

Historic Environment Division

Unearthed

New discoveries in development-led archaeology in Northern Ireland 2015–2018

September 2019



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Foreword

Since planning powers were devolved to councils in 2015 the Department for Communities' Historic Environment Division has provided advice on how to enable change in ways that protects or enhances Northern Ireland's archaeological sites and monuments in over 12,000 cases. The Department's work as a statutory planning consultee helps to ensure that the historic environment is preserved for future generations to understand and enjoy, while its contribution to enhancing our towns, villages and countryside through sustainable development and to our well-being and economic prosperity is realised.

The Department's work on proposing and regulating archaeological excavations also produces important new information about our past. This first edition of Unearthed summarises some of the most significant archaeological discoveries in Northern Ireland between 2015 and 2018. In this period almost 800 licensed archaeological excavation took place, mainly as a requirement of the planning process. These investigations have resulted in exciting and important new information about our past, from evidence of the homesteads of some of the first prehistoric farming communities in Northern Ireland to the remains of our more recent industrial heritage.

We intend that Unearthed will continue as a regular annual bulletin of the most significant archaeological discoveries arising from development-led archaeology in Northern Ireland. These new discoveries highlight the importance of archaeological mitigation in advance of development, as well as the significant contributions made by developers and archaeologists in unearthing these new archaeological sites for the benefit of all in society.



Iain Greenway Director, Department for Communities Historic Environment Division

Introduction

Welcome to the first edition of Unearthed, Historic Environment Division's bulletin highlighting the most significant new discoveries in development-led archaeology in Northern Ireland.

Archaeology is an important consideration in determining planning applications and in dealing with the environmental effects of major development and infrastructure projects. The Department for Communities' Historic Environment Division (HED) acts as a statutory consultee in the planning process, providing expert advice to the 11 local council planning offices, government departments, developers, consultants and the public on historic environment matters. Planning powers were delegated to the new local authorities in April 2015. From that date until July 2018, HED was consulted almost 10,000 times on development proposals – approximately 25% of all planning applications in Northern Ireland. Through this process HED seeks to mitigate the potential impacts of development upon archaeological sites and monuments, listed buildings and other historic environment assets. We do this by advising on the selection of appropriate sites and employing sympathetic design. However development proposals can also be made acceptable through conditions requiring developers to undertake archaeological excavation and recording works before a development project commences. The majority of archaeological excavations in Northern Ireland take place as part of development schemes.

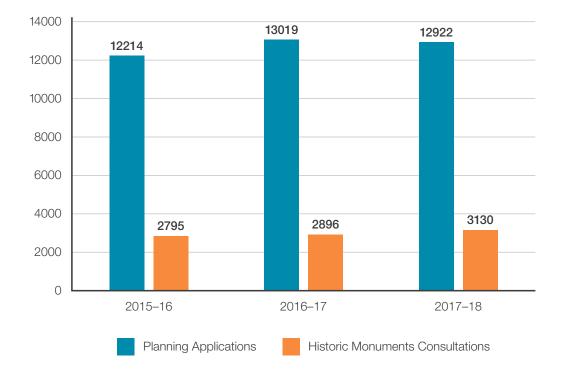


Fig. 1 Planning applications and HED consultations - financial years 2015/16-2017/18

What follows is a sample of some of the most significant discoveries in Northern Irish archaeology since the Review of Public Administration (RPA), unearthing important new information about our past. Since April 2015, almost 800 archaeological excavation licences were issued by HED, over 600 of which were directly related to planning applications. With a few exceptions the bulk of the remainder were related to major infrastructural schemes that fall outside the planning system (predominantly the A6 road scheme); and to excavations carried out by Queen's University Belfast and the National Trust.

NB: These summaries are largely based on preliminary findings and may be subject to revision by the archaeologist once analysis and final reports are complete.



