

# *The Archaeological Excavations on the N7 Nenagh Bypass, 1998-1999*

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## ABSTRACT

This paper is a brief summary of the archaeological excavations carried out on the 11km road route of the N7 Nenagh Bypass, Co. Tipperary, during the period 1998-1999. Although archaeological mitigation first occurred on the N7 route as far back as 1996, it is not proposed to deal in any detail with those investigations here, rather to concentrate on those sites found when the road route was being constructed. However, a number of the more important sites known about since 1996 will be included here as they are too significant to exclude.

As the post-excavation analysis is unfinished at the time of writing, it will not be possible to categorise all sites into exact archaeological periods, although the dating of some sites is certain. Instead the sites will be listed geographically in relation to their position on the road route, i.e. starting at the Limerick end of the Bypass, and working eastward to the Dublin end. Incorporated into the description of each site will be the position of other archaeological sites situated either on or off the road route.

This will allow the reader to 'frame' a new site into the existing archaeological landscape of that townland/area, and highlight any potential inter-site relationships. It is intended to publish the complete Nenagh Bypass report soon; it will incorporate all archaeological sites surveyed and excavated since 1996.

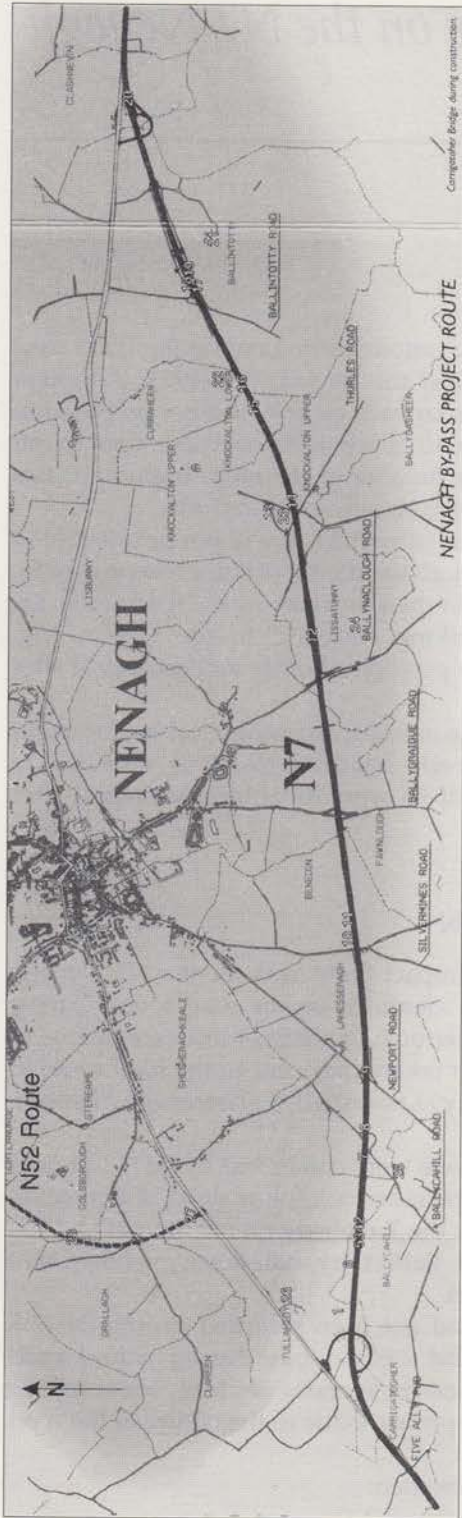
## INTRODUCTION

In 1994 C. O'Rahilly carried out the Environmental Impact Statement for the N7 Nenagh Bypass in which possible archaeological sites were first identified on the road route. During 1996-1997 Archaeological Development Services Ltd undertook a variety of test excavations to determine the archaeological potential of some sites both on and adjacent to the road route in the following townlands: Carrigatogher/Tullahedy/Lissenhall/Lahesseragh/Tyone/Knockalton Lower/Knockalton Upper & Ballintotty.

From August 1998 until October 1999 further excavations were conducted by ADS Ltd on a number of sites that were found when the road contractors undertook full-scale topsoil removal of the road route. Cia McConway directed excavations at the Tullahedy gravel mound and the sites at Benedin. Paul Logue directed excavations at Ballintotty hall-house, while Ciara McManus co-directed excavations at the Lahesseragh sites.

The majority of sites discovered on the road route had not been recorded during the EIS stage. All the excavations were rescue in nature and carried out during actual road construction, i.e. there was no time to undertake research agendas. Indeed, most of the excavations had to be resolved rapidly and under severe pressure due to the nature of the road building design.

