WHERE BELFAST BEGINS

MARITIME BELFAST STORY

DUFFERIN DOCK BELFAST, RW.

This place, lower case, this maritime mile, is,
more than any other, the place that gives
This Place, capital T, capital P, this city
of ours, its shape and purpose.

In ages that didn't know to call themselves late-Stone or Bronze (the people
then like people now could not imagine anyone to match them for ingenuity:
always, always testing the water) at the muddy mouth of the Farset a ford
was formed from which the name – Beal Feirste, Belfast – itself derives.

A ford that in time attracted a chapel – for those contemplating crossing
the tidal Lagan, or those thankful to have crossed safely back – a chapel
that in time-times-time gave rise to a settlement that became at last –
time-times-time-times-time-times-time – a town: chartered, its river-course
– still more mud than water, the haunt of oyster catchers and curlews – then
charted, a channel finally cut, an estuary become a proper port, a whole heap
of new opportunities thrown up on the Down side, by turns

A People's Park
A Powerhouse
A Titanic-driven tourist draw
A studio door on to worlds unimagined short years before.

Facing that – among the chandlers and Commissioners –
a jumping off point, or a stepping on
A platform on which to take a stand
For workers' rights
For the right to be a person not a possession

If this place (or This Place come to that)
had a flag it would have at its heart
Mary Ann McCracken
in her ninetieth year, pressing leaflets on travellers from the old world to the new:
No Human Bondage
End Slavery Now

All that flows through this place, lower case, filters into This Place and
beyond, eventually. Whatever there is that is new the chances are you saw
it, heard it, smelt it, tasted it, felt it here first. From tip to tail,
from way back when to right this moment, it's set the tone.

All its dry docks wet docks its bridges and basins and wharves and weirs,
east twin, west twin. Its Little Italy, Sailortown, Market, Bridge End and
Short Strand.

The old lives on within the new.
(The curlews are there yet if you take care to look – and do, do take care;
the Obel will be folded into lore like the Ballast Board or the mill that
ground old people young.)

Until you've walked the whole of it,
you won't know the half of it.
And by the time you reach the end
the beginning will have begun again
to change.

Glenn Patterson

As a heritage trust, Maritime Belfast believes that the most significant asset is the River Lagan and its story. This is the place **where Belfast began**, this is the place that built RMS Titanic, this is the place that was once the largest shipyard in the world, supporting the largest ropeworks in the world. This is where our world—famous linen and whiskey were exported to new worlds. This is the place that defied slavery. This is the place full of stories.

Some of these stories are told well, others could be told better and many have yet to surface. We want Belfast's maritime stories to be part of our transforming waterfront, to inspire new developments, architecture and public realm — fostering a personality that no other city can claim. We want to celebrate the thousands of ships built here, the different tradesmen and women, the Yardmen, the Dockers and the innovation associated with 400 years of industry.

Unfortunately, much of the physical heritage has disappeared, but the references and personal accounts are on record. We want to hold on to and celebrate our maritime stories, blending with contemporary developments to achieve an iconic waterfront destination that transforms the future of our city, whilst embracing the past.

We have produced the Maritime Belfast Story Plan as a framework for anyone who has an interest in developing the city's waterfront and **Maritime Mile**. The Plan identifies three core themes, supported by storylines and maps highlighting the relevant heritage sites. Some of the heritage is tangible but much has disappeared. We hope this Plan will inspire designs, street names, public realm and use of space. Branding, marketing and promotional material. Events, festivals and art installations. Menus, dishes and cocktails. We have put a spotlight on some existing best practice interventions that bring Belfast's maritime story to life.

The Maritime Belfast Story Plan has been informed by our research and engagement over the last ten years and Belfast City Council's wider work on Belfast Stories. We held workshops with neighbourhood communities, research by Louise Browne Associates, Tandem Design and Dr Sally Montgomery and numerous academic resources. We are indebted to Glenn Patterson for his words and his book The Mill for Grinding Old People Young. And we would like to thank the many former employees of Harland & Wolff who have worked with us over the years, sharing their knowledge and memories.

We hope you enjoy reading this Story Plan and find inspiration from Belfast's rich maritime heritage.

Kerrie Sweeney Chief Executive

MARITIME
BELFAST

Since its foundation in 1847, Belfast Harbour Commissioners has been at the forefront of innovation, establishing Belfast as a world leading maritime Port. In recent decades, Belfast Harbour has continued to build on the legacies of past generations, by developing a modern and resilient Port and Estate, that generates jobs and stimulates social and economic growth.

Joe O'Neill
Chief Executive, Belfast Harbour

For decades Belfast Harbour has been known for its civic leadership and contribution to the growth and development of the City of Belfast and the whole region. We are proud of our heritage and draw inspiration from the work started 175 years ago, as we continue to innovate and deliver for the people of this region and play our part in the ongoing evolution and transformation of Belfast.

Part of our ambitious 'Port for Everyone' vision is to develop an iconic waterfront for the City, working with our partners to create a vibrant space that local communities and visitors can enjoy, and making Belfast Harbour an attractive place to live, work, visit and invest.

This Maritime Belfast Story Plan brings the heritage and unique personality of our vibrant waterfront to life, and provides important context for the future development of the Maritime Mile. At Belfast Harbour, we look forward to continuing our partnership working with Maritime Belfast Trust, as together we share the rich maritime heritage of the area with all communities.

Belfast Harbour

In just over a decade Titanic Quarter has gone from master plan to reality as a thriving and bustling destination and is one of Europe's largest urban waterfront regeneration projects. Titanic Quarter is playing its part in the future regeneration of Belfast – while building upon the legacy of the City's maritime and industrial past.

James Eyre
Commercial Director, Titanic Quarter Ltd

Over £618 million has already been invested and some 20,000 people Live, Work, Visit and Stay daily in Titanic Quarter on Belfast's Maritime Mile, which is now attracting over 3.6 million visitors every year.

More than a century ago the area was home to the most innovative ideas in engineering. Today it is the home of the iconic Titanic Belfast, major TV, and film productions, educational facilities, over 100 national and international businesses and is one of Belfast's most desirable residential developments. Titanic Quarter is the centre of Belfast's Innovation district.

By 2035, our investment in Titanic Quarter will have reached £2 billion, playing our part in realising the growth ambitions of Belfast. This investment will grow the resident population to 9,000, creating a further 15,000 direct and indirect jobs for all and increasing the annual visitor numbers to 5.6 million.
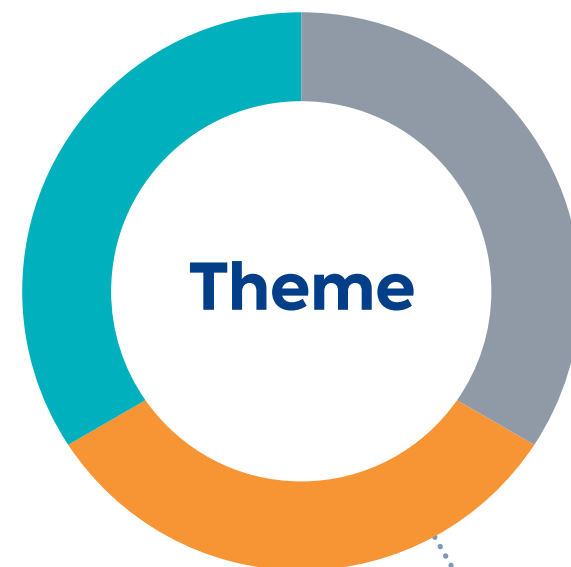
Titanic Quarter is the authentic home of Titanic's legend and this is where her memory lives on in the fabric of Belfast's maritime heritage. We look forward to continuing our work with Maritime Belfast Trust– building upon our shared vision of creating an iconic waterfront destination for future generations.

TITANIC®
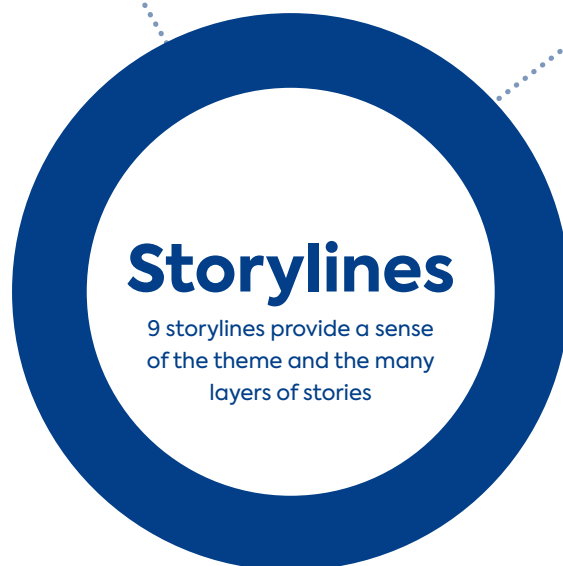QUARTER
Belfast, Northern Ireland

How to use this story plan

The Maritime Belfast Story Plan is structured through the identification of three key themes which are explored separately. Each theme is supported by several storylines, a map highlighting significant heritage sites; touchpoints that bring the theme to life and prominent characters who played a significant role in the Maritime Belfast Story.

Each section concludes with a best practice example demonstrating how our maritime heritage can be used to create an authentic experience and contribute to a distinctive waterfront destination.

