what we found

in brief:

Some of the findings from the scheme:

1. Flints
   Two flint scrapers from the cist cemetery at "Owen’s and Biggs-Lot".
   (Photo: Studio Lab)

2. Pottery
   Early Bronze Age Beaker pottery from "Windmill".
   (Photo: Studio Lab)

3. Weaponry
   Gun flint used for a 17th–19th-century flint-lock firearm from "Hughes'-Lot East".
   (Photo: Studio Lab)

4. Quern-stones
   Rotary quern fragment from a vernacular homestead at "Windmill", abandoned mid-20th century.
   (Photo: Studio Lab)

background

The N8 Cashel Bypass begins 3 km north-east of Cashel at Gormsalies, skirting Ballyknock hill, and meeting the existing N8 road south of Cashel. The shorter N74 Link Road begins south of Cashel at Windmill, skirting Windmill hill, and meets the existing Tipperary road west of Cashel.

Ten potential archaeological sites identified in desk-based and field-walking studies were investigated by test excavation undertaken by Mary Henry Archaeological Services Ltd in 2001. The results confirmed the presence of intensive archaeological remains around Cashel. Further testing and full excavation was undertaken by Judith Carroll Network Archaeology Ltd (JCNA Ltd) in 2003 along the entire route. All of the archaeological work was carried out on behalf of the National Roads Authority and South Tipperary County Council.

The intricacies of designing a modern road through the rich archaeological landscape that surrounds Cashel were immense. No archaeological works took place north of the Rock of Cashel, within the ancient ‘Plains of Cashel’.

The archaeological sites discovered spanned the entire 8 km length of the bypass, and the 1.9 km length of the Link Road. They ranged in date from Early Mesolithic artefact scatters, c. 6000 BC, to early 19th century vernacular homesteads. Certain landscape characteristics determined settlement location. Ponds served as foci from the early Mesolithic right through to the medieval period, and sites investigated were often multi-period in date. The slopes of hilltops also attracted settlement and burial activity, a precursor to the later occupation on the Rock of Cashel itself.

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The earliest human evidence from Cashel was dated to c. 6000 BC, with the discovery of two flint blades from Farranamanagh.

In addition to these early flint artifacts, three barrow-like structures were discovered in the adjoining townlands. In one of these, the remains of a cobbled roadway known as Croke's Lane was investigated and proved to be of late medieval date. A beehive-shaped limekiln from Farranamanagh was found to have been partly constructed of re-used monumental earthen townland boundaries were also recorded, as well as three vernacular homesteads of post-medieval date.

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Mesolithic

A Neolithic flint cemetry comprising of over 20 cist burials was also discovered at Owen's and Bigg's-Lot. The site was situated on the east-facing slope of a prominent hill, atop which lies the ancient hilltop enclosure of Bigg's-Lot. Evidence from an associated post-hole may represent evidence of Cashel’s first Neolithic structure.

Bronze Age

Prior to the archaeological excavations carried out for the bypass, no Bronze Age habitation sites were known from Cashel.

Neolithic and Mesolithic discoveries from the adjoining townlands of Owen's and Bigg's-Lot

Two Early Mesolithic flint blades from Monadreela ridge a circular slot were made east of Cashel in the adjoining townlands. In Owen's and Bigg's-Lot, two Early Mesolithic single platform blade cores found in Windmill were made east of Cashel in the adjoining townlands. Beneath one mound a rectilinear enclosure dating to the reign of King Edward II (1307–27). (Photo: Studio Lab)

Early Medieval

Two enclosed rural medieval settlements were discovered. In Monadreela, a ditch enclosing post-built structures, dating between the 11th and early 13th centuries. In Farranamanagh, an almost identical site-type consisting of a medival ditch-enclosure with monumental earthen townland boundaries were also recorded, as well as three vernacular homesteads of post-medieval date.