Fig. 2 Distribution of sites in the text

1	Artresnahan	12	Killuney, Armagh
2	Ballygarvey Road, Ballymena	13	Laurel Hill Solar Farm
3	Ballyhenry Minor, Comber	14	Magheralave, Lisburn
4	Ballynagalliagh	15	Millmount, Dundonald
5	Ballysculty	16	Milltown, Aghory
6	Donnydeade	17	Millvale, Bessbrook
7	Drumcullen	18	Navan Fort Road, Armagh
8	Finvoy Road, Ballymoney	19	Rasharkin Solar Farm
9	Glenshane Road, Claudy	20	Royal Exchange, Belfast
10	Halls Pig Farm, Glengormley	21	Tullaghans Road, Rasharkin
11	Hightown Road, Mallusk	22	Turmeel, Dungiven

1. Prehistoric Archaeology

This covers the period from the arrival of humans in Ireland to the arrival of Christianity. It contains a number of specific eras. The Mesolithic (8000–4000 BC) is the earliest phase of occupation in Ireland and is marked by a hunter-gatherer society. Archaeological evidence consists predominantly of flint and stone artefacts and pits; evidence for habitation is limited. The Neolithic (4000–2500 BC) is the period of the first farmers, and is often subdivided into an early and later phase. Key sites for the Neolithic period include megalithic tombs and large ritual sites. Neolithic houses are rectangular and excavated examples largely date to the fourth millennium BC. The earliest metal-based society was the Bronze Age (2500–700 BC). This is often divided into an Early, Middle and Late phase. These phases are marked by changes in burial and domestic structures. Houses associated with this period are generally round; and hillforts emerge towards the end of the Bronze Age. The Iron Age in Ireland (700 BC–AD 400) is characterised by its distinctive metalwork. Hillforts continue in use, but evidence for domestic structures remains limited.

Settlement Sites

Prehistoric settlement sites were uncovered at **Hightown Road**, Mallusk. Two spreads of occupation material, both of which contained sherds of pottery and flint, were identified as the floors of Early Neolithic structures.

Two Late Neolithic structures were also excavated, and pits on the site contained Late Neolithic pottery, including some Grooved Ware sherds. Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age activity was also identified at Hightown and included pottery sherds found within pits. Two windbreaks defined by arcs of stakeholes were identified. During the Early Neolithic houses are almost exclusively rectangular in shape. After this period there is a shift to predominantly circular houses and it is not until the end of the early medieval period that the rectangular form again dominates.

A rectangular Neolithic house was identified at **Turmeel** townland, Co. Londonderry during the archaeological investigation of the A6 near Dungiven. It measured approximately 14m long and 7m wide and contained almost 1400 sherds of Neolithic pottery.



Fig. 3 Excavation of a Neolithic house at Turmeel, Dungiven © NAC Ltd



Fig. 4 Early Neolithic Lyle's Hill Pottery from HIghtown Road, Mallusk $\ensuremath{\textcircled{}}$ NAC Ltd



Fig. 5 Neolithic Pottery from Turmeel, Dungiven © NAC Ltd.



Fig. 6 Excavated Enclosure at Ballynagalliagh, Co. Londonderry © HED

A Bronze Age roundhouse was identified at **Rasharkin solar farm**, Rasharkin. It consisted of a post-ring, an internal heath, areas of stakeholes, and a segmented enclosure. Enclosed houses generally date to the Middle Bronze Age, c. 1500 BC.

Finds included a possible rubbing stone and several sherds of Late Bronze Age coarseware pottery.

A curving ditch was excavated in advance of a housing development at **Finvoy Road**, Ballymoney. This was the continuation of an enclosure excavated at an adjacent site in 2006. Two radiocarbon dates (1120–940 BC and 801–485 BC) indicate that this was a Late Bronze Age feature. No further evidence of occupation was uncovered. Similar enclosures from the Bronze Age are generally associated with settlement, and it is possible that any further associated archaeological features had been destroyed by earlier development. A large enclosure was uncovered within a housing development at **Ballynagalliagh**, Co. Londonderry. It was located on a relatively steep, south facing slope and extended some 40m east-west by 20m north-south. The enclosure was constituted of 90 post holes with 12 post forming a separate arc in the north-west corner of the site.