Theme

- Taming, Reclaiming, Regenerating
- Trading, Making, Innovating
- Neighbourhoods and Livelihoods

Storylines

9 storylines provide a sense of the theme and the many layers of stories

Map

At a glance see where the visible and invisible maritime heritage is located

People

An insight into some of the historic characters who played an influential role

Spotlight

Best practice initiatives inspired by our maritime heritage

Touchpoints

Special heritage sites that bring each theme to life

Three themes to tell Belfast's maritime story

Taming Reclaiming Regenerating

This place is where Belfast began, where bold ambition and big ideas were transformative, where successive cuts, land reclamations, docks and quays meant trade could flow.

The history of Belfast's waterfront is not one story but many stories, from the smallest beginnings to the greatest endeavours. These stories are not consigned to the past but are still alive in maritime Belfast.

It's the stories about how the river was tamed and the land reclaimed, how trade and innovation made Belfast the city it is. It's the stories from the city's neighbourhoods, of the livelihoods and trades, of the shops that sold everything from a needle to an anchor.

All of these stories, and so many more, provide an opportunity for us to achieve an iconic maritime experience that is unique to Belfast.
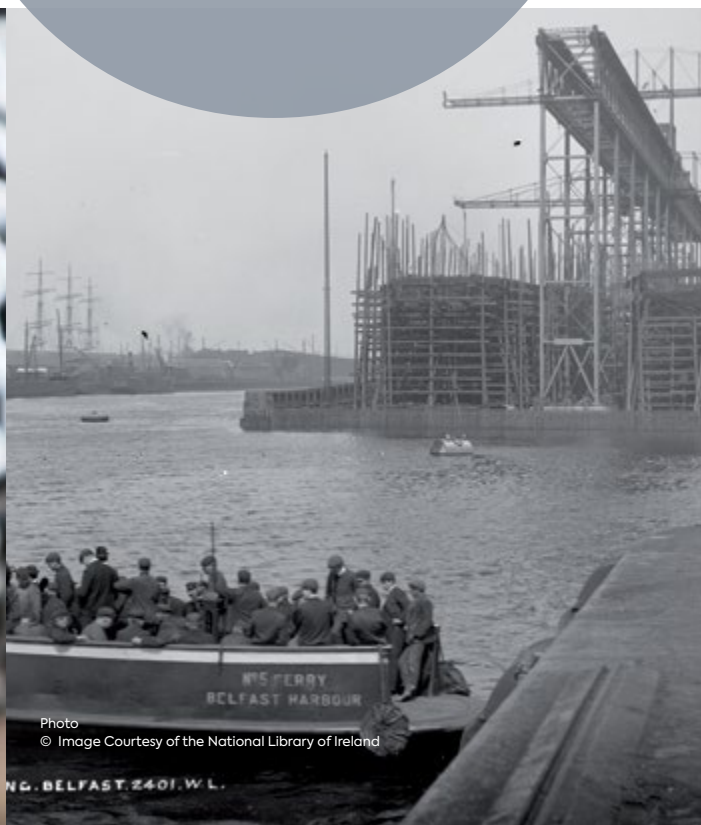
Photo
BELUM.U572 Belfast Quay (1851)
James Glen Wilson, 1827–1863
© National Museum NI. Ulster Museum Collection

Trading Making Innovating

This place is where imagination and innovation knew no bounds, a place of local and international trade, an industrial powerhouse, shipbuilders to the world.

Neighbourhoods and Livelihoods

This place is home to tight—knit communities, traders, sailors, millies & dockers. Sailortown & Little Italy, City Side & the Market, East Side & Ballymacarrett and the streets where they lived — Pilot, Ship, Dee & Mersey.

Photo
© Image Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland

Belfast's Visible & Hidden Maritime Heritage

As Belfast's landscape has evolved, much of our maritime heritage has been replaced by new buildings and developments, but there are some elements still visible – from docks to quays, to drawing offices and pumphouses. The map illustrates much of the visible and hidden heritage, and highlights where we could tell Belfast's maritime story better. This is the place where Belfast began.
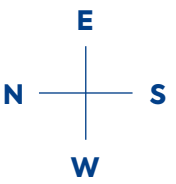
Taming Reclaiming Regenerating
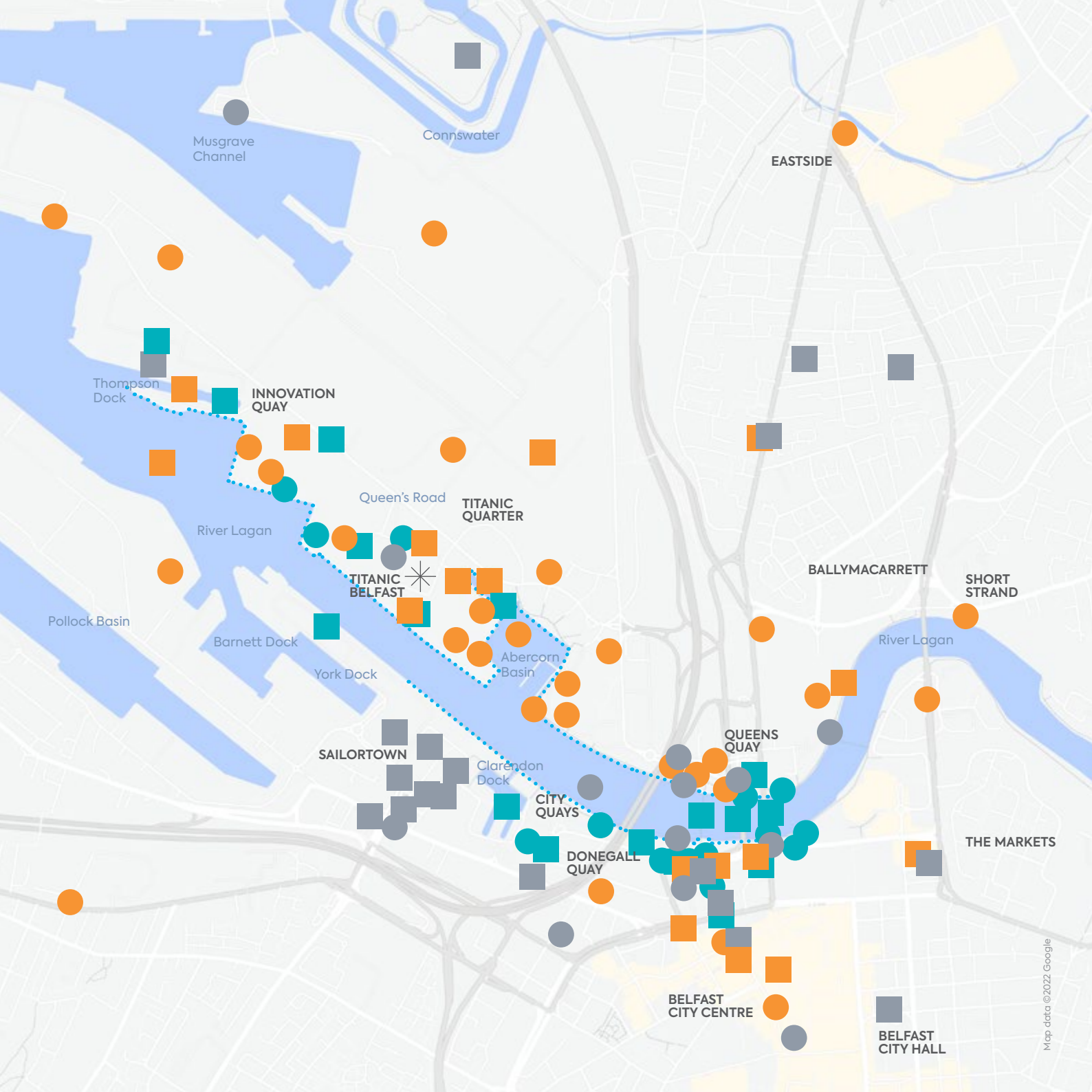
- Visible heritage
- Hidden heritage

Trading Making Innovating

- Visible heritage
- Hidden heritage

**Neighbourhoods and Livelihoods**

- Visible heritage
- Hidden heritage

maritime mile

Victoria Channel

Herdman Channel

Larne

Irish Sea

Carrickfergus

Bangor

Belfast

Northern Ireland

Musgrave Channel

Connswater

EASTSIDE

Thompson Dock

INNOVATION QUAY

River Lagan

Queen's Road

TITANIC QUARTER

BALLYMACARRETT

SHORT STRAND

Pollock Basin

TITANIC BELFAST

River Lagan

Barnett Dock

York Dock

Abercorn Basin

SAILORTOWN

QUEENS QUAY

Clarendon Dock

CITY QUAYS

DONEGALL QUAY

THE MARKETS

BELFAST CITY CENTRE

BELFAST CITY HALL

**Taming
Reclaiming
Regenerating**

**Trading
Making
Innovating**

**Neighbourhoods
and Livelihoods**

Taming Reclaiming Regenerating

While many claim the history of Belfast to be a relatively recent one, long before a medieval castle was established, Bronze and Iron Age settlements were evident in the surrounding hills. Part of the Gaelic kingdom of Dál Riata around 500 AD to the late 700s, medieval Belfast grew up around the Ford – a sand bank crossing over the River Lagan, revealed at low tide near the confluence with the River Farset. The development of the sandbank from medieval times onwards encouraged people to settle in what is now the centre of Belfast.
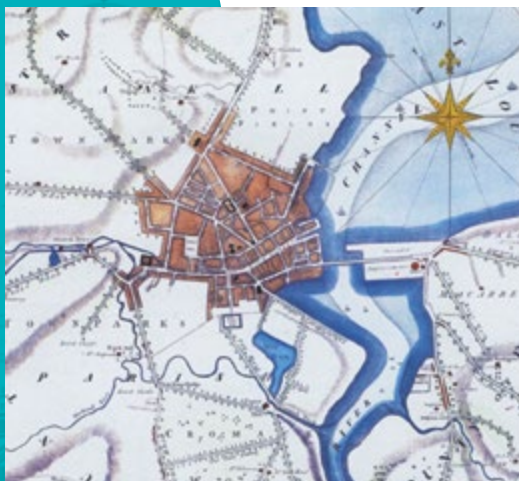
Photos
© Irish Historic Towns Atlas
Parts I and II, Royal Irish Academy

With its chapel, castle and rudimentary dwellings, Belfast only started to gain significance at the beginning of the seventeenth century, when Arthur Chichester was granted Belfast Castle and its surrounding lands. He began to lay out a town and settled it with planters from England and Scotland. Its new importance was recognised in 1613 when the town was constituted a corporation of 13 men headed by a sovereign. The Charter made provision for a town wharf – a freeport – and by 1783 Belfast had established itself as a direct trans–Atlantic trading port.