Such pressures were recently highlighted by Monk & Sheehan:



Map 1: Nenagh by-pass N7 road route, c. 11 km long.

**Key to sites:**

1. Tullahedy Ritual Mound
2. Tullahedy Site A
3. Tullahedy Site B
4. Tullahedy Site C
5. Tullahedy Site D
6. Tullahedy Site E
7. Lahesseragh Site C
8. Lahesseragh Site A
9. Lahesseragh Site D
10. Benedin

11. Benedin
12. Lissatunny
13. Knockalton Upper Site A
14. Knockalton Upper Site B
15. Knockalton Lower
16. Knockaunkennedy Fulacht Fiadh
17. Ballintotty Hall-house
18. Ballintotty Fulacht Fia
19. Ballintotty Fulacht Fia
20. Clashnevin Sites
21. Ballintotty Castle

22. Curraheen Rath
23. Knockalton Upper Rath
24. Lissatunny Rath
25. Ballycahill Castle
26. Tullahedy Motte
27. N52 Tullahedy Fulacht Fiadh
28. Solsborough Fulacht Fia

(Nos. 21-28 are known archaeological sites mentioned in the text.)



"There are difficulties with the value of the evidence obtained from some rescue excavations, whether urban or rural. Not only is it sometimes likely to have been hurriedly recovered and, perhaps, poorly recorded, but it is obtained only from those areas of sites which are to be directly affected by development... frequently these areas represent only a partial sample of the site and, in addition, one not chosen on the basis of research questions at all." (Monk & Sheehan 1998, 3-4).

## DISCUSSION

It is intended to encompass a broader picture of the archaeology of the Bypass within the known archaeological record of the Nenagh area in the following discussion. The site descriptions are listed geographically and divided by townland, beginning at the Limerick end of the Bypass and continuing eastward.

### Tullahedy Townland

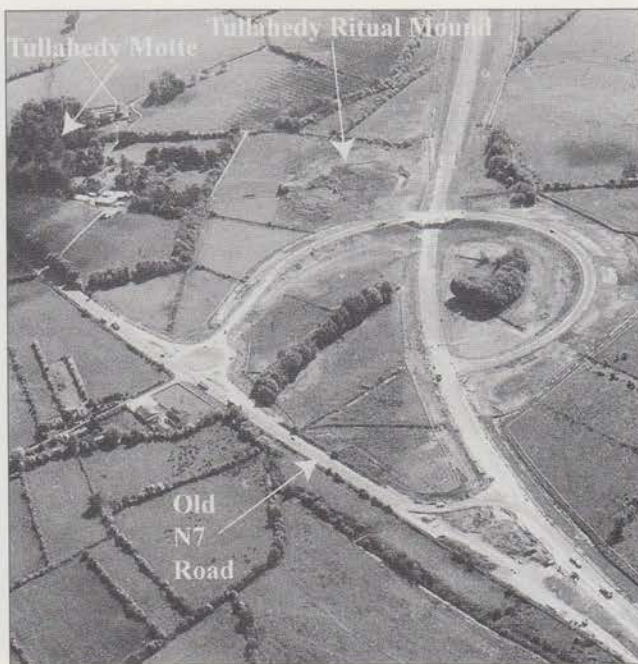
Grid Reference **R834772**: Excavation Licence Number **97E0472**

Site Classification – Neolithic landscape: Date – late Neolithic

This site was located c.2 miles west of Nenagh town, adjacent to the Carrigatogher fly-over bridge but not on the actual road route. The site consisted of a gravel and sand mound 110m x 125m, rising out of a boggy landscape. The mound is depicted as untouched on the 1st Edition Ordnance Map of 1841. However, by the 2nd Edition Map of 1905 a pathway led from the adjacent farm to the mound, suggesting that the gravel extraction had occurred in the late 19th century. This led to most of the mound being quarried away.

Upon excavation the surviving mound produced evidence of numerous pits, post-holes and stake-holes that represented much settlement activity on the mound slopes. One huge pit measuring 8.8m x 6m x 2m had been deliberately lined with wooden planks that were burnt in situ. The eastern slope of the mound produced evidence of deliberate mound landscaping forming artificial platforms with occupational evidence in the form of post-holes, pits and burnt spreads.

