost a year to the day after James II and William of Orange led their armies at the Boyne. The kings were absent at Aughrim and their armies were led instead by French and Dutch generals. The Marquis de St Ruth commanded an army of Irish and French troops for the Catholic James; Godbert de Ginkell commanded a force of English, Scots, Danish, Dutch and French Huguenot troops for the Protestant William. Even in the absence of the rival kings some would say that Aughrim was a more decisive battle than the Boyne. Certainly it was a bloodier one, with at least 7,000 dead, mostly on the Jacobite side.

Descriptions of the battle by Hayes-McCoy (1942; 1969), Murtagh (1990) and others are able to draw on contemporary accounts (Illus. 8). St Ruth had retreated into Connacht from Athlone but chose to fight at Aughrim, having organised his muster from headquarters in Loughrea. He ranged his army across a 2 km front along Kilcommadan ridge, with the peaty morass of the Melehan River floodplain before him and the village of Aughrim, with



*Illus. 8—A contemporary depiction of the Battle of Aughrim from behind the Williamite lines, showing the approximate line of the road as a dashed blue line (from Story's *An Impartial History of the Wars of Ireland [1691–3]*; reproduced in Murtagh 1990, 87)*

a standing tower house, on his left flank (Illus. 9). Things went well for the Jacobites at first and they repulsed several Williamite attacks, inflicting heavy losses on troops who had to make their way across the bog before they could engage. But panic swept through the battlefield when General St Ruth was killed towards evening by a cannonball. Around this time the Williamite cavalry made a decisive incursion against the Jacobite left, forcing a way along the causeway that is perpetuated now by the old road into the village. The Jacobite cavalry on that flank, under Brigadier Henry Luttrell, should have intervened to check this attack, but instead they quit the battlefield, possibly after they learned of the death of St Ruth. The Jacobite line gradually buckled and began to fall back across the summit of Kilcommadan ridge. Eventually resistance collapsed entirely, and in the crushing defeat that resulted there was a general slaughter of the infantry and their camp-followers.

The route of the new road passes to the north of Aughrim village and thus avoids the battlefield, but it does cross the route of Henry Luttrell's retreat—or 'Luttrell's Pass', as it is now known (GA087-054)—in the townland of Coololla and probably passes through areas where Jacobite troops, including cavalry, were stationed behind the lines. An intensive metal-detecting survey by Archaeological Surveys Ltd (NGR 178731, 228518; height 90 m OD; metal detection reg. no. R002) aimed to test this interpretation by searching for any munitions discharged into this area during the battle (Illus. 10). Hundreds of metal objects were recovered but only a handful of these were related to the battle: these were several musket balls (Illus. 11), a gun-money coin (i.e. an example of the largely worthless base-metal coins minted by James during his Irish campaigns) and a mortar fragment. This



Illus. 9—Aerial view of Aughrim village, showing the route of the N6 Galway to East Ballinasloe PPP scheme and the location of Luttrell's Pass, where the Jacobite cavalry under Brigadier Henry Luttrell quit the field at a decisive moment (RPS Engineering)

meagre result may represent skirmishing or merely overshooting, and confirms the generally accepted view that there was no combat proper on that northern side of the village. Still, it is a poignant experience to hold in one's hand a musket ball that was last handled in fear or anger on a day when so many died and so much changed forever in the west of Ireland.

A herdsman's house on the Moyode estate

The last example is again about tenure and dwelling-places, but in a much later period. In the early modern period in Ireland the rural poor lived in squalid, windowless, single-roomed cabins, consisting of no more than a wall of turf or sods with a roof of scraws or thatch supported on branches. These dwellings typically occurred in the unenclosed clusters known as clachans. In Galway they occurred throughout the county and are depicted on every sheet of the first-edition Ordnance Survey maps as a peppering of simple, short strokes of the draughtsman's pen. For most of these households, this is the only record that survives. They would soon be swept away by hunger, disease and emigration, in the great Famine of the 1840s and its sequel. But there were also tenants dwelling within the demesnes of the big houses and these seem to have had a more comfortable lot.