Largely led by the town's merchants, successive reclamations saw the development of docks and quays. With the establishment of the Ballast Board in 1785, harbour improvements took centre stage and plans were made to straighten the twisting channel. The first cut was made in 1839, and two years later, the spoil created Dargan's Island. With the creation of the Harbour Commissioners in 1847, the final works to create a new seven–mile long entrance channel to the port were eventually realised with the opening of the Victoria Channel in 1849. In creating Dargan's Island, the scene was set for the laying out of shipyards on what was later to become Queen's Island.

Where the old coal quays once were, the huge domed complex of the Odyssey now dominates and demonstrates the growing importance of the city's leisure and visitor economy. Downstream sparkles Titanic Belfast, drawing visitors from all over the world; while artworks, installations and meticulously restored features – the Harland & Wolff Drawing Offices, the Slipways, SS Nomadic and the Great Light – all continue to bear witness to the city's magnificent maritime heritage.

Taming
Reclaiming
Regenerating

Early Beginnings

A tunnel carries the river Farset under High Street and into the River Lagan, and is so big it can accommodate a double decker bus.

early crossings

A **sandy ford** was the only way to cross the Lagan, with early pilgrims praying for safe passage at the Chapel of the Ford. From 1688, the **Long Bridge** provided security with its 21 arches stretching a mile long, until it was replaced by the Queen's Bridge in 1849.

natives & settlers

Bronze Age people would **offer gifts to the Lagan**, ritually depositing swords in the river, and the Ulidians and Picts even fought a battle over the Lagan Ford in 665. In 1603 Arthur Chichester was awarded the patent to **Belfast Castle** and began overseeing the plantation of Belfast and Ulster.

royal charters

Early Belfast was **an obscure port**, and in 1613 the Charter of Belfast gave Lord Chichester control of the town, including establishing a freeport and provision for a **town wharf**. The Harbour began expanding and by 1783 Belfast was a direct trans—Atlantic trading port.

Taming the River

Big Ambitions

shifting the shoreline

From 1700 onwards a series of reclamation ventures by the town's merchants **created new land** from the marshland, transforming Belfast's shoreline. **Quays/kyes and docks** were built, expanded and changed names – George's Kye, Hanover Quay, Marchant's Kye – to Chichester & Donegall Quays.

gearing up

The Ballast Board was established in 1785, and began efforts to **improve the Harbour**, attracting Scottish shipbuilder William Ritchie to set up the **first commercial shipyard**. By 1847 the Ballast Board had become the Harbour Commissioners, taking ownership of the privately owned docks, shipyards and quays and building the magnificent Harbour Offices.

reshaping the river

Cuts were made to the Lagan to **straighten the river** and create the channels, Victoria, Musgrave & Herdman. The excavation spoil created Dargan's Island later called **Queen's Island**. The river was bridged by road and rail, and marked by navigational aids, east & west twin lighthouses, markers and buoys.

accelerating growth

The Victoria Channel was completed in 1849 and was **wider, deeper and safer**. In 1851 the Clarendon Wet Dock replaced the earlier Corporation Docks, and by 1897 Belfast Harbour also had the Dufferin, Spencer & York Docks. Donegall Quay was **modernised, with new methods** of handling cargo.

controlling the flow

Belfast is **a tale of two weirs**: the McConnell Weir in 1937 covering the unsightly mudflats upstream of the **River Blackstaff**, enabling coal barges as far as the Gas Works; and the Lagan Weir in 1994 – following investment from the Laganside Corporation to improve the water quality and the waterfront.

scaling up

In 1853 the Harbour Commissioners agreed to the laying out of **a new shipyard** and patent slip on Queen's Island, attracting early shipbuilders Thompson & Kirwin, and Robert Hickson. To support **further shipbuilding** Abercorn Basin and Hamilton Dock were completed in 1867, followed by the Alexandra Dock in 1889, and the Thompson Dock in 1911.

Taming Reclaiming Regenerating

Belfast's location at the shortest crossing point over the River Lagan presented the perfect gateway to harness the power and potential of the river over time. As Belfast developed, the river and marshy land needed tamed and reimagined, leading to hundreds of years of transformation of the waterfront area.

Visible heritage

1. Albert Memorial Clock
2. Lagan Weir
3. Belfast Harbour Office
4. Queen's Bridge
5. Queen's Quay
6. Titanic Slipways
7. Albert Quay
8. Alexandra Dock
9. Belfast Dry Dock
10. Clarendon Docks
11. Hamilton Dock
12. Thompson Dock & Pumphouse
13. Queen Elizabeth II Bridge
14. Tedford's Ship Chandlers
15. Queen's Road
16. Queen's Island/ Dargan's Island
17. Custom House
18. Donegall Quay

Hidden heritage

19. Long Bridge
20. Long Cross (ford)
21. Timber Pond
22. May's Dock
23. Queen's Quay
24. Ritchie's Dock
25. Sand Quays
26. Hanover Quay
27. Chichester Quay
28. Old Lime Kiln Dock
29. River Farset
30. Belfast Ballast Board
31. East Twin Lighthouse
32. West Twin Lighthouse
33. Victoria Wharf
34. Arrol Gantry

Victoria Channel

Herdman Channel

maritime mile

Taming Reclaiming Regenerating

"This (Long) bridge is the mall where all the company of Belfast take the air in a summer's evening."

Edward Willes
Chief Baron of the Irish Exchequer, 1759

Donegall Quay

Successive reclamations saw the development of several docks and quays. Donegall Quay is one of Belfast's earliest quays and still exists today. Built in the early 1800s, and named after the Earls of Donegall, it was an active quayside up until the 1980s, with freight trains, ferries and tourist boats coming and going. The River Farset, which runs under the city's High Street, joins the Lagan at Donegall Quay.

Tedford's Ship Chandlers was established on this quayside in the 1850s, supplying vessels with all shipping essentials before they set sail.

Photo
HOYFM.BT.677 Passenger steamers (ferry boats) at Donegall Quay, Belfast.
Belfast Telegraph
© National Museum NI. Ulster Folk Museum Collection

Bridges

The Victorian–engineered Queen's Bridge (named after Queen Victoria) was officially opened by the Queen herself in 1849.

It is in the area of the former Long Bridge, the first to cross the Lagan from the 1680s. The Long Bridge was around a mile long and had 21 arches. The Long Bridge, and subsequently Queen's Bridge, was built at the oldest and shortest fording point where people crossed the river.

A second Queen's Bridge, 'Queen Elizabeth II Bridge' was constructed alongside it in 1967.

Photo
The Long Bridge, Belfast, by Andrew Nicholl RHA
© Belfast Harbour Commissioners.

Custom House

The original Custom House was based in Carrickfergus, where the Corporation of Carrickfergus held a substantial trade monopoly.

In 1637, the Corporation was purchased by Thomas Wentworth, the Lord Deputy of Ireland, and trade was redirected into the Belfast Harbour. A new Custom House was designed by English architect Charles Lanyon in 1857.

Today the Custom House retains the original statues carved by Thomas Fitzpatrick, of Neptune, Mercury and Britannia, with additional figures said to represent Manufacture, Peace, Commerce and Industry. It is located near to the original site of the Ballast Board offices, in the area around McHugh's Bar built in 1711. For hundreds of years, merchants would have arrived in Belfast with goods to trade and had to register at the Custom House.

Victoria Channel and Dargan's Island

In 1849 the Victoria Channel officially opened. This redirection and deepening of the river enabled larger vessels to come up the River Lagan. Until then the depth of water at the central quays was only a little over one metre and large ships had to anchor miles from the Harbour.

This development transformed Belfast into a modern trading centre with a well–defined channel along which trade could flow.

As the river was reshaped and deepened, Dargan's Island was created by the dredging of mud and silt from the newly cut channel. It was named after the Irish engineer William Dargan who undertook the works. It became the People's Park and later the site of the shipyards.

The Timber Pond was added in 1845 as a small natural reservoir to store wooden logs used for milling at a local sawmill, and it also had a bathing pond for the public to use. Dargan's Island was renamed Queen's Island following Queen Victoria's visit in 1849.

Clarendon Docks

The oldest remaining docks in Belfast Harbour are the Clarendon Dry Docks, built in the early 1800s, by Belfast's first commercial shipbuilder, William Ritchie.

