LONGFORD - COUNTY GEOLOGICAL SITE REPORT

NAME OF SITE	**St. Mel's Cathedral**
Other names used for site	
IGH THEME	**IGH15 Economic Geology**
TOWNLAND(S)	**Townparks**
NEAREST TOWN/VILLAGE	**Longford**
SIX INCH MAP NUMBER	**13**
NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE	**613440E 775300N**
1:50,000 O.S. SHEET NUMBER	**41 GSI BEDROCK 1:100,000 Sheet No. 12**

Outline Site Description
The site is an historical Cathedral building and its immediate paved surrounds.

Geological System/Age and Primary Rock Type
The Cathedral is built mainly from Carboniferous Limestone rock from around 340 million years ago, and was constructed from 1840 onwards. Extensive restoration work was completed between 2010 and 2014.

Main Geological or Geomorphological Interest
This landmark building is proposed as a County Geological Site for its excellent display of rock used as a building material, both in the original edifice and in its recent restoration after a catastrophic fire in 2009. The original building commenced in 1840, and in 1846 the walls and pillars were in place. Famine and the death of Bishop O'Higgins intervened and it was Bishop Kilduff who saw a new design for the roof and campanile completed. The Cathedral opened in 1856 for worship but both interior and exterior additions continued for decades after, and the building was finally consecrated as St. Mel's Cathedral in 1893. Detailed history survives of the construction and local sources of stone and building materials at different times in the 1840s and 1850s, including Newtowncashel.

At Christmas 2009 a fire devastated the building, destroying the roof and the floor and generating such heat that much of the stonework including the main pillars were irreparably damaged. A massive restoration project, costing around €30m, was commenced which replaced significant parts of the building, and required both traditional and modern building skills and innovative work practices to complete the work by Christmas 2014. Whilst many of the elements of great public interest are the religious iconography, artworks and artists involved, the geological elements are also very significant. In particular the total replacement of 28 massive columns of limestone with stone quarried from Old Leighlin in Carlow is most notable.

The high altar is composed of Carrera marble. The portico of great limestone columns from Knockcroghery in Roscommon was only commenced in 1891, and greatly enhances the building's grand façade. The statuary on the tympanum of the façade is in Portland Stone. The copper roof was destroyed in the fire but has been replaced by Bangor Slates, as first built, with stone from the original quarry source. Other chapels and elements inside the Cathedral use a variety of rocks and minerals in the decoration or construction.

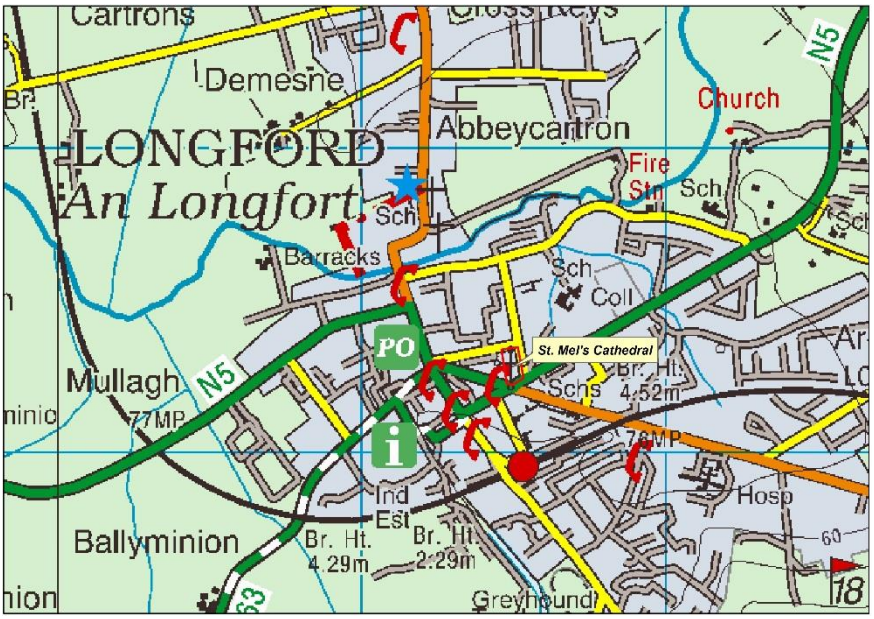
Site Importance – County Geological Site
This is a landmark building with a national profile, whose restoration has been reported upon extensively in national media. It is one of the finest neo-classical style churches in Ireland.

Management/promotion issues
The continued life of St. Mel's Cathedral is in the good hands of the Parish and the Diocese. The Parish website has an extensive photo archive of the restoration:
www.longfordparish.com

The exterior façade of St. Mel's Cathedral, Longford.


The interior of St. Mel's Cathedral.

Left: Column in sections alongside the cathedral. Middle and Right: Paving with brachiopod shells (L) and colonial corals (R).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18


St. Mel's Cathedral
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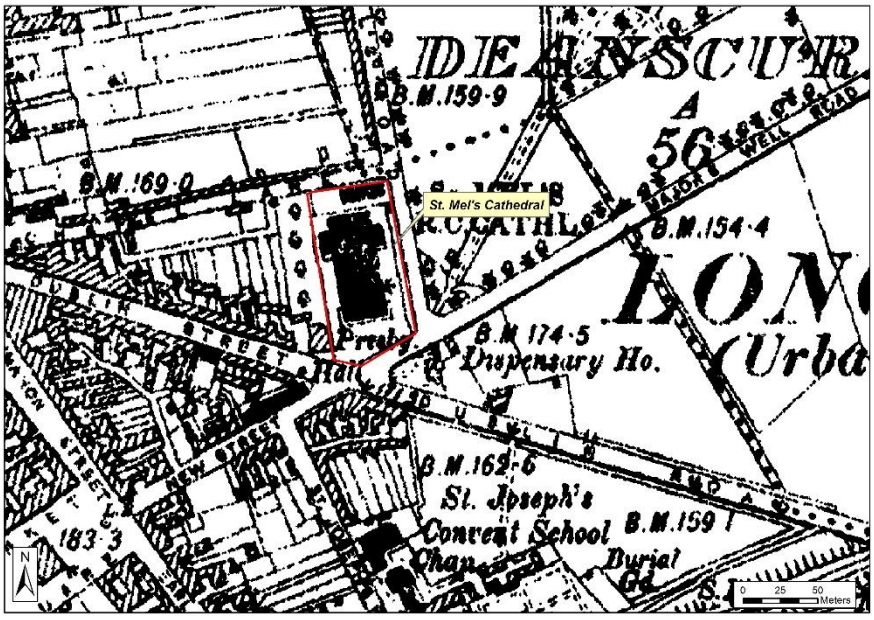
B.M.159·9
B.M.169·0
St. Mel's Cathedral
B.M.154·4
B.M.174·5
Dispensary Ho.
B.M.162·6
St. Joseph's
Convent School
B.M.159
Burial
183·3
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