

Newmills Corn and Flax Mills, Letterkenny

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Photos by Keith and Ruth Andrews

A final report from our visit to Ireland last autumn. As it was out of season, plus covid, we expected the mill complex at Letterkenny in County Donegal to be closed, as indeed it was, but we drove there to have a look anyway.

The oldest building that survives at Newmills is 400 years old and there have been mills at the site since the early 19th century. In Victorian times a flax mill was at the core of the complex, providing crucial supplies to the linen industry, the backbone of Ulster's economy at the time. A corn mill ground barley, oats, and imported maize.



Newmills steadily expanded to include a public house, a scutcher's cottage, and a forge. By the early 1900s it was also exporting food – the earliest supplies of butter, bacon, and eggs for Sir Thomas Lipton's nascent grocery empire in Glasgow came from there. The waterwheel that drove the corn mill is one of the largest working waterwheels in the country.



The importance of Newmills was recognised in a 1978 *An Foras Forbatha* 'inventory of industrial archaeological monuments' which identified it as by far the best example of a mill complex in County Donegal. In 1986, the mills were purchased by the state for preservation as a national monument. Under the direction of the Office of Public Works, a group of Irish and international volunteers restored the mills and millrace in 1989.