Ritchie originally established his shipyard at the Old Lime Kiln Dock (where Corporation Street is now) but needed a dry dock which he built himself, completing it in 1800.

Known as Ritchie's Dock for years, it was later renamed Clarendon Dock No 1. The second Clarendon Dock was completed in 1826. The dry docks are no longer used and are protected as a scheduled monument, remaining an important link to Belfast's maritime past.

Taming Reclaiming Regenerating

Captain William Pirrie
1780–1858

Captain William Pirrie was a shipowner and Harbour Commissioner who had moved to Belfast from Scotland in 1820. He joined the Ballast Board in 1827 and was passionate about improvements to the twisting Lagan. He opened the first cut to the Lagan in 1841 and christened the Victoria Channel in 1849 by pouring a bottle of whiskey into the water.

Photo
Portrait of Captain William Pirrie
© Belfast Harbour Commissioners

William Dargan
1799–1867

Dargan was an Irish engineer commissioned by the Ballast Board to reconfigure the River Lagan, making two cuts to straighten and deepen the channel. In 1841 the excavation spoil created Dargan's Island, which became a Peoples Park and then used for shipbuilding, and later renamed Queen's Island. Dargan was also responsible for numerous railway projects across Ireland, and the construction of the Ulster Canal.

Photo
Portrait of William Dargan (1799–1867)
© National Gallery of Ireland

Sir Charles Lanyon
1813–1889

Henry Martin
1822–1898

Queen Victoria: Victoria was hugely significant to Belfast's maritime history, with the Victoria Channel, the Victoria Wharf, Victoria Road and Queen's Bridge named in her honour. She visited Belfast in 1849 alongside her husband Prince Albert, after whom the Albert Clock was later named.

An English architect and Belfast Harbour Commissioner, Lanyon also served as Mayor of Belfast and MP. Lanyon was responsible for numerous buildings and construction projects across the country, including the Antrim Coast Road from Larne to Ballycastle, the Palm House in Botanic Gardens, Queens University's Lanyon building, Crumlin Road Gaol, Belfast's Custom House, and Sinclair Seamen's Church.

The Belfast builder set up his company Henry Martin in 1840, before being joined by his son John in 1879, to create H&J Martin. The company built some of Belfast's most iconic buildings – City Hall, the Belfast Harbour Office, the Grand Opera House, and the Robinson and Cleaver department store. The company also built harbours, docks, timber ponds, and brick works across the city. H&J Martin was acquired by Lagan Construction in 2015.

Taming Reclaiming Regenerating · **Big Ambitions** · gearing up

Belfast Harbour Office

Historic building and headquarters of Belfast Harbour located in City Quays. Visitors can freely access the public areas of this opulent building and learn about the history of Belfast Port.

Belfast Harbour, originally set up as the Ballast Board in 1785, played a pivotal role in the emergence of Belfast as a major port and subsequent development into an industrial city. Since 1847, the Harbour Office has been the headquarters of the Belfast Harbour Commissioners, designed by the Commissioners' engineer George Smith. The first section of the building was opened in 1854. An additional extension was completed in 1895, designed by Belfast architect William Henry Lynn. The style of architecture reflects that of an Italian palazzo.

Belfast Harbour has taken steps to share its maritime heritage with visitors:

Designated public areas
Visitors can freely enter the building during normal working hours and explore the ground floor reception area to see the marble mosaic floors, the impressive stained–glass windows, some of the Commissioners' fine art collection and the Titanic Captain's Table.

Visitor Centre
A specially commissioned permanent exhibition 'A Port that Built a City' celebrates 400 years of Belfast's maritime history. It is located on the ground floor and includes interactive displays, details of famous past Harbour Commissioners, artefacts and a stunning stained–glass window which depicts major events from the Harbour's history right up to the 21st century.

© Crown DfC Historic Environment Division

One of the first things
the Ballast Board did
was remove the remains
of the ancient ford, as
an impediment to river
traffic...It got better
in time at Preserving as
well as Improving.

Glenn Patterson

Taming
Reclaiming
Regenerating

Trading
Making
Innovating

Neighbourhoods
and Livelihoods

Trading Making Innovating

During the 19th century, Belfast embarked on a process of industrialisation which was to radically alter its nature. Linen mills, shipbuilding and engineering were to become its most significant economic drivers. Investment in technology, notably in mechanised spinning wheels, resulted in Belfast becoming the leading centre of linen production in the world. These industries helped to stimulate the development of a range of other industries such as chemical manufacture. By the start of the twentieth century, more than 35,000 people worked in textiles in Belfast.

Photos
HOYFM.HW.H1516 Workers disembarking from almost completed Olympic at Thompson deepwater outfitting wharf
Robert John Welch, (1859-1936); Harland and Wolff
© National Museum NI
Ulster Transport Museum Collection

BELUM.Y3568 Mobile crane on Queen's Island
A. R. Hogg
© National Museum NI.
Ulster Museum Collection

The most iconic of Belfast's industries was undoubtedly shipbuilding, vital for the export of linen goods around the world. Its stellar achievements brought international recognition to the city. As the shallow waters of the city were redeveloped into a major port the city was transformed into the home of the largest shipbuilder in the world. In 1859 Edward Harland bought the shipyard from Robert Hickson which he had previously managed; took on Gustav Wolff two years later as his partner, and over the following decades, expanded to employ thousands of workers. In 1911 they launched RMS Titanic, then the largest ship in the world.

The commercial success of the city was framed by the chimneys of its linen mills and the cranes which rose above its shipyards. It was these and a whole host of other industries – engineering, rope–making, distilling, tobacco, and many more – which forged an extraordinary expansion.

The people who flowed into Belfast throughout the nineteenth century turned what was a town into a city. With a wealth based on its industrial prowess, Belfast was emerging as a place unlike any other in Ireland. In 1808, it had a population of around 25,000; by 1841, this number had increased to 70,000; and by 1911, it had reached 385,000 – the largest city in Ireland by a considerable number and the fastest growing urban area in the British Isles.

Trading Making Innovating

Goods in Goods Out

"I remember the excitement of seeing cattle and sheep herded through the streets of Belfast to the docks ... we helped the drovers by running alongside!"

Sailortown resident

early trade

Trade was key to the development of Belfast, with a charter approved for a market in 1605. The town was trading with England, Scotland, France, Spain, North American colonies and the West Indies, **importing cloth, wine, spirits, spices**, sugar, tobacco and timber; and exporting beef, fish, butter, tallow, hide and corn.

commercial life

By 1807 Belfast had a population of 22,000, **a Market Hall**, both Brown & White Linen Halls, and an increasing number of banks. There were **new professions** alongside the trades, with Belfast recording 80 tailors, 20 shoemakers and a dozen watchmakers, 45 innkeepers, 10 bakers, 80 grocers and 166 butchers.

anti slavery

The town found **a common cause** in the fight against slavery, from Mary Ann McCracken with her dockside leaflets, to Thomas McCabe thwarting the plan to operate a slave company out of Belfast. **The abolitionist movement** had support from local newspapers and there was a boycott of sugar and rum.
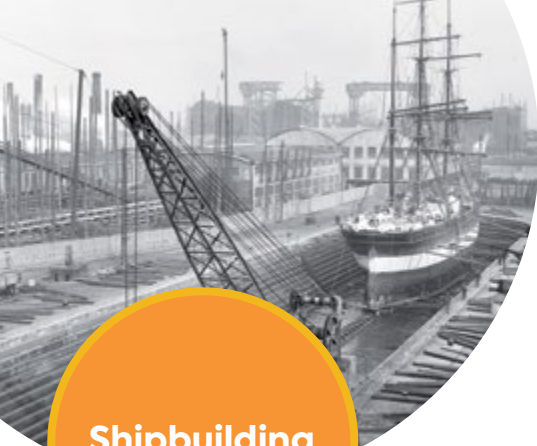
Shipbuilding

the yards

In the 1800s **shipyards were established** on both sides of the Lagan, before being concentrated on Queen's Island. There were **engine works & drawing offices**, and the yards had their own medical centres and ambulances from 1908. The Arrol Gantry dominated the skyline until Samson & Goliath in 1969 and 1974.

the war years

By WW1 Harland & Wolff and Workman Clark produced more than 10% of the world's shipping output: **passenger liners, naval ships, tanks and armaments**. During WW2, H&W repaired 22,000 vessels, built six aircraft carriers and 131 naval ships. From 1936, Short & Harland built **seaplanes, fighter planes, Stirling bombers**, and Sunderland flying boats.

reinvention

Harland & Wolff went through **change and transformation**, building bulk carriers and offshore rigs, **continuing to break records** building supertankers and launching the Sea Quest drilling rig from three slipways. H&W also made flood gates for the Lagan Weir, the Foyle Bridge and Ha'penny Bridge in Dublin.

Industrial Powerhouse

workshop of the world

Belfast became the **linen capital of the world** when local innovators adapted cotton spinning techniques to linen, building huge mills. Belfast also claimed the **world's largest ropeworks**. Forges were making engines and machines; distilleries and factories were providing employment through their products such as mineral water and cigarettes.

inventors & innovators

By 1861 Harland & Wolff was established on Queen's Island, pioneering a **larger, faster, slimmer ship design**. Samuel Davidson was developing his **innovative fans** for ventilation and drying tea at the Sirocco Works. Short Bros was trialling the first twin engine planes, vertical take–off and landing, and flying boats.

transport

From the 1850s Belfast's **roads were being revolutionised**, as Robert Shipboy MacAdam from the Soho Foundry transformed the city streets. **Trams, trolley buses and rapid transit** followed, and Belfast had railway stations either side of the river, with the Belfast and County Down Railway at Queens Quay.