Finds from this area included Neolithic pottery, polished stone axes, chert arrowheads and rock crystals. The mound itself was almost fully enclosed by a huge ditch-type feature



*Plate 1: Aerial view of Nenagh by-pass at Carrigatogher roundabout.*



*Plate 2: Aerial view of Tullahedy, Sites B, C and D, looking northwest. Note the curvilinear field system to the north.*



*Plate 3: View of Tullahedy, Site A, during excavation. Three quarters of the site has been excavated. The remaining quarter is preserved in situ.*



varying from 8m wide, and 1.86m deep. There was evidence of a palisaded feature on the inner edge of the ditch that suggested some form of a defensive/protective role for the activity on the mound.

It was clear from the initial excavations that Tullahedy mound represents a portion of a once larger, vibrant settlement. Some penultimate Bronze Age activity attested to a possibly long duration of settlement on the mound. Tullahedy mound must have been a centre of great importance in the prehistoric landscape of north Tipperary, and indeed north Munster. The site is only c.4 miles from Youghal Bay on Lough Derg, an artery that served as a primary conduit for people- and trade- movement throughout prehistory in this region.

In the light of recent attitudes to regionality in the Irish Neolithic (Cooney 2000, 49-65), and specifically to Co. Tipperary (Doody 1997, 105) the relationship Tullahedy mound may have had with the megalithic tombs at Cooleen (3 miles south), Corbally (4 miles west), and with the standing stone/stone circle/stone row sites on the eastern slopes of the Arra Mts. (c.4 miles west), to further afield at sites on the Slieve Felim Mts. to the south merit investigation. The Tullahedy community would also have been only a few days' travel from the settlement at Lough Gur in east Limerick amongst others. It is hoped future research excavation on the site will elucidate such questions.

#### **Tullahedy (Sites A, B, C, D, & E)**

Grid Reference **c.R842771**: Excavation Licence Number **98E0540**

Site Classification – *fulachta*/Ditches: Date – Prehistoric/Early Medieval

Three previously unrecorded *fulachta* were discovered c.1/3 of a mile east of Tullahedy mound. These sites were located on the road route and lay adjacent to the modern railway line. They had been deliberately sited on the edge of a low ridge (60ft OD contour) bordering the boggy, wetland landscape that characterised the Tullahedy region. Thus the settlers utilised a convenient source of water for their activities as the troughs filled naturally with water. The three sites will be looked at individually but should be viewed as one entity due to their inter-visibility and obvious association.

#### **Tullahedy (Site A)**

This site measured c.18m x 20m, and was located adjacent to the railway line. Three quarters of the mound were fully excavated and the remainder preserved. Excavations revealed up to seven clay-lined troughs and pits, hearths, areas of cobbled surfaces, post- and stake-hole structures. One trough had a large post at each internal corner surrounded by cobbles on the surface. In the northeast area of the site two separate clay surfaces were identified. Each produced worked chert, flint flakes and a stone bead. The stone bead was similar to others found at Tullahedy mound.

This activity was sealed by a succession of burnt stone layers which formed the mound. Within the later burnt mound strata were deposits of fine, yellow sand, and a deposition of iron rivets/fragments mixed with cremated animal bones were found. Two stone roof weights, iron slag and animal bones were found in the burnt stones. Subsequently large amounts of iron slag were deposited on the mound surface after which the site was finally abandoned.

#### **Tullahedy (Site B)**

This site was located c.35m north of Site A, and was the largest mound of the three. The roughly circular mound measured c.22m x c.26m in diameter, and had a maximum depth of



1.5m of burnt stones. Approximately half of the site was fully excavated down to natural to facilitate the road development. The remainder was preserved.

The excavation showed evidence for a multi-phased occupation. Initially a pre-mound arc of hundreds of stake holes may have enclosed the original habitation which in turn was sealed by a marl and peat deposit. The remains of a structure were found at the southwest area. It consisted of a series of large, sand-filled post-holes. There was similar evidence at the northeast area for post-holes and pits. It is hoped to use in situ wood remains from these posts for dating this phase.

The primary burnt mound phase followed. Artefacts associated with this phase were wood, burnt bone and antler/horn. Features included footpaths, cobbled surfaces, stone hearths/ovens, burnt spreads and a trough. A deposit of fine grey sand sealed this mound phase and could reflect long-term site abandonment or represent an archaeological stratum from a later phase. Sealing this grey layer was the secondary burnt stone phase, activity that may have been associated with a partial, encircling ditch feature.

Finds from the ditch included animal jawbones. The mound had burnt stone deposits which were charcoal rich and appeared to be stained with traces of iron ore. Many metallic and burnt bone fragments were recovered from this phase, as was a ring headed pin, a rotary quern fragment, hone stones, rubbing stones and worked bone. The rotary quern find, and indeed the general complexity of Site B, may suggest long-term/permanent settlement at this site as it is not representative of a seasonal hunting camp (Feehan 1991, 205).