Field-walking for the scheme EIS identified some anomalous humps and bumps in a pasture field that was once part of Moyode demesne, near Kiltullagh. The desk study



Illus. 12—Excavated remains of the herdsman's house on Moyode demesne, from north; a cobbled doorway gives direct access to the main or central room, which has the remains of a fireplace set in one wall (Headland Archaeology Ltd)



Illus. 13—The tower house at Moyode (Galway County Council)



Illus. 14—The ornamental entranceway to Burton Perse's stableyard, dated 1822 (Galway County Council)

suggested that these corresponded to buildings depicted on the first-edition Ordnance Survey map of 1838, and the geophysical survey confirmed that they were likely to be the remains of stone structures and yards. The site was subsequently excavated by Tom Janes, for Headland Archaeology Ltd (NGR 152195, 225191; height 40 m OD; ministerial direction no. A024/011; excavation reg. no. E2353).

The excavation revealed what could be described as a miniature farmstead: a three-roomed cottage with bedroom, kitchen and parlour/end bedroom (Illus. 12), a walled kitchen garden, and a haggard or infield enclosure with an animal pen—possibly a pigsty or poultry house—built into one of its walls. The house was of good construction and well finished. The associated artefacts also indicate a comfortable household. Several hundred objects were recovered, ranging from imported tablewares from the new pottery towns of industrial England to farmyard tools that were probably hammered out in a local forge in east Galway. The mid-19th-century survey of rateable property known as Griffith's Valuations (1847–64) records that the tenant was a herdsman on the estate of Moyode.

The first manor of Moyode was a stronghold of the Dolfin de Burgos, who received their lands from Richard de Burgo in the 13th century (Roy 2001, 113–19; Holland 2000, 160). The tall, slim tower house built there in the 15th century still stands (Illus. 13), but the lands changed hands over the centuries and several subsequent owners are recorded. The people in our excavated farmhouse were tenants of the Persse family, who acquired the estate in the 1770s. They were descended from an ambitious and acquisitive Northumbrian clergyman, the Rev. Robert Persse, who came to Ireland in or about 1610 (Roy 2001, 198–200). The Persses built several houses in east Galway and fulfilled all expectations of the landed gentry. They were masters of the famous Galway Blazers hunt, which still rides out in pursuit of the fox on cold, hard, winter Saturdays. Some preferred gentler pursuits, and Lady Augusta Gregory, née Persse, kept a famous literary salon in her house at Coole, in south Galway, and was co-founder of Dublin's Abbey Theatre.

The estate at Moyode was energetically developed by Burton Persse in the early decades of the 19th century and he is commemorated by an inscription on the arched entranceway to the stableyard, dated 1822 (Illus. 14). A century later, during the Easter Rising of 1916, the house was garrisoned by 700 volunteers under the command of Liam Mellows. The tower house built by the Dolfin de Burgos was restored in recent years by the American author and historian James Charles Roy (for an entertaining account of this episode see Roy 2001); but Burton Persse's house was razed by Republican activists during the War of Independence and only a ruined shell survives.

County Galway has an unusually high number of Ascendancy-period mansion houses and associated demesnes. In a relatively poor part of the country they were oases of order, pleasure and prosperity, with their gatelodges and avenues, walled gardens and parkland planting. The excavation of an estate cottage at Moyode reveals another aspect of these places. The families that inhabited such cottages were tenants and estate workers—with a house and plot of land sufficient for their subsistence—but were also inhabitants of the demesne. They seem to have shared to some degree in the order and prosperity of their landlords, certainly enjoying a higher standard of living than their counterparts in the clachans outside the walls, so many of whom would be carried away by hunger and disease only a few years after our buildings first appeared on the Ordnance Survey map of 1838.

Conclusion

This paper has briefly described a late prehistoric hillfort, an early medieval cemetery-settlement, a 17th-century battlefield and an estate cottage of the Ascendancy period. These are four examples from among 36 archaeological sites on the route of the N6 Galway to East Ballinasloe PPP scheme and they illustrate the randomness and variety of archaeological discovery on a major linear development. It might appear that the only thing linking them is the road itself but, in addition, they illustrate how inhabited landscapes are socially and historically constructed. The successive generations that occupy a landscape consume and mark it, name and rename it, and embed in it their material remains. Because of this, special places do not occur only on mountain summits and sea promontories. Even a quiet landscape can be invested with significance by the work, beliefs, achievements and defeats of the generations that have lived in it.

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