Trading Making Innovating

The site of manufacture, international commerce and homegrown invention, Belfast was famous for selling everything from a 'needle to an anchor'. The reinvention and regeneration of the city continues today.

Visible heritage

1. Caisson Gate
2. Sirocco Works
3. Yardmen Statue
4. HMS Caroline
5. Paint Hall
6. SS Nomadic
7. Samson & Goliath Cranes
8. St George's Market
9. Tedford's Ship Chandlers
10. H&W Drawing Offices
11. Custom House
12. Queen's Island/Dargan's Island
13. Victoria Channel
14. Calder Fountain
15. Waring Street
16. High Street
17. The Entries

Hidden heritage

18. Abercorn Basin
19. Abercorn Works
20. Arrol Gantry
21. Bacon Factory
22. Brass Foundry
23. Coal barges
24. Electric Generating Station
25. Engineering Works
26. Alexandra Wharf
27. Short Bros. & Harland
28. Hickson's Yard
29. King's Works
30. Market House
31. Musgraves of Belfast
32. Pool of Garmoyle
33. Ropeworks
34. Sail Lofts
35. Saltworks
36. Sirocco Works
37. Glassworks
38. Thompson Wharf
39. Vitriol Works
40. Workman Clark Ltd North Yard
41. Patent Slip
42. Queen's Quay Railway Station
43. Kelly's Coal Yard
44. Old Ferry Terminal
45. Thompson & Kirwin Shipyard
46. McIlwaine & Lewis Iron Works
47. York Street & Jennymount Mills
48. Coates Foundry
49. Workman Clark Ltd South Yard

Victoria Channel

Herdman Channel

E
N — S
W

maritime mile

Musgrave Channel

Connswater

EASTSIDE

Thompson Dock

INNOVATION QUAY

Queen's Road

TITANIC QUARTER

BALLYMACARRETT

SHORT STRAND

TITANIC BELFAST

River Lagan

Pollock Basin

Barnett Dock

York Dock

Abercorn Basin

River Lagan

SAILORTOWN

Clarendon Dock

CITY QUAYS

Queen's Quay

DONEGALL QUAY

THE MARKETS

BELFAST CITY CENTRE

BELFAST CITY HALL

Trading Making Innovating

"In the morning you would hear the noise of the workmen's boots on the cobbled streets as they walked to the yards on the Queen's Road"

Charlotte Crothers–Gilpin
Daughter of shipyard worker

Queen's Quay Railway Station

The impressive station for the Belfast and County Down railway line was located on Queen's Quay, providing an essential passenger service. The station opened in 1848, and closed in 1976.

Nearby was the ferry stop used by shipyard workers travelling to Queen's Island and day–trippers enjoying excursions to Bangor.

The railway also helped distribute the coal from the busy coal yard, where Kelly's coal boats (and a workforce of around 10,000) provided fuel for Belfast's industries and homes.

Patent Slip/ H&W Shipyard

In 1849, a 1000–ton patent slip was built on the south side of Queen's Island to replace the dry docks that the Ballast Board had purchased. It was used to dry dock new ships and repair trading ships.

Thompson & Kirwin and Hickson's shipyards were then established in this area in the 1850s.

A young Edward Harland took over Hickson's Yard, and went into partnership with Gustav Wolff, establishing the world's largest shipbuilders Harland & Wolff in 1861.

Photo
BELUM.Y3512 Belfast and County Down Railway terminus, Queen's Quay
© National Museums NI. UlsterMuseum Collection

Photo
A map of the Harland & Wolff works in 1879 on the south side of Queen's Island
© The Yard

Short Bros. & Harland and the Belfast Blitz

The yards were busy during the two world wars, repairing and manufacturing naval ships, cruisers and later aircraft carriers and tanks. Short & Harland, a subsidiary with Short Brothers, was established in 1936 to produce bombers.

East Belfast and the shipyard area suffered extensive damage in the Belfast Blitz in 1941, when bombs damaged gantries, cranes, and a fuselage factory. Later bombing raids particularly affected North Belfast, with half of the residential housing across the city either damaged or destroyed.

Shorts also established an airport beside the factory in East Belfast, now known as the George Best Belfast City Airport. Short Brothers was acquired by Bombardier in 1989 and more recently by Spirit Aerosystems.

Photo
HOYFM.BT.1459 Bristol bombers being built at H&W
Belfast Telegraph
© National Museum NI. Ulster Folk Museum Collection

Belfast Ropeworks

Established by William Holmes Smiles and Gustav Wolff in 1871, the Belfast Ropeworks Company became a major employer in East Belfast and the largest ropeworks in the world.

With a rope walk reportedly a mile long, the ropeworks supplied the nearby shipyards and thousands of customers with every kind of rope, cord and handmade fishing nets.

Barges travelled up the Connswater River from the Harbour to the Connswater works with the raw supplies and made their return journey with the finished ropes.

Photo
HOYFM.BT.1138 Belfast Ropeworks, making camouflage nets
Belfast Telegraph
© National Museum NI. Ulster Folk Museum Collection

Glassworks and Sirocco Works

The early glassworks were established at Bridge End in the 1770s by Benjamin Edwards and by John Smylie a decade later. They made glass bottles, glass windows and fine glassware. The infamous Belfast saying 'going up the Lagan in a bubble' is said to have originated from the glassworks and their bubble shaped bottles.

Located on the site of the earlier glassworks, the Sirocco Works were developed at Bridge End in 1881 by Samuel Cleland Davidson, an inventor and engineer. His innovative centrifugal fan was originally used for drying tea and evolved into the first air conditioning system, used across buildings and industry.

The Sirocco fan, named after the Saharan wind, was used on many of Harland & Wolff's ships, including RMS Titanic.

Photo
HOYFM.BT.997 Sirocco Engineering Works, dressing the blades of a rotor fan, 1940
Belfast Telegraph
© National Museums NI. Ulster Folk Museum Collection

Trading Making Innovating

"Sir Edward [Harland] builds the ships, Mr Pirrie makes the speeches, and, as for me, I smoke the cigars."

Gustav Wolff
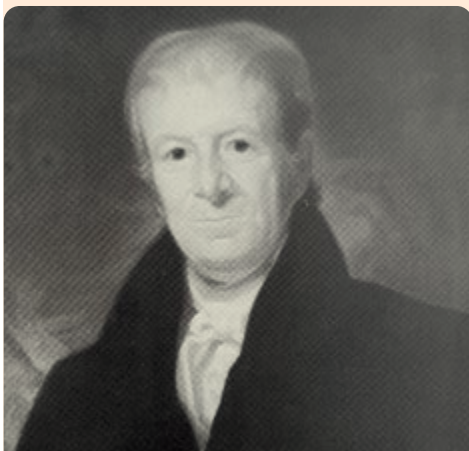
William Ritchie
1756—1834

Gustav Wolff
1834—1913

In 1791, the Scottish shipbuilder Ritchie visited Belfast and encouraged by the commercial opportunity, he established a new shipyard at the Old Lime Kiln Dock. In July 1792, he launched his first Belfast ship, the Hibernian. The yard quickly grew and in 1800 Ritchie built a new dry dock, now called Clarendon Dock No 1. By 1811 Ritchie had built 32 vessels, ranging from 50 – 450 tons. When he retired in 1820 another Scot Charles Connell took over the business and renamed it Charles Connell & Sons. Ritchie was also involved in charitable works, chairing the General Board of the Charitable Society, and along with his brother Hugh, contributed to the founding of the new Academic Institution. William Ritchie died in 1834 at the age of 79.

German born Gustav Wilhelm Wolff moved to Belfast in 1857 to work as an assistant to Edward Harland, who had acquired Hickson's shipbuilding yard. He became a partner in 1861, forming Harland & Wolff. He was also a Harbour Commissioner, and founded the Belfast Ropeworks in 1871. With Wolff as Chairman, the firm became the largest ropeworks in the world. Wolff was also an MP for East Belfast, and had shares in the Union Steamship Company ensuring H&W received regular orders.

Photo
William Ritchie
© Belfast Harbour Commissioners

Photo
Gustav Wolff
© National Portrait Gallery

John Pierpont Morgan: The American financier acquired the White Star Line in 1902 in a bid to have a monopoly of North Atlantic shipping routes. The Olympic Class liners were White Star Line's most famous ships, and JP Morgan was due to travel on RMS Titanic's maiden voyage but cancelled last minute.

Aristotle Onassis: The Greek shipping magnate became a significant shareholder in H&W and almost took over the company in the 1960s. H&W built oil tankers for Onassis, and he brought his glamourous wife Jackie to visit the shipyard in 1970.

Lord Pirrie
1847–1924

The grandson of Captain Pirrie, William Pirrie started his career as a gentleman's apprentice in Harland & Wolff in 1862. Pirrie was a draughtsman, and became partner in 1874. He would go on to be a Harbour Commissioner, Mayor, MP, Baron and Viscount, as well as Chairman of H&W, leading the company to become the largest shipyard in the world. Pirrie was supported in his ambitions by his wife, Lady Montgomery Carlisle Pirrie.

RMS Titanic was launched on Pirrie's birthday, 31st May, and when he died in 1924, he was brought back to Belfast on the RMS Olympic.

