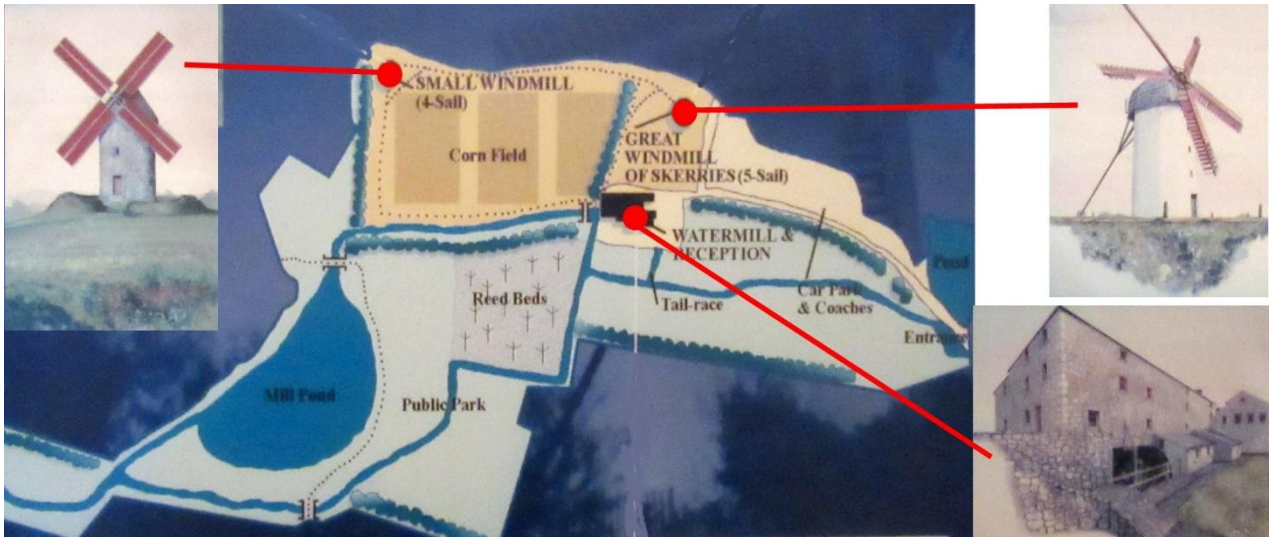
Skerries Mills

Ruth Andrews

Driving up the coast north of Dublin in search of rock formations, Keith and I were surprised to encounter brown signs directing us to '**Skerries Mills**' – no mention in any guidebooks, of course. The signs mysteriously finished well short of Skerries town, so we set off to find the rocks on the beach, from where we were pleased to see two distant windmills in the middle of the built-up area.

The mills seen from the beach

Imagine our surprise on reaching them (by trial and error until I spotted 'Miller's Lane') to find a 5-sail tower mill, a smaller 4-sail thatched tower mill, **and** a 4-storey watermill, all on the same site. The watermill and smaller windmill are both open to the public and on the day we were there we had an eloquent and knowledgeable guide called (inevitably) Paddy.



The watermill is first mentioned in mid-17th and early 18th century maps and documents. During the mid-19th century it supplied flour, meal, and bread to

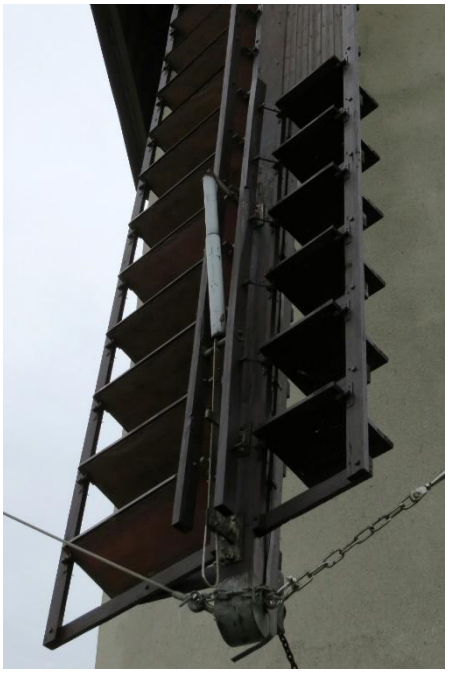
the Balrothery Union Workhouse. Two of the original four coke-fired ovens are in the reception area. Milling probably ceased around 1921 and the bakery finally closed in 1986 following a fire. The site was purchased by Dublin County Council in 1989 and extensive refurbishment was carried out before the complex was opened to the public in June 1999.

The mill has one set of English Grey (Derbyshire Peak) stones without dressing used for shelling or bruising oats, and two sets of French burr, and it is powered by a pitch-back metal wheel with a wooden flume (launder). The buildings and a covered area outside display a wide selection of cleaning and processing machines, including a neat little plansifter with leather straps on the dressing floor and a bread-slicing machine.

The 4-sail thatched windmill has canvas sails and one pair of stones. The cap rests on bearings and is designed to be 'luffed' (turned to wind) internally by a hand lever but in practice (according to Paddy) is heaved round with chains by several stalwart volunteers. The crop in front of the mill is oats and they harvest it ready for a steam threshing day each autumn.

The Great Windmill of Skerries was built with 4 sails but rebuilt with 5 sails following a fire in about 1844. The sails are an early version of Cubitt's patent. They appear to have no 'spider', so each set of shutters must be operated individually from ground level. (*I don't know much about this so could someone please explain the details of the sails shown below.*) There are two sets of millstones. The cap is turned by pulling round the braced tailpole supported by the red wheel (*just visible over the bushes*).

This mill is not generally open to the public.



I know it is a long way to Dublin (but not as far as Tipperary!), but this site really is worth a visit. We would like to publicly thank 'Paddy' for stepping off script and welcoming us to the mills.

The mills are open daily; for details see www.skerriesmills.ie .

Tacumshane Windmill

Ruth Andrews

Unlike Skerries Mills, we were aware of **Tacumshane Windmill** near Rosslare in County Wexford because it featured in an advert for Millstones Bar and Restaurant. The key is available from the bar, and after exploring the mill we indulged ourselves further with an excellent meal.

It is a small tower mill with two sets of large but incomplete stones. It was probably built in 1846, and used until at least 1908 when it was re-thatched. Between 1908 and 1930 it became disused and fell into disrepair. Garry Murphy acquired it in 1930 and replaced the damaged parts using iron machinery from the mill at Ballyfane nearby, which was destroyed in a great storm in 1905. The mill functioned again until 1936, when a diesel engine was installed in the grain store beside the mill where it drove a pair of small millstones for 25 years until 1961. (The diesel and grain store no longer exist.) The mill was placed in the care of the Board of Works in 1948 and major repairs were undertaken in 1952.

The replacement ironwork makes an uncomfortable fit with the older wooden upright shaft. The metal rod at the base of the shaft (*right*) is apparently ready to bore a hole in the timber beneath it. The sack hoist drive (*above*) from the bevel gear appears to have relied on friction metal-on-metal.