The majority of the post holes were of considerable size, measuring 350mm in diameter, with an average depth 300mm. Half of the post holes produced sherds of pottery within their fills. Some of these have been identified as belonging to the Vase tradition of Bronze Age pottery; and other sherds have been identified as coming from the Cordoned Urn tradition. This gives a general date of c. 2000–1500 BC for the use of the site. Extensive topsoil stripping associated with a large housing development on the outskirts of Dundonald revealed a substantial outer ditch that enclosed a number of prehistoric houses (Millmount Site 2). There was also evidence that the large enclosure was divided internally into smaller enclosures. A cremation burial was located in the north-west area of the site. Only minimal excavation took place in this area, and the archaeological features were recorded and preserved in situ beneath geotextile and quarry dust. Once protected the site was further buried under spoil from the wider development. This area may be subject to future development, at which time the archaeological site will be fully excavated.

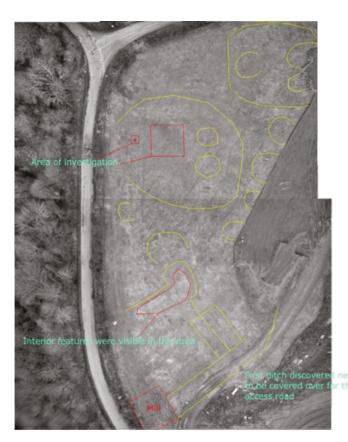


Fig. 7 Annotated aerial photograph at Millmount, Co. Down showing features © Gahan and Long.

Fulachta Fiadha

The term fulacht fiadh (pl. fulachta fiadha – 'cooking pit for wild animals'), or burnt mound, is given to a class of archaeological monuments that predominantly date to Bronze Age. These are represented in the archaeological record by a layer, or mound, of charcoal-rich soil which contains a large number of fire-cracked stones. They are generally found close to water sources, whether streams, springs or marshy ground.

The monument was created by placing fire-heated stones into a water-filled trough (sometimes lined with wood, clay or stone). This process occurred multiple times and eventually the stones disintegrated and were discarded and replaced with fresh stones. This led to the accumulation of the mound of cindery burnt rubble that survives in the archaeological record.

The early interpretation of these sites was that they were used for cooking. Archaeological experiments have indicated that when the fire-heated stones were placed within a water trough, the water could be bought to boiling point within 35 minutes. Meat may have been wrapped in reeds or grass before being placed into the pit; pottery or leather vessels could also have been put into the trough to cook broths or stews. Evidence for cooking has been found at some sites with pieces of burnt bone and pottery recovered from the burnt mounds. However, it has become clear that there was a range of functions for these sites, including brewing and sweat lodges.

Geophysical survey in advance of the Laurel Hill solar farm at Donaghcloney indicated possible archaeological anomalies. Two of these anomalies, located close to the River Lagan, were the stone spreads of fulachta fiadha. A possible archaeological site had been identified from aerial photographs at Ballyearl townland. Excavation in advance of a large-scale pig farm revealed that this was a fulacht fiadh. A second fulacht fiadh was also identified during testing at the site. These were located close to the channel of an old stream.



Fig. 8 Fulacht fiadh at Laurel Hill Solar Farm, Co. Down © NAC Ltd.



Fig. 9 Fulacht fiadh at Hall's Pig Farm, Glengormley © NAC Ltd.