Photo
HOYFM.HW.3493 The Four Partners in Harland & Wolff from 1876 – 1885
Harland and Wolff
© National Museum NI. Ulster Transport Museum Collection

Frank Workman
1856–1927

In 1873 Francis Frank Workman joined Harland & Wolff as a gentleman's apprentice, and quickly learned the trade, before setting up his own small shipbuilding yard on the north banks of the Lagan in 1879. Fellow H&W apprentice George Clark joined the business in 1880. The Workman Clark Shipbuilding Company, or the Wee Yard as it was known, established themselves on yards on both sides of the Lagan, producing their own engines, and specialising in medium sized cargo ships and pioneered refrigerated shipping. In 1902 and 1909 the company produced the highest tonnage of vessels across all the UK shipyards, and in 1918 a Scottish worker at the yard established the world record for riveting. A serious of problems affected the yard in the 1920s, and both Workman and Clark resigned from the Board in 1921. By 1935 Workman Clark had closed down.

Photo
Frank Workman
© Ulster Scots Agency

| Trading Making Innovating | Shipbuilding | the yards |

SoundYard

An interactive play area located along Belfast's historic waterfront. It can be freely experienced by day and in the evening when it is illuminated.

The design team took their inspiration from our industrial past and the immense shipyards that once employed thousands of people. Their striking design celebrates Belfast's maritime heritage, inspired by the constant noise of striking, hammering and riveting of metal emanating from the shipyards and by the brass, iron, and bronze foundries that served the busy shipyards.

Significant location
Queen's Quay is where Belfast Harbour began to develop and expand in the 1840's. Queen's Island and the Abercorn Basin were built in the following decades, establishing the County Down side of the Harbour as the perfect location for shipbuilding.

Sounds of the Shipyard
Shipbuilding would become one of the city's largest industries in the 19th and 20th centuries, and the hammering and clanging noises from the yard would become as iconic as the Samson and Goliath cranes that define Belfast's skyline today.

Materials
Reflective and weathered metal was used entirely to reflect the industrial theme. It was also the material of choice to create the required sound reminiscent of the shipyards.

Shakespeare's Caliban
heard a 'thousand twangling
instruments' on his isle
full of noises. The Queen's
Island 'instruments'
were janglier, but there
was a music in them. And
everywhere, everywhere,
there were voices.

Glenn Patterson

Taming
Reclaiming
Regenerating

Trading
Making
Innovating
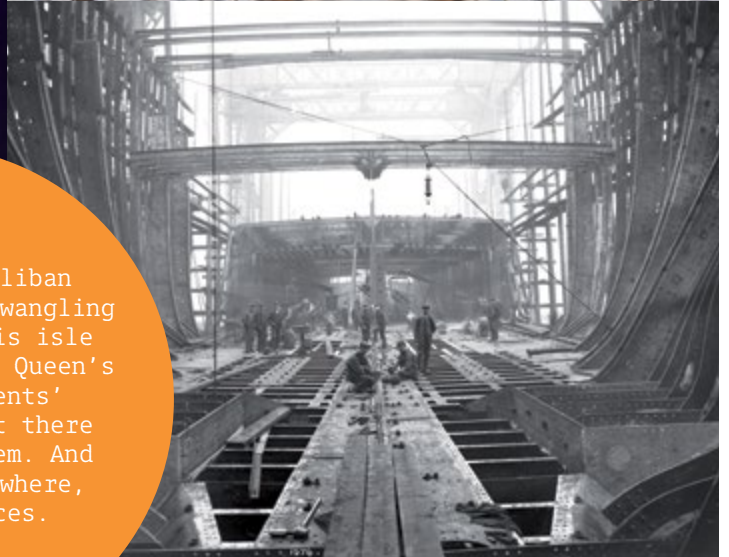
Neighbourhoods
and Livelihoods

Neighbourhoods and Livelihoods

In the city's neighbourhoods lived the welders, riveters, platers, heater boys, catch boys, holder–ups, fitters, plumbers, painters, draughtsmen, naval architects, carpenters, message boys, typists, secretaries and tracers who kept the shipyards thriving. The ebb and flow of the trading city was also captured in the real life experience of the sailors, merchant seamen, dockers as well as in the names of the streets where they lived — Pilot, Marine, Fleet, Ship, Dock, Dee, Mersey, Severn, Tralfalgar, Princes' Dock, and Garmoyle.

Photo
BELUM.Y2542 Hugh Gray, Publican
A. R. Hogg
© National Museum NI. Ulster Museum Collection

Photo
Belfast children playing during the dockers strike
© Getty Images

While Belfast boasted a tradition of humanitarianism and philanthropy, political divides were evident and the primacy of industry, trade and commerce in the city meant that the provision of adequate welfare support for those in need was overlooked. Some 2,000 children between the ages of 10 and 14 alternated their days between the classroom and the linen mills, earning extra money to keep their families going. The health of workers was undoubtedly impaired and the position of women in the city was not helped by their low pay and, for many, appalling living and working conditions.

During the famine in 1845—49 many of the poor moved from rural areas into Belfast and Dublin. Famine workers were employed to undertake the second cut to the Lagan. Highly contagious diseases were rife, from smallpox to dysentery and typhus. Tuberculous killed thousands, and was most prevalent among female mill workers. By the end of the 19th century, trade unions were growing in popularity with 57 different unions. The 1907 Dock Strike brought Belfast to a standstill for four months with James Larkin managing for a time to unite Protestant and Catholic workers and even the police joining in the dispute. The strike was eventually ended by the use of troops.

While the wealth of the city was driven by the linen mills, factories and shipyards and their owners, it was the men, women and children who worked in them who deserve special recognition.

Neighbourhoods and Livelihoods

Seafarers & Settlers

The shipyard was no stranger to art. Thomas Carnduff published his first book, 'Songs of the Shipyard', while employed at Workman Clark and spent his retirement as resident caretaker at the Linen Hall Library.

Glenn Patterson

EastSide & Ballymacarrett

In 1776 Benjamin Edwards set up his **glassworks in East Belfast**'s Short Strand, followed by John Smylie's Glass House Company, a clay pipe and vitriol works. The **Belfast ropeworks,** established in 1876 employed thousands of men and women. There was a felt works, galvanising works, foundries, engineering works and copper & chemical works.

Sailortown & Little Italy

The neighbourhood closest to the Harbour was called Sailortown, after its residents: **sailors, merchant seamen and dockers**. The area was renowned for its numerous pubs, and shops that sold everything from **a needle to an anchor**. Little Italy was named after the immigrants who settled there.

City Side & the Market

At the Market area, **traders and farmers** from all over Ulster sold fruit and vegetables, meat and livestock, hay and straw. The **C&C Minerals factory** was established near the Market, alongside the Inglis Bakery. City Side had the Musgrave Iron Works, the Cromac Foundry and a disinfecting station.

Photos
Docker's Mural
© Titanic Belfast

Queen's Island Annuals
© Titanic Quarter Limited

HOYFM.HW.H1555 Queen's Road and shipyard men leaving work
Robert John Welch, (1859-1936); Harland and Wolff
© National Museum NI. Ulster Transport Museum Collection

Society & Sociability

fun & games

When Queen's or Dargan's Island was first created in the 1850s, for a decade it was **a People's Park**, with a crystal palace, a botanical collection, a small zoo, fetes and firework displays. It was **a pleasant retreat** for workers who paid a penny to be ferried across the river.

politics & power

The area suffered from secterian and social tensions. In 1907 **labour strikes brought chaos** to Belfast, with rallies held at the Custom House. Unskilled workers called for better pay and union recognition. Trades across the city were united on strike: **dockers, carters, shipyard workers**, firemen, boilermakers, transport workers, and workers from the tobacco factories and Sirocco works.

culture & creativity

The harbour and shipyards were **inspirational for poets, playwrights, musicians and artists.** James Glen Wilson documented the early port in oils, Carnduff wrote his poems and **Jimmy Ellis wrote his plays**. H&W had their two male voice choirs singing at ship launches, and the Queen's Island Annuals shared jokes and witty illustrations.

Labour & Skills

building ships

Building a ship required **numerous trades**, welders, riveters, shipwrights, stagers all building the ship based on the draughtsman's plans. **Tracers replicated plans** on linen for the platers and plumbers, while painters and carpenters finished the job. The typists, secretaries, message boys, accountants and management all kept the yards busy.

loading & unloading

Belfast was **a hive of busy quays**: with dockers, carters and coal heavers loading and unloading at the coal yards, **cranes, and coal boats**; Donegall Quay's goods sheds and steamers bound for Liverpool & Glasgow; and Queen's Quay, with its ferry and train station.

women's work

By 1900 there were 50–60,000 women & girls working in **linen production** in Ulster, preparing flax, spinning yarn, winding bobbins, weaving cloth, laundering & packing the product. The ropeworks & tobacco factories also employed **women workers**, their nimble fingers making fishing nets and stripping tobacco leaves.

Neighbourhoods and Livelihoods

Tight–knit communities, at work and at play, have always surrounded and supported the maritime industry of Belfast. As the city expands, capturing the stories within these communities is more important than ever.

