

TIPPERARY - COUNTY GEOLOGICAL SITE REPORT

NAME OF SITE	Thurles Cathedral
Other names used for site	Cathedral of the Assumption
IGH THEME	IGH15 Economic Geology
TOWNLAND(S)	Thurles Townparks
NEAREST TOWN/VILLAGE	Thurles
SIX INCH MAP NUMBER	41
ITM CO-ORDINATES	612915E 658811N
1:50,000 O.S. SHEET NUMBER 66	GSI BEDROCK 1:100,000 SHEET NO. 18

Outline Site Description

A large Cathedral building within the town of Thurles.

Geological System/Age and Primary Rock Type

The Cathedral is 19th century in age, built using a large variety of Irish Carboniferous limestone rocks for the structure, with Portland Stone used for carved ornamental and structural elements. The interior uses a wide variety of ornamental marbles, many of which are classic polished Irish Carboniferous limestones.

Main Geological or Geomorphological Interest

The Cathedral was built from 1865 and was completed and consecrated in 1879. It is in a Romanesque Revival style with the façade modelled on that of Pisa Cathedral in Italy. Inspection of the exterior reveals a wide range of Irish Carboniferous limestones have been used in the construction with a range of shades of grey and different textures, as well as the variation in the finished dressing of the stone by stonemasons. Of particular note are the richly fossiliferous crinoidal limestones. More ornamental carved courses and architectural detail has been implemented in classic white Portland Limestone, a freestone from Dorset in England. The roof has also been renovated in recent years using Blue Bangor natural slates including bands of Killaloe Grey to match the original finish.

The main reason for the inclusion of this Cathedral as a County Geological Site is the widespread use of ornamental marbles within the Cathedral, particularly in structural pillars as well as in ornamental features such as altar rails, pulpit, tabernacle and other elements. The most obvious feature is the use of Cork Red Marble, a mottled polished Carboniferous limestone from the Middleton area of Cork. There are 38 large structural pillars composed of this rock, of very large size compared to other known examples. Of particular note is the installation of some 26 large, highly decorated wall panels of different marbles in the apse, behind the altar. This semi-circular area has portrait shaped panels about 1 m high. An enigmatic sign in the middle asks the visitor to “pray for the donor of the marbles in the panels of the apse”. Who the donor was, and when they were installed is unknown to the authors of the report. The range of decorative marbles would indicate a wide spectrum of foreign sources. Other features include some exceptionally black marbles, suspected to be Irish ones from perhaps Kilkenny or Galway, in the pillars just inside the doorway. There are a range of orange and cream coloured marbles used in the pulpit and altar rails. There is some minor use of the classic green Connemara marble, which was popular in many contemporary churches, such as in the pulpit decoration.

Site Importance – County Geological Site

The Cathedral is an excellent exhibition of different marbles in structural and decorative use in a wide variety of scales.

Management/promotion issues

As a publicly accessible place this offers many possibilities to promote the geological heritage. A detailed study with a book or booklet guide would be desirable, but currently available information provides very little mention of the uses of marbles in the Cathedral.



Interior view of Thurles Cathedral.



The pillars are of Cork Red Marble.



Exterior view of Thurles Cathedral.



Large marble panels in the apse.



A plea to visitors.



Large marble panels in the apse are highly ornamental.

