



archaeological DISCOVERIES

background

Cashel in County Tipperary is synonymous with royal and saintly events throughout Ireland's history. Designing a new road through such a rich archaeological landscape was a challenge. Archaeological testing by **Mary Henry Archaeological Services Ltd** in 2001 and full excavation by **Judith Carroll Network Archaeology Ltd** in 2003 revealed new insights into Cashel's history. All of the archaeological work was carried out on behalf of the **National Roads Authority** and **South Tipperary County Council**.



The Rock of Cashel, from the north-east. (Photo: Richard O'Brien)



Elevated view of double-ditched ringfort in **Hughes'-Lot East**. (Photo: Richard O'Brien)



Excavation of the Cashel Corporation Townland Boundary at **Hughes'-Lot East**. (Photo: Richard O'Brien)

historic cashel

The Rock of Cashel or *Sid Druim* is surrounded by low-lying pastureland - 'The Plains of Cashel' or *Corca Athrach* - lying at the western limit of the Slieveardagh Mountains and c. 6 km east of the River Suir. Surrounding ringforts such as Rathordan and Ballinree (Town of the King), and territorial boundaries such as *Dubhdloy* (Black Ditch) still form a protective ring around Cashel; formal echoes of when Cashel was the seat of the Kings of Munster, under kings like Brian Boruma.

early medieval

Cashel's close affiliation with the beginnings of Christianity survive in placename evidence - *Rath an Easpaig* (Fort of the Bishop) - and with the tradition of the baptising of King Aengus Mac Nattraich on the Rock by St Patrick (nearby Carron Henge is known locally as Fort Aengus).

Two new ringforts dating to this epic era were discovered in **Hughes'-Lot East**. The larger site consisted of a double-ditched enclosure (c. 50 m wide) with evidence for structures in the interior. Beside the outer ditch was a cereal-drying kiln, which yielded abundant environmental evidence. The discovery of a female skeleton was the first stratified burial from a non-religious site from Cashel. The second ringfort was a single-ditched enclosure (c. 30 m wide) found in the same field.

Investigations on the *bohereen* known as the *Rian Bó Phádraig* (Track of Saint Patrick's Cow), the ancient route way between Cashel and Ardmore, produced no dating evidence.

medieval

During the early years of the Norman occupation of Ireland King Henry II held a Synod at Cashel in 1172. Two enclosed rural medieval settlements were discovered each c. 3 km from the medieval town of Cashel. In **Monadreeela** a ditch encircling post-built structures was discovered, dating between the 11th and early 14th centuries. In **Farranamanagh** an almost identical site-type consisted of a rectilinear ditched-enclosure with internal structures. An external metalworking area and a human skeleton were found nearby. The remains of a possible hut and disarticulated human bones were discovered in **Windmill**, possibly associated with the nearby Leper Hospital founded by Sir David de Latimer (c. 1230s).

A cache of 18 silver pennies, dating from the reign of King Edward II (1307-27) was found in a tree bole beside a pond at **Cooper's-Lot**, hidden perhaps during the turbulent Scottish occupation, when Robert and Edward Bruce held a Parliament in Cashel in March 1317.

post-medieval

A cobbled roadway known as Croke's Lane was investigated and ancient wheel-ruts discovered. A beehive-shaped limekiln in **Farranamanagh** was found to have been partly constructed of re-used architectural stones, possibly from Cistercian Hore Abbey. A number of monumental earthen townland boundaries were fully recorded as were three vernacular homesteads of 18th/19th century date.



Coin from a hoard of 18 silver pennies from **Cooper's-Lot** dating to the reign of King Edward II, 1307-27. (Photo: Studio Lab)



Townland wall built during Famine relief works at **Rathordan**. (Photo: Judith Carroll Network Archaeology)