The final phase of activity involved deliberate deposition of a sandstone kerb/revetment around the edge of the mound. The sandstone was derived from the nearby bog and may have been placed for storage for use on the adjacent burnt mound, Site C. Associated with this phase was a deposit of iron fragments at the south east of the mound.

### **Tullahedy (Site C)**

This site was the smallest burnt stone mound, located only a few metres east of Site B, and produced multi-phase activity. About three quarters of the site were fully excavated. The remainder was preserved. The primary phase involved a number of clay lined pits and associated stake-holes, possibly for a fence. It is hoped that bone and wood remains will help to date this phase. This activity was sealed by a number of cobbled surfaces. One large clay-lined trough was found between Sites B and C. This trough showed different phases of use and because of its location it may have been the chief trough for both sites. A polished boar tusk was found in a basal deposit of the trough.

On the highest part of the site a four-post rectangular structure was sited. It was surrounded by cobbled surfaces that served as a clearly defined work area. There was much charcoal found along the base of the rectangular structure, and it was sealed under a deposit of clay and stones. Two clay-lined troughs were located near this structure. All this was sealed by a low, charcoal rich burnt stone mound, measuring 12m x 12.5m, which represented the final phase. Unfortunately the wetland area between these sites could not be investigated thoroughly.

### **Tullahedy (Site D)**

This site consisted of two deep ditches (and related pits) which were found in the exposed section of the road drain, c.10m to the north west of Site B. Although most of the ditches had been removed during the drain excavation there was enough evidence to show that the ditches ran roughly parallel to Site B. A number of deposits produced quantities of butchered animal bones, slag, metal and charcoal. The ditches continued northward outside the development line where they may have formed part of a larger enclosure still preserved in the adjoining field.



### Tullahedy (Site E)

This site consisted of 2-3 ditches that were found in the exposed section of the road drain, c.50 - 60ms west of Sites B/D. As the site only survived in section and produced no finds, little can be said about it. However, the ditches were filled with stone and pebble deposits. The ditches were sealed by bog growth which suggests a very early prehistoric date. The ditches survived beyond the road drain and would be worthy of further investigation.

Due to the complexity of the sites found here the question of dates for the three burnt mounds and the ditches is very important. Based on the artefactual evidence alone, the latest phase on Site B would be Early Medieval in date. However the primary, pre-mound level may be Bronze Age. Similarly the final phase of iron slag deposition on Site A may be Iron Age in date, while the primary, pre-mound level may be Bronze Age. Such possible late dates for *fulachta* activity need not be controversial (Feehan 1991, 206), and could reflect a long traditional usage in an area. It is hoped that further analysis, particularly of the grey sand deposits, will aid the dating questions.

The field systems to the north of these sites should be subject to intensive survey, as a cursory examination of the surface revealed other potential *fulachta* and large earthworks. The excavations have highlighted previously unknown, intensive settlement on the edge of the Tullahedy wetlands in the prehistoric/early historic periods.

## Lahesseragh Townland

Grid Reference **R848769**: Excavation Licence Number **98E0473**

Site Classification – Habitation Site: Date – Prehistoric

Two prehistoric settlement sites were discovered c. 1/4 of a mile east of the Tullahedy *fulachta*, situated on hilly ground which overlooks the entire Tullahedy region.

### Lahesseragh (Site A)

This site was found on the eastern side of the Ballycahill ridge (90ft OD contour) c.2 miles west of Nenagh. The site had commanding views to the west and south. To the northwest Lough Derg can be seen from this ridge. The site area measured 30m x 40m within which c.50-60 posts/pits, a linear feature measuring 10m x 0.40m, and two hearths/fire spots were uncovered.

It was found that c.10 posts appeared to form a sub-rectangular structure that may have extended beyond the excavation zone. Most of these posts were quite shallow and produced no finds. An ovoid "rubbing/smoothing" stone was found in one of the hearths. Other finds consisted of worked flint and chert flakes, a fragment of a possible chert arrowhead and charcoal. The nature of the features and the finds suggested that the site was a prehistoric settlement.

