

what we found

in brief:

Some of the findings in and between **Rossbrien** and **Cratloemoyle**.



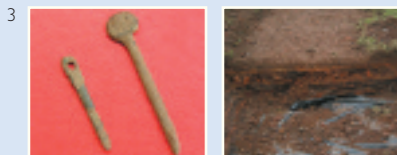
1. Ring pins

Penannular ring pins recovered from the enclosure site at **Coonagh West**. (Photo TVAS (Ireland) Ltd.)



2. Stone bridge

Stone bridge located over a reclamation drain in **Ballinacurra** (Weston). (Photo I.A.C. Ltd.)



3. Pin and needle

Copper-alloy pin and needle recovered from the enclosure site at **Coonagh West**. (Photo TVAS (Ireland) Ltd.)



4. Brick burning

Brick burnings in **Coonagh West**. (Photo TVAS (Ireland) Ltd.)

5. Brick kiln

Excavation of brick kiln in the reclaimed salt marshes at **Coonagh West**. (Photo TVAS (Ireland) Ltd.)

6. Lime kiln

Section through probable flue area of a kiln uncovered at **Rossbrien**. (Photo I.A.C. Ltd.)

background

The proposed Limerick Southern Ring Road (Phase II) will extend from the existing Limerick Southern Ring Road (Phase I) in the townland of **Rossbrien**, County Limerick, across the River Shannon by way of a tunnel, to join with the existing N18 in the townland of **Cratloemoyle**, County Clare.

There will also be a link road between **Coonagh West** and **Clonmacken** townlands. The length of the main scheme is approximately 10km, with 2km of link roads. The project also includes 27ha of ground in Coonagh West that will be used as a recovery area for material extracted from the river during the tunnel construction. The first phase of archaeological work on the scheme, undertaken from December



Aerial view of the possible enclosure at **Rossbrien**. (Photo Markus Casey)

2004 to January 2005, comprised test trenching; the second phase, the resolution of sites was also carried out in 2005. This work was carried out by **Irish Archaeological Consultancy Ltd.**, (I.A.C. Ltd.) and **TVAS (Ireland) Ltd.**, on behalf of the **National Roads Authority**, **Limerick County Council**, **Limerick City Council** and **Clare County Council**.

The majority of the topography of the roadtake is located on the alluvium flood plain of the River Shannon and its tributaries, all of which are defined by substantial embankments. This flat, low-lying, reclaimed ground is interspersed with areas of higher ground. Both types of terrain are used mainly for pasture, with the fields in the low-lying areas bounded by deep drainage ditches. The majority of the sites identified during testing were situated on the areas of higher ground or at the interface between it and the flood plain.



Excavation of a series of ditches at the site of **Ballinacurra** (Hart) looking east. (Photo I.A.C. Ltd.)

N7 LIMERICK SOUTHERN RING ROAD (PHASE II), County Limerick



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archaeological DISCOVERIES

front cover images

LEFT: Aerial view of test trenching in **Coonagh West**. (Photo Markus Casey)

RIGHT: Excavation of brick kiln in the reclaimed salt marshes at **Coonagh West**. (Photo TVAS (Ireland) Ltd.)

MIDDLE: Penannular ring pins recovered from the enclosure site at **Coonagh West**. (Photo TVAS (Ireland) Ltd.)



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prehistoric

Archaeological testing revealed a small number of archaeological sites dating from the prehistoric period. Among the sites excavated in Spring 2005 were a *fulacht fiadh*, an isolated cremation burial pit and deposits of burnt stone. Additional evidence of prehistoric activity, characterised by a damaged stone axe and chert and flint tools, was discovered on a gravel ridge at the interface with the alluvial flood plain.

early medieval

The largest site uncovered was a ditched enclosure at **Coonagh West** with a diameter of 40m that exploited a glacial drumlin located at the margin of alluvium laid down by the River Shannon. The circular enclosing ditch was typically 2-3m wide x 1-1.5m deep. In the south-east quadrant, a rectangular arrangement of post-holes was found, while located both internally and externally of the ditch were post-holes and pits, and concentric gullies which were concentrated on the western side. An entrance, defined by a pair of gullies, was found at the northern side of the enclosure, which is the driest portion of the site.

An identical pair of penannular ring brooches was recovered from the site that are typologically similar to a pair found at **Ballinderry Crannóg II, Co. Offaly**, dated to AD 600. Also recovered were a copper-alloy stick pin, a needle, two saddle querns and large quantities of animal bone (including antler and horn cores) from the ditch fill.



Copper-alloy pin and needle recovered from the enclosure site at **Coonagh West**. (Photo TVAS (Ireland) Ltd.)