Ritual Sites

A Late Neolithic ritual site was discovered during a guarry extension at Glenshane Road, Claudy. This consisted of a timber circle - large wooden posts with an outer fenced forecourt - which dated to c. 2500 BC. Timber circles are likely to have been the focus of elaborate ritualised activities attended by large numbers of people. Other posts, pits and stakeholes were identified in the area. To the northeast was a later Late Neolithic/ Early Bronze Age roundhouse with a contemporary smaller four post structure to the northwest, as well as at least two industrial working areas comprising hearths, pits, gullies and stakeholes. An isolated cremation burial which dated to the Middle Neolithic was found to the far side of the working area away from all the structures along with a small number of undated token cremation deposits. The Bronze Age house respected the timber circle itself and its enclosure. It seems likely that knowledge of the timber circle was remembered when the location for the house was chosen.

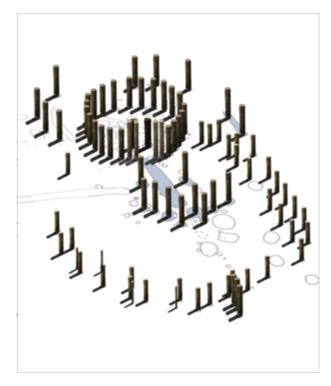


Fig. 11 Reconstruction of timber circle at Glenshane Road, Claudy @ NAC Ltd.



Fig. 10 Timber Circle at Glenshane Road, Claudy © NAC Ltd.



Fig. 12 Aerial view of excavated timber circle and barrow at Donnydeade, Co. Tyrone © John Cronin and Associates

A pair of probable Bronze Age barrows (burial mounds) were identified at **Navan Fort Road**, Armagh from examination of the LiDAR survey (a detailed topographic survey taken with lasers). It was possible to amend the layout of the development in order that these sites could remain undisturbed and preserved in situ.

Preliminary findings from a site at **Donnydeade**, Co. Tyrone suggest ritual and ceremonial activity during the Neolithic and Bronze Age periods. The earliest evidence of ritual activity is represented by the deliberate deposition of early Neolithic carinated pottery sherds along with one sherd of late Neolithic Grooved Ware in a pit. A circle of 18 postholes has been interpreted by the excavators as a timber circle (Structure A) dating to the late Neolithic period. It has parallels with other late Neolithic timber circles: e.g. Cappagh Beg, Co. Londonderry. Of note is its south-facing entrance which faced a ringbarrow (8.5m external diameter; ditch 2.7m wide). The ring-barrow was re-cut at some stage during its use-life. No cremated bone was recovered from the primary fills; however, the fills of the re-cut contained small quantities of cremated bone along with prehistoric pottery and flint (including a hollow scraper indicating

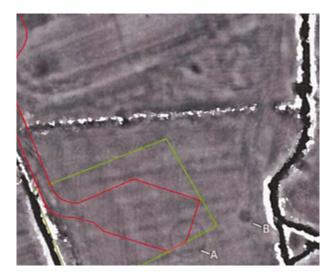


Fig. 13 Two archaeological features ('A' and 'B') identified by LiDAR at Navan Fort Road, Armagh $\ensuremath{\mathbb{O}}$ James McKee

a potentially Neolithic date). Elsewhere on the site, a cluster of small pits each contained two small sherds of Beaker Ware and a significant number of lithics, indicating that the ritual activity continued into the Chalcolithic (c. 2500–2200 BC). An undated hut (Structure B) may have been domestic in nature; it consisted of multiple stakeholes indicating that the structure was dismantled and re-erected several times. It may have comprised bent hazel or willow rods pushed into the ground, tied together, and covered with skins or such like.

Focus on: Solar Farms

2016 saw a significant increase in the number of large-scale solar farm projects in planning, and these are becoming a more familiar sight in our countryside. They tend to be located on very large greenfield sites with south-facing slopes, which means they also have a high potential to contain previously unrecorded below-ground archaeological remains. As a result, solar farm projects will normally involve significant pre-development archaeological assessment and excavation works. Careful consideration is also given to the siting and layout of solar farms to minimise their visual impact upon the historic environment.