### Lahesseragh Townland (Site C)

Grid Reference **R845769**: Excavation Licence Number **98E0474**

Site Classification – Habitation Site: Date – Bronze Age

Site C was located on the western side of the Ballycahill ridge (80ft OD contour), c.300 meters from Site A above. Site C possessed commanding views of the landscape to the west and was inter-visible with the Tullahedy *fulachta* and Neolithic mound (described above). The site area measured c.17m x 24m within which was uncovered a small, circular hut structure with footing



trench 3.3m x 3.7m in diameter, with habitation layers and evidence of an entrance feature.

Associated pits and post-holes were found to the south west of the hut structure. One post-hole contained a disc shaped stone spindle whorl. Two large rubbish pits containing clay and stone fills from 0.60m-1m deep were also found. The larger pit produced a rubbing stone, burnt bone, charcoal, and a saddle quern. The smaller pit produced a grinding stone, burnt bones and another saddle quern. Further finds consisted of chert flakes and animal teeth.

The artefactual and structural evidence from Site C suggested a date in the Bronze Age. The size, shape and type of construction of the hut structure resembled an example from Cloghucas South, Co. Cork, dated to the Bronze Age (Doody 2000, 139). Finds of saddle querns have been made from other Bronze Age house sites at Aughinish, Co. Limerick, Ballyveelish, Co. Tipperary, Belderg Beg, Co. Mayo and Drombeg, Co. Cork (Doody *ibid*, 151-154). Lahesseragh Site C was also important as it provided the evidence for ancillary activities associated with the hut, evidence that often does not survive in the archaeological record.

Both Lahesseragh sites were deliberately sited on a prominent ridge. If Lahesseragh Site A is Neolithic, and there is nothing in the artefactual assemblage to suggest otherwise, then there is Neolithic activity on the most prominent hill east of the Tullahedy gravel mound. Settlement on both sites would have been inter-visible. This is important as it raises questions as to types of settlement patterns and, perhaps, wider issues such as outlying defensive settlements, strategic positioning of sites in the landscape and control over wide areas of agricultural land.

These issues are relevant too for the Bronze Age Lahesseragh Site C, and its relationship, if any, with the final, Bronze Age phase on the Tullahedy mound. It would be a useful research theme to investigate the presence, if any, of Neolithic and Bronze Age settlements/field systems north and west of the Tullahedy mound.

#### **Lahesseragh Townland (Site D)**

Grid Reference **R854771**: Excavation Licence Number **98E0475**

Site Classification – *fulacht fiadh*: Date – Unknown

This site was located c.2 miles south of Nenagh, beside the Newport Road, and adjacent to the newly constructed Newport Bridge. The site was situated in low-lying ground, and partially excavated as it lay in the middle of the road route. The burnt mound measured c.22m x 28m in diameter, and 0.90m deep.

It was obvious from the start of excavations that most of the mound had been disturbed in the past as two pump stations had been inserted through it. Tree roots and field drains traversing the mound had done additional damage. A number of large boulders sited at the edge of the mound may have served to define the mound for some reason. A hearth feature was found at the southwest extremity, sealed by mound material. Charcoal samples from the hearth will be used for dating purposes.

#### **Benedin Townland**

Grid Reference **R866774**: Excavation Licence Number **98E0444**

Site Classification – Huts/Pits: Date – Bronze Age

Benedin townland lies c.2 miles south of Nenagh town. An area for road fill was required and a portion of high ground reduced (c.70ft OD contour). During the monitoring of this work an extensive area of Bronze Age activity was discovered. This consisted of twelve pits concentrated at one part of the site, with a separate area 16m x 7m wherein evidence for a hut



circle was found. The pit fills produced charcoal-rich clays, burnt clays, and a number of the pits had been fired.

Finds included charcoal, burnt bone, hazelnut shells and metal slag. The separate hut circle area contained a floor of beaten clay, obviously, a work/living area. There was associated evidence for settlement in the form of post- and stake-holes and more pits. Finds from this area included pottery, burnt bone, metal slag and chert scrapers.

### **Benedin Townland**

Grid Reference **R826769-R923788**: Excavation Licence Number **98E0430**

Site Classification – Pits: Date – Bronze Age?

This site consisted of several pits varying in size from 0.20m - 0.80m in diameter x 0.50m, and 0.40m in maximum depth. The pit fills produced evidence of charcoal-rich soil, burnt clay and metal slag deposits, suggesting a possible date in the Bronze Age. Both of these sites in Benedin may have been part of a wider, more extensive Bronze Age settlement. The settlement was located on high ground, just as at Lahesseragh Site C and at the Tullahedy gravel mound.

### **Lissatunny Townland**

Grid Reference **R885776**: Excavation Licence Number **98E0477**

Site Classification – Habitation Site: Date – Bronze Age?