Penannular ring pins recovered from the enclosure site at **Coonagh West**. (Photo TVAS (Ireland) Ltd.)

post-medieval

In **Rossbrien** townland there was a known enclosure (Record of Monuments and Places (RMP) site LI013-019), which has proven to be a small, circular lime kiln. The site is, as yet, undated but is likely to have been constructed in the post-medieval period. In **Ballinacurra** townland another RMP site (RMP LI013-114) was the location of a possible castle where a ditch was found during the testing phase. Subsequent excavation of the area within the roadtake has identified a possible 17th-century ditch and 18th or 19th-century drains and walls. Three burnt spreads and

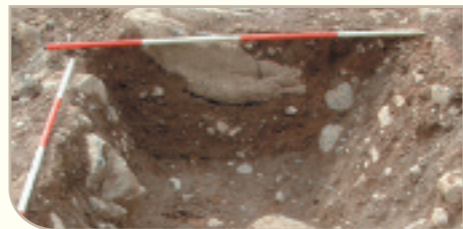


Excavation of the possible enclosure at **Rossbrien** revealed a lime kiln. (Photo I.A.C. Ltd.)



Stone bridge located over a reclamation drain in **Ballinacurra** (Weston). (Photo I.A.C. Ltd.)

a small, 19th-century stone bridge were also identified along this portion of the scheme. Three post-medieval brick-making kiln sites were also excavated. Brick making requires a bulky raw material (i.e. clay), therefore, the River Shannon flood plain would have provided ample resources for the brick manufacturing industry. Fine alluvial clay was extracted from the 'brick fields or holes' (i.e. clay quarries) that are located on the flood plain and the 'clamps' (or temporary kilns) were adjacent to what was then the



Section through ditch feature at the **Ballinacurra** (Hart) site. (Photo I.A.C. Ltd.)



Archaeological testing at the possible enclosure at **Rossbrien**. (Photo I.A.C. Ltd.)

post-medieval

river edge. The finished bricks were probably transported by water up to the city.

A brick clamp is a rectangular construction for firing bricks. The 'green' bricks are stacked on the ground in rows ('benches') and alternate header and stretcher layers built up to form an externally battered structure. The gaps between the lower rows of bricks are filled with fuel and ignited. These gaps would have facilitated a through draught. The clamp was most likely turf covered and the slow firing of the bricks would generate large amounts of white smoke. The clamp would have burned for a number of days before the finished bricks could be taken down ready for use. An average sized example might have been stacked up to 5m high and produced 20,000 to 30,000 bricks. The post-medieval production of brick was accelerated by shortages of structural timbers and the simple form of clamp may pre-date the mechanised production of bricks in the mid 19th-century.

The brick clamps at **Coonagh West** were part of a relict industrial landscape that included 'brick holes', quays and brickyards. It is known that the Arthur's Quay tenements in **Limerick City** were begun in the last decades of the 18th-century and were built from bricks sourced from **Coonagh**. According to local sources, brick were still being made in the area in the early 1900s.



Brick burnings in **Coonagh West**. (Photo TVAS (Ireland) Ltd.)



A burnt spread located in **Ballykeeffe**. (Photo I.A.C. Ltd.)



Aerial view of test archaeological trenching at **Ballykeeffe** showing the site of a possible burnt mound. (Photo I.A.C. Ltd.)

post-medieval

Additional archaeological assessment

In addition to the conventional archaeological test trenching, an archaeological assessment of the estuarine alluvium, including the tidal channel of the River Shannon, was undertaken by **Headland Archaeology Ltd.**, who examined the soils, and **Landscape and Geophysical Services**, who conducted an extensive land and waterborne geophysical survey. A map regression report of this area of the **Shannon Estuary** was also prepared by **TVAS (Ireland) Ltd.**, to determine the history of the embankments along Coonagh West. It is clear from this study that the salt marsh area south of **Coonagh Point** was only reclaimed in 1820s.

Conclusion

The excavation of known and newly identified sites has drawn to a close, however, a programme of further testing in the alluvial areas is currently being finalised. This work may reveal additional sites that will require mitigation or resolution. Above all, these additional archaeological works will add to the knowledge gained from the previous assessments and will greatly contribute to our understanding of the evolution of this important wetland landscape.



Aerial view of archaeological test trenching in **Coonagh West**. (Photo Markus Casey)



Aerial view of Saltmarsh area along the southern bank of the **River Shannon**. (Photo Markus Casey)



Excavation of brick kiln in the reclaimed salt marshes at **Coonagh West**. (Photo TVAS (Ireland) Ltd.)