Geophysical survey has become a routine tool at the outset of archaeological investigations on solar farms. The underlying geology and the nature of soil cover dictate the type of survey used and can influence the quality of results. Geophysical surveys can locate potential archaeological features and 'hot spots' of high archaeological potential, which then help to target further archaeological investigations in advance of any construction works. Archaeological features found on solar farms may be preserved in situ, for example by amending the site layout or adapting the way solar panels are mounted. Where this is not possible, archaeological excavation will take place.

Several solar farm developments have revealed archaeological features and are presented within the text.



Fig. 14 Geophysical Survey at Ballygarvey Road, Co. Antrim $\ensuremath{\mathbb{O}}$ Earthsound

2. Historic Archaeology

This period covers the years from the arrival of Christianity up to the Ulster Plantation. The main site-types of the early medieval period (AD 400–1169) are raths (earthen banked and ditched farm enclosures), crannogs (artificial islands) and early ecclesiastical sites. The arrival of the Normans in 1169 brought timber-and-earth mottes, stone-built castles, urban

architecture and more intricate churches. In the later medieval period in Ulster small castles, called tower-houses, were being constructed by the native Irish as well as in the remaining Anglo-Norman towns. The native Irish were also re-using earlier crannog sites as well as appropriating other earlier sites such as Tullaghoge.

The dominant early medieval site type is the rath. A number of new sites have been identified and excavated since 2015.

Geophysical survey was employed on a number of solar farm developments and identified two previously unknown enclosures – a rath at **Ballysculty**, Crumlin, and an enclosure complex at Mullans townland, **Tullaghans Road**, Finvoy.

The survey at Ballysculty revealed a previously un-recorded bivallate rath. This is an early medieval enclosure with two sets of banks and ditches, normally associated with high status individuals. The layout of the development was amended to preserve the monument in situ. Planning permission was refused on other grounds. Another early medieval bivallate enclosure was identified in the geophysical survey at Tullaghans Road. Excavation of this site revealed two substantial ditches – the inner ditch had an average width of 5.5m; the outer ditch had an average width of 3.4m. – enclosing an area c. 60m×50m in size. The interior of the site contained at least two structures with stone foundations.

Due to the presence of further ditches across the lane, the archaeologist, however, considered that it was unlikely that the enclosure was the usual circular shape. It is possible that the overall shape of the enclosure, therefore, was likely to have been 'plectrum' shaped with interrupted ditches. In which case the settlement area increases to c. 104m×55m.

This previously unknown site may be an example of the enclosure complexes discovered in counties Meath and Dublin during the road schemes of the early 2000s.