This site was located east of the Ballynaclogh road about 1 mile southeast of Nenagh. The site consisted of two associated areas of archaeological features. Area 1 measured 6m x 7m in diameter, containing a roughly circular arrangement of between 6-8 charcoal-rich pits/posts. Associated with these features were a number of hearths/fire spots.

Area 2 was approximately 24m east of Area 1. It consisted of a linear feature measuring c.6m long, and 0.20m wide. The author found 13 crumbs/sherds of burnt, prehistoric pottery and a small fragment of curved, sheet bronze in the fill of the linear feature. All the pottery is from one feature, and it is likely that all the pieces are from the same vessel and from the same part of that vessel (A. L. Brindley pers comm).

Prior to full excavation the site area was completely destroyed by machine traffic. No further investigation could be made, although a nearby hearth feature was recorded in sectional profile. The Lissatunny site was important as it proved that there was prehistoric activity in this area. The sherds are very dark coloured fabrics which occur sporadically in Western Neolithic Tradition assemblages and in assemblages of the later stages of the early Bronze Age (A. L. Brindley pers comm).

One can only conclude that the site was a possible habitation area, perhaps with some bronze working activity (as attested by the sheet bronze artefact and the nearby hearths). Indeed, the site is only ¼ mile north from the impressive bi-vallate hilltop enclosure at Lissatunny, SMR No. 48. The destruction of the Lissatunny site also highlighted the dangers archaeological sites face when machines are working near them.

## **Knockalton Upper Townland**

The townland of Knockalton Upper lies c.2 miles southeast of Nenagh town close to the Thurles road. Two sites were discovered on opposite sides of a large bi-vallate ringfort (SMR No. 50-AR27).



### **Knockalton Upper (Site A)**

Grid Reference **R893775**: Excavation Licence Number **97E0320ext**.

Site Classification – Ditch: Date – Unknown

This site was found close to the Knockalton Road c.70m northeast of the enclosure (AR27). The site consisted of an irregular ditch-like feature, measuring 20.8m x c.0.40m. The ditch was cut into subsoil. The clay fills varied from 0.22m-0.32m in depth. Neither of the two fills produced any finds but some charcoal from the later fill may be sufficient for dating the site.

A number of small, shallow pits were found together near the southern end of the ditch, but these produced no finds. In form and size the ditch feature resembled the double-ditch feature found at Knockalton Lower (see below) and by such association this ditch may be prehistoric in date.

### **Knockalton Upper (Site B)**

Grid Reference **R893776**: Excavation Licence Number **97E0320ext**.

Site Classification – Habitation Site: Date – Prehistoric

This site lay to the southeast of (AR27) within 100m of Site B. The site area measured c.10.5m x 12m in diameter. It consisted of a number of pits and a series of post- and stake-holes. Although the post-holes did not form a clearly identifiable structure, they did reflect settlement evidence. The largest pit measured 1.5m x 2m x c.0.45m and was filled with charcoal- and burnt clay-flecked soils. Surface finds within the site zone consisted of some pottery crumbs/sherds and chert flakes. This pottery is probably early rather than late prehistoric, i.e. either Western Neolithic or late Beaker Pottery rather than one of the middle or late Bronze Age ceramic traditions (A. L. Brindley pers comm).

Until the charcoal samples are dated a more precise date cannot be assigned for the site. Although direct associations between the Knockalton Upper sites was not found, their proximal relationship could suggest shared activity. Further evidence of prehistoric activity in this area can be found at the Knockalton Upper standing stone SMR No. 46½ mile to the north, and the afore-mentioned Lissatunny site ⅓ mile to the southwest.

### **Knockalton Lower Townland**

Grid Reference **R902777**: Excavation Licence Number **98E0471**

Site Classification – Prehistoric Ditches: Date – Bronze Age

This site was situated c.1 mile east of the Knockalton Upper sites and was found on the road route. Full excavation revealed two parallel, roughly S-shaped ditches with associated small pits. Ditch I measured 15.5m x 0.80m x c.0.40m in size, and terminated at the southern end of Ditch II.

This latter ditch measured 28m x 0.60m x c.0.50m in size. A number of pits were noted at its northern end. There was no evidence of the ditches surrounding a settlement area. The ditch fills were broadly similar. Finds included metal slag, charcoal, struck chert flakes, a stone axe rough-out, disarticulated animal bones, antlers and the partial skeleton of a canine.