Visible heritage

1   Barrow Square
2   Custom House
3   McHugh's Pub
4   Mission to Seafarers
5   Pat's Bar
6   Rotterdam Bar
7   Sinclair Seamen's Church
8   St George's Church
9   St Joseph's Church, Sailortown
10 Dockers Mural
11 Templemore Baths
12 Victoria Park
13 St George's Market
14 The American Bar
15 Workman Clark WWI Memorial
16 Garmoyle Street
17 McMaster Street
18 Yardmen Statue
19 Titanic Memorial Garden
20 Public Records Office NI

Hidden heritage

21 Belfast Castle (original)
22 Canberra Bar & Rising Tide
23 Docker's Corner
24 1907 Dock Strike
25 Ferry
26 Ferry Office
27 HMS Maidstone
28 Little Italy
29 Queen's Quay Railway Station
30 People's Park/Crystal Palace
31 Riverside Corn Mill
32 Queen's Square

Victoria Channel

Herdman Channel

E
N —— S
W

maritime mile
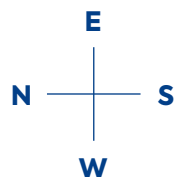
27 Musgrave Channel

12 Connswater

EASTSIDE

15 Thompson Dock

INNOVATION QUAY

17

11

18

Queen's Road

TITANIC QUARTER

30 TITANIC BELFAST

River Lagan

BALLYMACARRETT

SHORT STRAND

20

Pollock Basin

Barnett Dock

Abercorn Basin

River Lagan

York Dock

31

1

5

SAILORTOWN

Clarendon Dock

6

4

10

CITY QUAYS

29

QUEEN'S QUAY

16

14

26

22

9

25

32

23

7

DONEGALL QUAY

THE MARKETS

2

13

26

24

3

8

BELFAST CITY CENTRE

21

19 BELFAST CITY HALL

Map data ©2022 Google

Neighbourhoods and Livelihoods

'Buttons & Bourds'...
having a job was everything and without these dockers and yardsmen had no chance of a day's work.

Sailortown resident

5 6 14 22

30
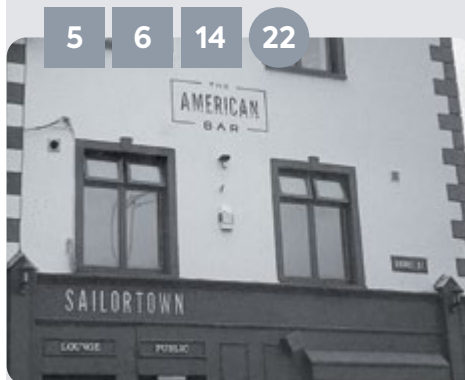
Bars and Dockers Corner

Sailortown was renowned for numerous bars frequented by dockers, seamen, carters and riveters. Names such as The Magic, The Majestic, Bennys, Barneys and Valeries have come and gone, others have changed from the White Horse to the Clarendon Bar to McKennas. The Rotterdam Bar, once a popular venue for traditional music, was built on the site of a hostel for seamen, and reportedly still contained the shackles used when transporting prisoners. The remnants of the Rotterdam and the adjoining Pat's Bar are still visible in Sailortown. The American Bar, established in the 1860s, was also known as the site of Docker's Corner. This was where dockers would gather every morning hoping to be selected for work. Following the labour strike in 1907, they wore dockers buttons that signified union membership and guaranteed work, passed from generation to generation.

Photo
American Bar
© Maritime Belfast Trust

Crystal Palace and the People's Park

Dargan's Island was formed in 1847 from the excavation of the Lagan and was originally named after the engineer who led the dredging project.

It was firstly a place of public leisure, known as the People's Park, with a crystal palace, gardens, zoo, numerous bathing boxes, an aquarium, aviary and a ferry service.

There were regular fetes, firework displays and equestrian events. It was a pleasant retreat for the town's workers – open to all who paid a penny to be ferried across the river. It was renamed Queen's Island following Queen Victoria's visit to Belfast in 1849.

The Crystal Palace was destroyed by fire in 1864 and the lands turned over to shipbuilding.

Photo
Belfast Crystal Palace, constructed in 1851 on Queen's Island
© PlaceNI

13

The Market

St George's Market, a covered Victorian building, was constructed in the 1890s on the site of a market dating back to 1604. St George's is still in use today as a general market, selling some of the country's best local produce, and crafts by local artisans.

The Market community, located at the edge of the River Lagan, is one of the oldest working–class communities in Belfast. It was once a mix of residential, commercial, and industrial sites, from markets to linen mills, distilleries, foundries and factories.

Locals can remember livestock being herded through the streets of Belfast, to market, to the abattoirs or to be exported from the docks. The Calder Water Fountain, beside the Custom House, was built in 1859 for the cattle and sheep herded through Queen's Square.

15

Workman Clark War Memorial

A Memorial for employees who died in WWI, including Frank Workman's only son Edward, is displayed on the side of the Thompson Dock pump–house, across from the former north yard of Workman Clark. It is beside Alexandra Dock, home to HMS Caroline, a survivor of World War I's Battle of Jutland.

Created by sculptor Sophia Rosamund Praeger, the three–sided memorial had engraved panels depicting scenes of the shipyard and the war. Following the closure of Workman Clark in the 1930s, the memorial was moved to the Thompson Dock pumphouse.

The relief panels were lost at some point, so the memorial is now a list of the names of Workman Clark employees and features a side profile of Edward Workman.

7 **8** **9**

Churches

From Sailortown to East Belfast, there were churches for dockers and shipyard workers, visiting seamen and migrant workers. The oldest church, the Chapel of the Ford, now the site of St George's Church on High Street, was located close to the edge of the River Lagan, and used by travellers to offer prayers for a safe journey before they attempted crossing the untamed river. The congregation for Sinclair Seaman's Church grew out of mission work among the seamen arriving in the Port of Belfast. Designed by Belfast architect Charles Lanyon in the 1850s, the church is rich with maritime artefacts. St Joseph's Church, known as the Chapel on the Quay, with its spire often the first and last sight of home for generations of seamen, dates from the 1870s. Harland & Wolff even constructed 'wee tin churches' – to be exported to support overseas mission work but an example remains on the Glen Road in West Belfast.

Neighbourhoods and Livelihoods

Joseph Black, son of a Belfast wine merchant, discovered carbon dioxide and his principles were used by James Watt to develop the steam engine.

Mary Ann McCracken
1770–1866

Mary Ann McCracken was a social reformer and activist who fought for the rights of women and petitioned for education, child welfare and prison reform. She was known for distributing papers to American emigrants campaigning for the abolition of slavery. Over the course of her life, she witnessed the expansion of Belfast from a small port into an important industrial city. Her father Captain John McCracken was on the board of Belfast's Charitable Society and Mary Ann helped found its ladies committee in the 1820s. She remained committed to campaigning for social reform until she was nearly 90.

Photo
BELUM.Y18144 Mary McCracken and child
F. J. Biggar
© National Museum NI. Ulster Museum Collection

Lady Montgomery Pirrie
1857–1935

Margaret married William Pirrie in 1879, who had already become a partner in Harland and Wolff. Her brother Alexander Carlisle was the general manager at H&W, and Margaret was hugely involved in the business of the shipyard. She was recognised as the Royal Victoria Hospital in Belfast's single most important benefactor for her fundraising. Margaret was also the first female Justice of the Peace in Belfast, and after the death of her husband was appointed the first female President of H&W for a time.

Photo
Viscountess Margaret Montgomery Carlisle Pirrie
© Harland & Wolff, Shipbuilders to the World

Thomas Andrews
1873–1912

Sir Frederick Rebbeck
1877–1961

James Larkin: The trade unionist Larkin grew up in Liverpool and worked as a sailor & docker, developing an interest in socialism and joining the Dockers Union. Larkin visited Belfast in 1907, with the aim of recruiting Belfast's dockers into the National Union of Dock Labourers. In a bid for better wages and working conditions, the dockers went on strike in June, and were joined by 10,000 workers from trades across the city.

The nephew of Lord Pirrie, Thomas Andrews Junior joined Harland & Wolff as a gentleman apprentice when he was 16. He trained as a draughtsman, and in 1907 became the managing director and head of the H&W drafting department. He travelled on board RMS Titanic as part of the Guarantee Group, alongside plumbers, fitters and electricians. Andrews was described as 'heroic until death' during Titanic's fateful journey. None of the nine guarantee group survived and Andrews body was never recovered.

Engineering apprentice Rebbeck began his career in Belfast, firstly at Victor Coates & Company, before joining Harland & Wolff. Rebbeck worked his way up through the business, becoming managing director of the engine works, and by 1930 he was appointed Chief Executive and Chairman. Rebbeck was in charge for the next thirty years. He was also a Harbour Commissioner and diversified the company into aircraft manufacturing and locomotive production. Rebbeck's eldest son Denis joined the company in 1935 as a graduate in mechanical sciences, and after managing H&W's Abercorn ordnance factory subsidiary, by 1946 he was H&W's Assistant Manager, helping to modernise Belfast shipbuilding, alongside his father, who he succeeded as Chief Executive and Chairman in 1962.

Neighbourhoods & Livelihoods

Labour & Skills

loading & unloading

SPOTLIGHT

Docker's Rest Hickson's Point

Mural of dockers located at Hickson Point on Titanic Belfast Plaza. Can be freely enjoyed by visitors 24/7.

The mural, a collaboration between leading local artists Terry Bradley and Friz, aims to attract and engage visitors by showcasing the city's maritime history, as well as Belfast's contemporary art movement. It is located at the outside wall of Hickson's Point – Titanic Belfast's newest shipyard themed hospitality space, which serves up traditional music, food and drink.