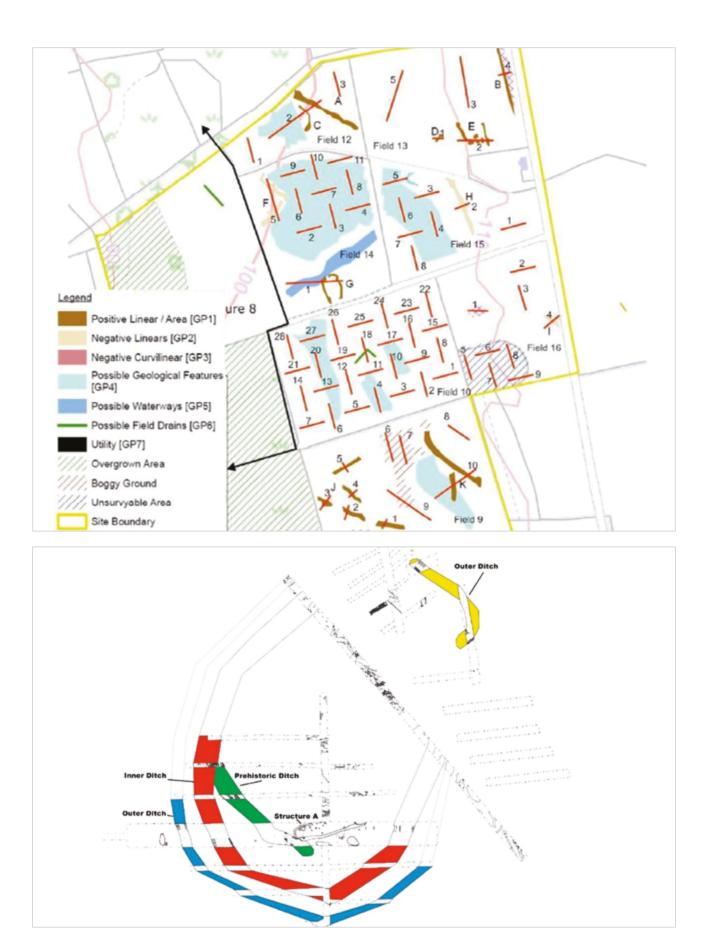


Fig. 15 Analysis of the geophysical survey at Tullaghans Road © Earthsound Fig. 16 Plan of Prehistoric and early medieval activity at Tullaghans Road © Gahan and Long

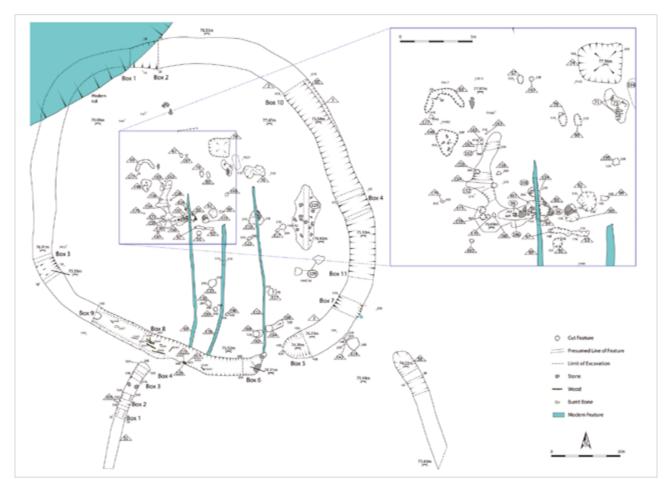


Fig. 17 Plan of rath excavation at Magheralave, Lisburn © NAC

The final excavation report has not yet been completed, however if it verifies the initial interpretation, the site at Tullaghans Road is one of the first early medieval enclosure complexes to have been discovered in Northern Ireland.

Finds from this excavation included large amounts of cremated bone and Souterrain Ware. There was also evidence for industrial activity on site – e.g. quantities of slag, a whet stone and a mould – and an early medieval ringed pin was also discovered. The major development south of the North Lisburn Feeder Road included three identified SMR sites. One of these, **Magheralave** rath (ANT 064:020) was fully excavated as part of the development process. This uncovered the enclosure ditch, as well as two internal structures and two working areas. The excavation uncovered almost 1300 sherds of early medieval pottery as well as pieces of early medieval glass.

Ballyhenry Minor, Comber (Moorfield Road)

Excavations in advance of development at **Ballyhenry Minor**, Comber revealed a multiperiod occupation, including a Bronze Age curving ditch (1643–1504 BC) and a later enclosure ditch which was approximately 28m² (1301–1118 BC).

Early medieval activity was indicated by a large rath enclosure 28m×36m in diameter (AD 645– 765) and an associated field enclosure. The interior of the rath had a metalled surface, and a possible post-built structure around a hearth. An earth-cut souterrain was associated with the rath – the roof of which appears to have been supported by oak posts – and exited into the ditch.



Fig. 18 Plan of Bronze Age and early medieval activity at Ballyhenry Minor, Co. Down © NAC

Focus on: Road Schemes

Due to their large scale, infrastructural projects like road improvement schemes are among the most significant in terms of new archaeological discoveries. Years of archaeological research may have taken place before site investigations begin.