The southern end of Ditch I continued beyond the road limit, and may have been associated with a hollowed-out depression in the adjoining field. However, it was not possible to investigate this feature at the time. An isolated hearth feature found on the opposite side of the road route produced evidence of metal slag, c.60m from the ditches. The ditches were unusual features as they seemed to serve no recognisable function but the finds suggested a possible Bronze Age date.

The ditches resembled the single ditch at Knockalton Upper (Site A) in size, and shape.



Similar ditches were found on the nearby N52 road scheme at Tullahedy, beside the old N7 road.

### Knockaunkennedy Townland

Grid Reference **R903777**: Excavation Licence Number **98E0472**

Site Classification – *fulachta*: Date – Prehistoric?

This site area was found only c.150m east of the Knockalton Lower ditches c.170m south of a large, tri-vallate enclosure in Curraheen, SMR No. 51. Full excavation was conducted as the site lay on the road route in wetland beside a nearby stream. The site area contained two associated burnt stone mounds that had been damaged by drainage activity. A local farmer knew of the sites prior to the road route being stripped, saying '*there was a nest of them here*'.

Site A measured c.16m x 9m x c.0.30m. The burnt mound sealed a rectangular trough feature. The clay-lined trough measured 2.4m x 1.2m x 0.32m. It had a post-hole at each internal corner (identical to the trough at Tullahedy Site A). Associated with the trough was a small pit feature and a possible windbreak feature. Nearby pits and/or smaller troughs contained a basal fill of peat sealed by burnt stones.

Site B was located approximately 10m southeast of this mound. It consisted of a roughly oval mound of burnt stones that measured c.11m x 9m x c.0.20m. A trough, similar in type to that found on Site A, was discovered here plus additional pits/small troughs and post-holes. The area between the mounds was investigated and evidence for a metallised stone surface was found surrounding some of the pits. Unfortunately there was little in the way of finds from Knockaunkennedy, apart from small quantities of animal bones and teeth, chert flakes and charcoal. The question of dating will have to await further analysis but the sites resemble typical, Bronze Age *fulachta*.

### Ballintotty Townland

Grid Reference **R910784**: Excavation Licence Number **97E0328**

Site Classification – Medieval hall-house: Date 13th-14th century AD

Undoubtedly, the most visually impressive site found during the Bypass investigations was a previously unknown medieval stone hall-house. The site, located beside the Ballintotty River and Ballintotty Castle, had been completely overgrown by trees and scrub. The site was found in late 1996 and fully excavated in 1998. These excavations proved that a stone hall-house had been constructed on a U-shaped river promontory, most likely during the late 13th century.

The hall-house was located within an enclosure measuring 65m x 50m. The limits of this enclosure were formed by a substantial earthen bank (8m wide and 2m high) with an outer ditch measuring 5m-6m wide and at a maximum depth of 1.5m. The enclosure was sub-divided internally by the addition of a second, less substantial earthen bank. The entrance through the outer bank was at the southwest and may have been fronted by a stone-fronted timber gate-tower. From there a metallised and paved stone surface led back through the enclosure to a gateway in the inner bank.

The hall-house survived at ground floor level only. It measured 13.5m x 10m externally, and 10m x 6.5m internally. A cross-wall created two rooms at ground floor level, one of which gave



access to the partial remains of a staircase within the north wall. An arrow loop survived in the south wall. A small latrine tower adjoined the western wall. Evidence for two smaller buildings constructed on wooden sill-beams was exposed within the enclosure. The excavations produced two pennies dating from the reign of Henry III (1216-1272) and ceramics dating from the 13th and 14th centuries. The hall-house was deliberately sited on low-lying land with an accessible and constant water supply. The site was subsequently sealed under the road build and thus preserved *in situ*.

This newly discovered medieval structure at Ballintotty is of great importance for our understanding of the Middle Ages in north Tipperary. The discovery showed that there was medieval settlement on the banks of the Ballintotty River much earlier than formerly known. The *Civil Survey* of 1654-56 recorded a mill seat, an orchard, eight cabins and the ruined Ballintotty Castle (Simington 1934, 255). The existence of an earlier hall-house highlights an additional 400 years of medieval settlement in the Ballintotty region.

The coins found showed the hall-house post-dated the construction of Nenagh Castle and may reflect the expansion of the Anglo-Irish colony outside the precincts of Nenagh. The medieval moated site at Killanafinch (c.3 miles south west), the earlier Rathnaleen South Motte (c.2 miles north west), the hall-house at Lisbunny (c.2 miles west) and the manorial centre at Ballynaclogh (c.3 miles south) were all located nearby. The existence of the hall-house was perhaps a factor in the erection of the adjacent, but later, Ballintotty Castle. The question as to who resided at Ballintotty in the 13th and 14th centuries will be a future topic for scholars.

