

Title Excavations at Clareabbey on the N18 Ennis Bypass, Co. Clare

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Sébastien Joubert is a NRA archaeologist. He has been working as an archaeologist in France since 1991 and as a freelance archaeologist in Ireland since 1996. In 2001, he was appointed by Kerry County Council to oversee the archaeological aspects of national road schemes in County Kerry and Clare before being appointed by the National Roads Authority in 2007.

Organisation National Roads Authority

Road Scheme N18 Ennis Bypass and N85 Western Relief Road

This presentation will describe the preliminary results of the excavation that took place at Clareabbey, along the N18 Ennis Bypass and the N85 Western Relief Road, Co. Clare. The excavation was carried out by TVAS (Ireland) Ltd under Ministerial Directions A025 and Consent C020 between October and November 2005.

Clare Abbey is located in the townland of Clareabbey, parish of Clareabbey and barony of Islands, and lies approximately 1.75 km south-east of Ennis town centre and 1.5 km north of Clarecastle. Clareabbey was established c. AD 1189 by the Augustinians under the Patronage of Donal Mor O'Brien, King of Thomond. The abbey charter was confirmed again in 1461 and was dedicated to Saints Peter and Paul. The visible remains of the abbey date to the 15th century repairs. Clare Abbey was the principal Augustinian foundation in this region up to the time of the reformation. After the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1541, it passed to various members of the O'Brien family, but the canons seemed to have lived on in the abbey until about 1650. Clare Abbey is a National Monument in state ownership.

Clare County Council and the NRA intend to provide a small carpark/turning area next to the west gable of the abbey, which will be linked to the N85 Western Relief Road via a narrow roadway. The excavation was restricted to the narrow strip of land under the footprint of the proposed roadway and the turning area. The excavation produced evidence of human activity dating from the medieval period and continuing into the post-medieval period. Early interpretation revealed that some of the excavated features relate directly to the abbey and its occupation. Some of these features also reflect the changes that occurred to the monument during its occupation by the Augustinians but also after its dissolution. There is also a possibility that recorded post-medieval activities and artefacts relate to the Jacobite/Williamite war of the later 17th century.

The post-excavation works are still on-going and additional works carried out at Clareabbey by Graham Hull of TVAS (Ireland) Ltd as part of private developments may help in finalising the interpretation of the small excavated area and provide additional valuable information to the history of the monument.

The construction of the new access route to Clare Abbey, which was previously very remote and had restricted access, should also enhance the heritage of County Clare.