The Department for Infrastructure (Dfl) has lead responsibility for delivering road schemes in Northern Ireland. During route selection, emphasis is placed on avoiding known archaeological sites and monuments and identifying areas of heightened archaeological potential which may require further investigation. Procedures agreed with HED are in place to ensure that any new sites which may only become apparent after topsoil removal are investigated in advance of road construction. Archaeological investigations are carried out as far in



Fig. 19 Excavations on the A6 near Dungiven © NAC Ltd.

advance of road building as possible in order to avoid delays in the delivery of these regionally significant projects.

In 2017, archaeological investigation on large scale road schemes were undertaken on the A6 (Dungiven to Drumahoe), A6 (Toome to Castledawson), and A4 (Enniskillen Bypass). HED is currently involved in agreeing the archaeological mitigation of future road schemes such as the A5, Ballynahinch Bypass and A1 junctions.

Artresnahan, Co. Antrim (A6)

Excavation suggests that this was a large early medieval plectrum-shaped enclosure at least 40m in diameter. The full extent of the enclosure was not ascertained as it continued outside the vesting boundary for the road.

At least four possible structures were located within the enclosure. Three were formed using gullies as foundation slots for the buildings. It is clear from the layout that the structures were sequential, resulting in successive building on the one spot over many years.

A fourth, post-built structure was located to the north and west of these three structures. It is likely to have been constructed backing onto the enclosure bank and has been interpreted as a store, workshop or barn.

Artefacts from the site consisted of 157 sherds of early medieval Souterrain Ware pottery as well as 129 worked wooden items from the lower fills of the ditch. The wooden artefacts included posts, stakes, wedges, pegs and staves. Also found was the lid of a barrel, a possible basin and the head of a spade.

Drumcullen, Co. Antrim (A6)

This site contained two distinct areas of archaeology. Firstly, a series of eleven pits which, on the basis of the artefactual material present, date to the Neolithic period. Secondly, a medium sized enclosure ditch which contained Souterrain Ware pottery. Souterrain Ware within the fills indicates an early medieval date for the enclosure and suggests that it may have been connected to the destroyed rath (ANT048:013) that was located immediately to the northwest.



Fig. 20 Wooden trough from Artresnahan © NAC



Fig. 21 Aerial photograph of enclosure at Artresnahan, Co. Antrim NAC



Fig. 22 Aerial photograph of Drumcullen © NAC



Fig. 23 Aerial photograph of excavations at Killuney, Co. Armagh © NAC Ltd.

Killuney, Co. Armagh

The excavations here comprised a large curvilinear enclosure ditch (100m×87m) with an ancillary ditch attached and a double outer boundary ditch surrounding the enclosure.

A large curving ditch was located within the main enclosure. A cluster of postholes and stakeholes were uncovered as well as three large pits. The remains of a sub-square set of double gullies that could have been the remains of a heavily truncated structure were also uncovered. A further large curving gully contained no artefactual deposits but was substantial and could indicate the remains of a structure. The ancillary ditch formed an annex to the main ditch at the southwest corner of the site. A small lignite ring was found in a pit cut into the side of the annex. Just outside the annex ditch lay a small circular feature containing burnt bone and the surface appeared to be baked; it could be the remains of a small circular oven.

The double ditches may have formed a secondary enclosure surrounding the main ditch. These were truncated at the northern end of the site and more heavily to the western end. The ditches measured at their widest 1.2m and had a maximum depth of 0.7m. The fills of these ditches resembled the surrounding subsoil and contained no artefactual material. In between the two ditches in the southeast corner a small piece of highly decorated prehistoric pottery was discovered which may point towards a date for the construction of the feature.

3. Post-medieval and Industrial Archaeology

This period covers the period from AD 1600 through to the 20th century. The early part of this time includes the Ulster Plantation, and the bawns (fortified houses) and planned settlement associated with it. In the 18th century there was an increase in the numbers of designed landscapes associated with large country houses; while the Industrial Revolution initiated a large number of structures such as mills, railways, and canals. The Defence Heritage Project (DHP) has highlighted a large number of structures associated with the Northern Ireland's role in the World Wars. These range from coastal forts to military airfields.

