

## Collooney Mills and Falls, County Sligo

**Keith Andrews**

Photos by Keith and Ruth Andrews

We snatched an end-of-season holiday last October in Ireland expecting bad weather and wild coastal scenery. Amazingly the weather was pretty good although as you can see from our photos the rivers were in full spate and the previous week had reportedly been a wipeout.

Travelling between Mayo and Donegal, we were seduced by a label 'Mills and Falls' on the map at Collooney in County Sligo. So we took a diversion and followed the signs to the town – not that easy as 5 miles away down the road was a place confusingly called Coolaney! No signs to the mills anywhere, so after a few wrong turns we finally made our way through a new housing estate called Mill Falls (bit obvious, that!), and came across the amazing sights that you see in the pictures.



There was no information at the site that we could see about the mills, and there seems to be a paucity of information available in general. The *Sligo Hub* website says that the mills, on the River Owenmore, date from the 1830s and were owned by Alexander Sim. *Industrial Ireland, An archaeology* (Colin Payne, The Collins Press 2006) says that they used a Scotch turbine, as developed by James Whitelaw of Glasgow, with rotating arms enclosed in a cast iron box; it was made by Randolph of Glasgow and powered 14 pairs of stones.

Although they are thought to be corn mills, a comment on the *Sligo Hub* website suggests that an early map shows that the corn mills were actually on the site of the Mill Falls housing estate, and that the mills you can now see across the river are a carbide mill and a fabric mill. *Wikipedia* says that Charles O'Hara built a bleach mill there, which was also used at times for producing carbide.





In the picture above you can see the height of the falls, and the arch which is presumably the tail race. The second mill on the site (*below left*) has no visible tail race. The cascade (*below right*) is presumably a fish pass on a grand scale.