### Ballintotty Townland

Grid Reference **R911785**: Excavation Licence Number **98E0476**

Site Classification – *fulacht fiadh*: Date – Unknown

This site was situated to the west of the aforementioned medieval hall-house north of the Ballintotty River. The site consisted of a burnt stone mound, some burnt stone spreads and a marl embankment. The mound was roughly circular in plan, measuring c.13m x 18m in diameter, and was between 0.3-0.5m high. Approximately 10m to the north a satellite spread of burnt stones was partially excavated. The site measured 8m x 12m in diameter and was 0.2m high. Evidence for two deposits was found. A peat deposit (0.04-0.10m deep) lying directly on the natural ground surface was sealed by a 0.04-0.10m depth of burnt stones. The deposit had been truncated by a number of field drains. No finds were recovered.

The marl embankment was 5m east of the main mound, measuring 17m x 31m in diameter with a south-south-east/west-north-west orientation. The marl sealed peat and burnt stone deposits. These burnt stones extended south beyond the embankment for approximately 50m x 14m in the direction of the Ballintotty River. This area of the site was not fully uncovered during the topsoil removal. Due to the low-lying nature of the site (at the base of the road embankment) and its close proximity to the Ballintotty River, natural flooding of the site occurred. This prevented any further investigation of the whole area. After consultation with Dúchas, the Heritage Service, the site was sealed with topsoil.

Opposite the river from the hall-house some additional burnt stone spreads were found which indicated the presence of more *fulachta* north of the river and west of the above sites. This evidence showed there were up to five (possibly more) *fulachta* on the banks of the Ballintotty River, possibly dating from the Bronze Age. Areas worthy of future investigation would include the higher terrain overlooking the river to the north and the river banks to the west.



## Clashnevin Townland

Grid Reference c. **R923787**: Excavation Licence Number **98E0430**

Site Classification – Pits/Posts: Date – Unknown

Clashnevin townland located east of Nenagh town borders the Dublin road and was the highest point on the road route that produced archaeological remains. The Clashnevin ridge rises to c.90ft OD, and there are views southward to the Silvermines. A large number of related and un-related pits, posts and hearths/fire spots were found throughout the apex of the ridge and on parts of the slopes.

Unfortunately, none of these features produced any artefactual evidence that could be used to date the features or to identify possible activities on the ridge. Some pits produced charcoal remains that may be sufficient for dating purposes but there was no evidence for houses or enclosures in association with the pits.

## CONCLUSION

The archaeological monitoring and excavation on the Nenagh Bypass were successful as a variety of new archaeological sites were discovered. Some of these sites are of great local importance while the Tullahedy gravel mound is of international importance, having great relevance to our understanding of the Irish Neolithic in north Munster. The archaeology discovered south west of Nenagh, in the townlands of Lahesseragh and Tullahedy, has revealed new sites which date from the Neolithic and Bronze Age, and in conjunction with sites like the Tullahedy *fulachta fiadh* complex, Tullahedy Motte, and Ballycahill Castle it is obvious that this region possesses a “microcosm” of Irish archaeology, heretofore unrecognised. Similarly, the Ballintotty River valley, the lowlands from Knockaunkennedy – Knockalton Upper and the Benedin hill area provided many new and exciting archaeological discoveries.

Some wider questions need to be raised in regard to road schemes and archaeology in general, specifically here for Nenagh, but of nationwide relevance. For instance, the route of the Nenagh Bypass was partially designed to *avoid* known archaeological sites. If the design team had changed the route by only 50m either side of the preferred route, then *few* of the above archaeological sites would have been found. Most would remain buried, including the Ballintotty hall-house. The Tullahedy gravel mound would continue to be extracted, unintentionally spreading the Irish Neolithic throughout north Tipperary! What more sites await discovery in today’s landscape?

Such sites will *always* remain undiscovered, unless by chance they are found by development/agricultural use/field work and reported to the relevant authorities. More intensive fieldwork is needed at the design phase of road developments, as neither the Tullahedy *fulachta fiadh* nor Ballintotty hall-house was noted during the original EIS work.

Investigations on the nearby N52 Link Road produced up to nine previously unknown *fulachta fiadh*, two of which were in Tullahedy townland. Since 1999 field walking has discovered four stone axes to the north and north west of Nenagh town. The archaeological investigation on the Nenagh Bypass has highlighted that there still exists a large amount of archaeological sites awaiting discovery in today’s landscape.

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