

OFFALY - COUNTY GEOLOGICAL SITE REPORT

NAME OF SITE	Clorhane Quarries		
Other names used for site	Clerhane Quarries, Egan's Quarry, Claffey's Quarry, Clonmacnoise Marble Quarries		
IGH THEME	IGH15 Economic Geology		
TOWNLAND(S)	Clorhane		
NEAREST TOWN/VILLAGE	Shannonbridge		
SIX INCH MAP NUMBER	5		
ITM CO-ORDINATES	598800E 727695N		
1:50,000 O.S. SHEET NUMBER	47	GSi BEDROCK 1:100,000 Sheet No.	15

Outline Site Description

Two disused quarries, now flooded, situated within woodland.

Geological System/Age and Primary Rock Type

The quarries, when they operated, were extracting Carboniferous Limestone beds, classified as a part of the Waulsortian Limestone. In particular, some highly fossiliferous crinoidal limestone beds were worked and traded, and often referred to as Clonmacnoise Marble.

Main Geological or Geomorphological Interest

Two disused and now flooded quarries were once an important local industry in Offaly, extracting limestone for use in Shannon navigation works and other local construction. Of particular note here were the beds of richly crinoidal limestone, which were prized for making mantelpieces, doorsteps, windowsills and other decorative stonework. This distinctive rock became known as Clonmacnoise Marble (in the stone trade the term 'marble' is used for any polished limestone, contrary to the geological definition, which is restricted to metamorphic limestone).

Two separate quarries, Egan's and Claffey's operated and a detailed history of the family quarries has been written by Declan Ryan in an excellent book published by Offaly County Council. It also provides much detail on many building and monumental or gravestone works which used stone from Clorhane. This book also outlines the industrial archaeology of the area, whereby rock was taken by track down to the River Shannon for travel north to Athlone. It was also shipped south along the Shannon to Killaloe in Tipperary where extensive slate quarrying provided facilities for sawing and polishing large slabs and blocks. The limestone bedrock is at the surface in the Clorhane area and there were shoals in the River Shannon that provided a barrier to navigation, until removed in the late 1840s. A canal from the river across part of the Callows was constructed, with a pier on the Shannon itself. There were a few minor quarries to the west of Egan's Quarry, which can now be seen as depressions through the vegetation in the side of the track, but no rock is exposed.

Site Importance – County Geological Site

The site is an important part of the history of Offaly, demonstrating the importance of geology to the economic lives of people and to the buildings that form part of society. It is recommended as a County Geological Site.

Management/promotion issues

The quarries are within woodland of great importance for biodiversity, and they part of the site is managed by the National Parks and Wildlife Service and part is still privately owned. However, as they are both flooded they are not accessible, and Egan's Quarry in particular is almost inaccessible due to growth of trees and scrub all around the quarry. They are not suitable for general promotion without significant interventions.



The one remaining face of crinoidal limestone in Egan's Quarry.



Egan's Quarry is flooded and virtually inaccessible.



The dipping beds of Claffey's Quarry in cross section.



The flooded Claffey's Quarry.