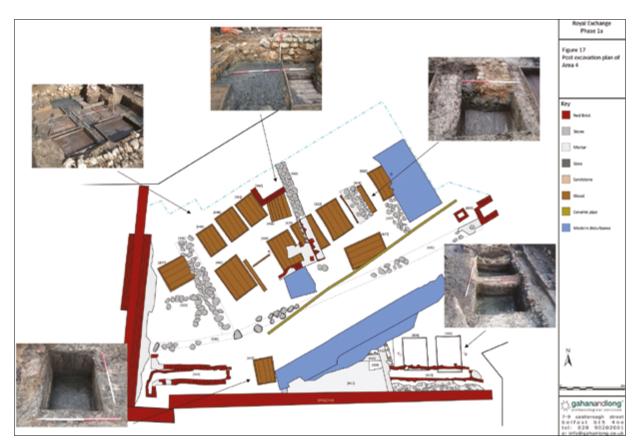


Fig. 24 Plan of tanning pits found at Royal Exchange, Belfast © Gahan and Long

Urban Archaeology

The Royal Exchange site is located within the historic core of Belfast. The main activity within the central area of the site consisted of a tannery. This was represented by a series of 15 tanning pits, the majority of which were constructed of wooden planks joined together by wooden dowels. The base planks appear to have been held together by a smaller base plate. This method of construction is similar to that of a series of 18th-century tanning pits excavated at Stone Row, Coleraine.

The abundance of horn cores identified across the area of the excavation (703 in total), waste products of the tanning process, indicates that the entirety of the tannery or tanneries may not be fully identified.



Fig. 25 Tanning pits at Royal Exchange, Belfast © Gahan and Long

Industrial Archaeology

Millvale, Bessbrook, Co. Armagh

The Millvale complex at Bessbrook was established in 1792 and was one of the largest non-urban mills in Ireland. A flax scutching mill appeared on the map of 1859; and in 1883 a powerhouse was constructed for the 3-mile long Bessbrook to Newry electric tramway.

Excavation revealed substantial remains associated with the flour mill, as well as belowground remains of the scutching mill. The remains of the steel rails associated with the tramway bridge were also uncovered.

Milltown/Aghory, Co. Armagh

The proposed development was for the extension of an existing Waste Water Treatment Plant at Milltown, Co. Armagh. The site was located on the location of a corn and flax mill recorded on the 1st edition OS map. The mill was later converted to a saw mill. A precautionary archaeological condition was attached to the planning approval. The excavation revealed that the entire lower floor of the mill, including drive shafts and gearing, had been buried to a depth of 2.5m.



Fig. 26 Excavation of scutching mill at Millvale, Bessbrook © NAC



Fig. 27 Remains of tram bridge over Bessbrook River © NAC Ltd.



Fig. 28 Mill site at Milltown, Aghory, Co. Armagh © HED

List of sites referenced in the text

Acknowledgements

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Ballygarvey Road Solar Farm, Ballymena, Co. Antrim (Planning Ref. LA02/2015/0756/F). Dermot Redmond (Gahan and Long) AE/17/185

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Rasharkin solar farm, Rasharkin, Co. Antrim (Planning Ref. D/2014/0181/F). Chris Lynn (Gahan and Long) AE/16/188 and AE/16/122

Royal Exchange, Belfast, Co. Antrim (Planning Ref. LA04/2016/2327/F) Chris Long (Gahan & Long) AE/17/148 **Tullaghans Road**, Finvoy (Mullans td.), Co. Antrim (Planning Ref. LA01/2015/1045/F) Chris Lynn (Gahan and Long) AE/16/207

Turmeel, Co. Londonderry (A6). Charlene Conway (NAC) AE/17/245



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Historic Environment Division

Ground Floor 9 Lanyon Place Belfast BT1 3LP

Tel: 028 9082 3100Email: planning.general@communities-ni.gov.ukWeb: www.communities-ni.gov.uk/topics/historic-environment