Significance of using local artists and contemporary art medium to tell our stories

With so many stories to tell we can use art in its many forms to help engage visitors and share these stories. This mural, commissioned by Titanic Belfast Ltd, depicts dockers from Sailortown. It provides a touch point to tell the story of Belfast's trading past, as well as its local neighbourhoods and social history.

Other examples of art installations that have been inspired by Belfast's maritime story include:
– The Yardsmen, East Belfast
– The Kit, Titanic Quarter
– Dividers, Clarendon Dock

> The most famous painting of the shipyards in their heyday — and possibly the artist's best — is 'The Launch', by William Conor (c.1923). Conor's paintings were likened to folk songs in picture form.
>
> Glenn Patterson

Belfast Shipbuilders

Belfast was described as a suitable place for shipbuilding as far back as 1613, but it wasn't until the arrival of William Ritchie in 1791 that the first commercial shipyard was established in Belfast.

Before Harland & Wolff there were a dozen small yards and foundries building ships, from Coates & Young who launched the first iron steamship in 1838, to Workman Clark who at one point were producing more tonnage than H&W.

Over the years these shipbuilders have changed names and ownership, gone into ship repair or closed their yards, and it was H&W that survived, acquiring either companies or their yards.

In 2003, Harland & Wolff built their last ship, the Anvil Point.
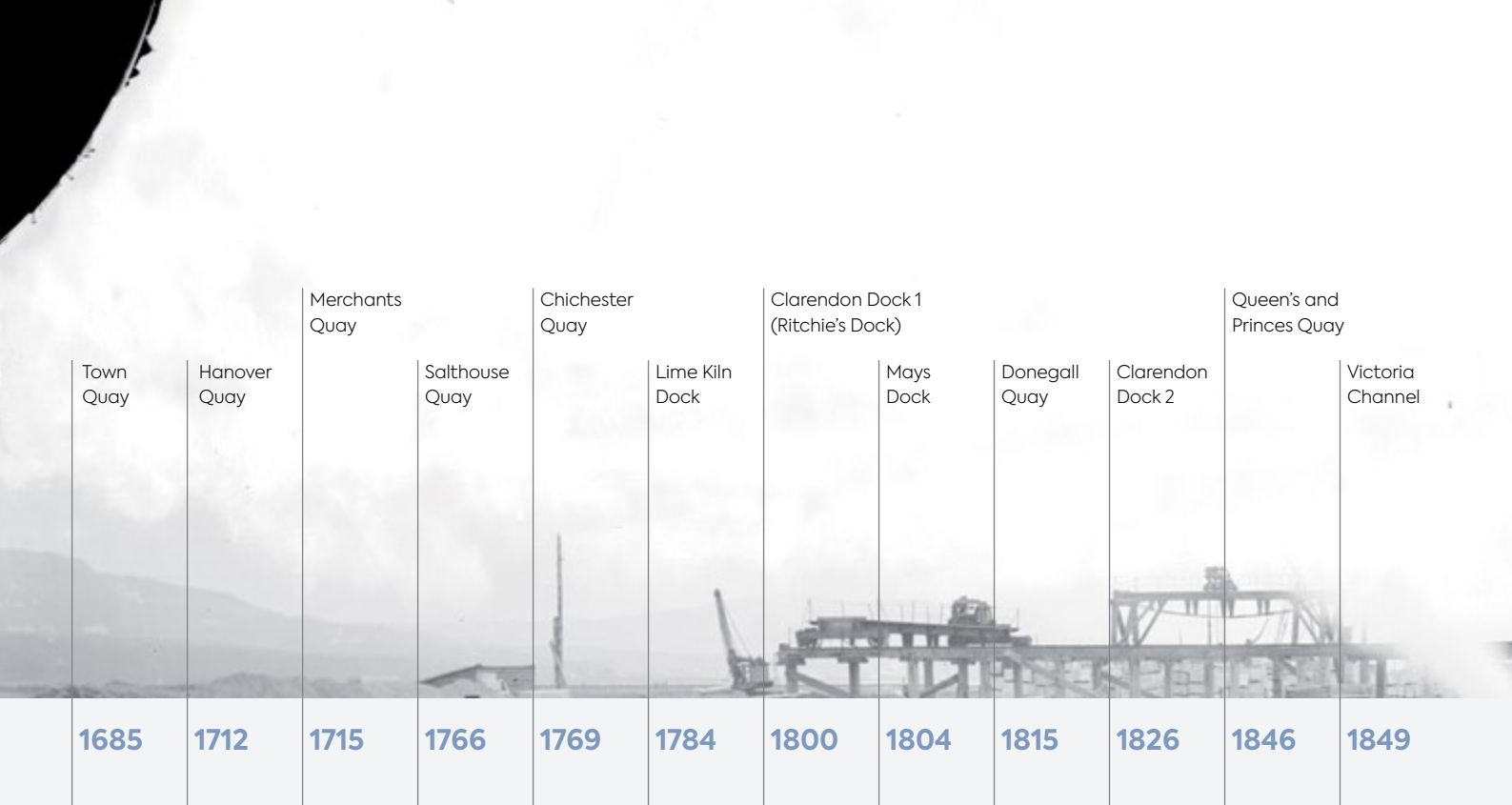
Author CS Lewis's grandfather was one of the owners of McIlwaine Lewis & Co, and they built the first ship called Titanic in 1888.

Belfast still holds the world record for riveting. Scot John Moir who worked for Workman Clark, drove 11,209 rivets in 9 hours on 5th June 1918.

Family tree / flow chart

- **LAGAN FOUNDRY** 1798
- **COATES & YOUNG** 1830

- **MACILWAINE LEWIS, ULSTER IRON WORKS** 1863
- **MACILWAINE & McCOLL** 1885

- **WILLIAM RITCHIE** 1791
- **CHARLES CONNELL & SONS** 1820

- **HUGH RITCHIE** 1798
- **JOHN RITCHIE & SONS** 1807

- **RITCHIE & McLAINE** 1811
- **ROBERT HICKSON** 1853
- **KIRWIN & McCUNE** 1838

- **WORKMAN CLARK** 1879

- **ALEXANDER McLAINE & SONS** 1828
- **EDWARD JAMES HARLAND & CO** 1858
- **THOMPSON & KIRWIN** 1839

- **HARLAND & WOLFF** 1861

Fire safety was a huge concern for the shipyards, after several fires devastated various yards. Harland & Wolff had fire safes in strongrooms, a 24–hour fire watch for decades, and their own fire service.

Ship launches were celebrated and well attended events across the yards. Royals and VIPs often launched ships, using bottles of champagne to name them. To ensure the bottle always broke when hitting a ship's hull, a worker would make a small cut to weaken the bottle.

Town Quay	Hanover Quay	Merchants Quay	Salthouse Quay	Chichester Quay	Lime Kiln Dock	Clarendon Dock 1 (Ritchie's Dock)	Mays Dock	Donegall Quay	Clarendon Dock 2	Queen's and Princes Quay	Victoria Channel
1685	**1712**	**1715**	**1766**	**1769**	**1784**	**1800**	**1804**	**1815**	**1826**	**1846**	**1849**

Docks & Quays
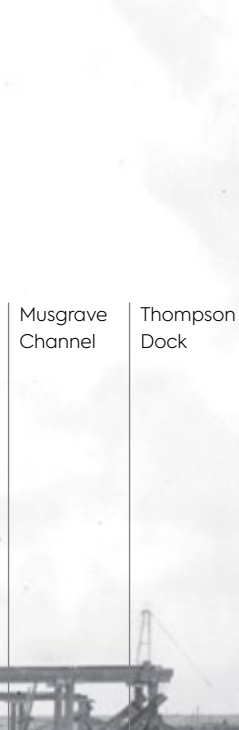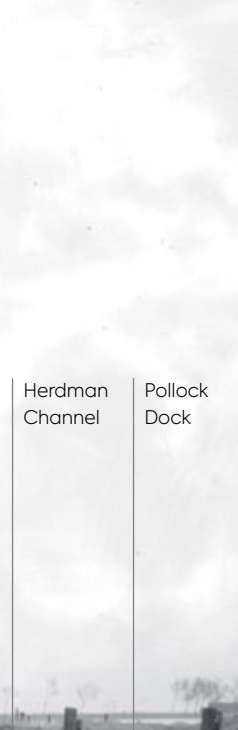
Clarendon
Wet Dock

Hamilton
Dock and
Abercorn
Basin

Dufferin
and
Spencer
Docks

Alexandra
Dock

Victoria
Wharf

York
Dock

Musgrave
Channel

Thompson
Dock

Herdman
Channel

Pollock
Dock

Stormont
Wharf

Belfast
Dock

| 1851 | 1867 | 1872 | 1889 | 1892 | 1894 | 1903 | 1908 | 1933 | 1933 | 1962 | 1965 |

Photo
BELUM.Y.W.10.46.31 Alexandra Graving Dock.
Photograph taken during building of dock, 1886
Robert John Welch, (1859–1936).
© National Museum NI. Ulster Museum Collection

Belfast companies still trading

Photos left to right

BELUM.Yt4397 View of giant crane in Harland & Wolff shipyard
NI Tourist Board
© Tourism NI. Ulster Museum Collection

BELUM.U3145 Donegall Quay (c1854)
James Moore, 1819 – 1883
© National Museum NI. Ulster Museum Collection

BELUM.Y39038.79 Gustavus Heyn
© National Museum NI. Ulster Museum Collection

**HOYFM.ARH.197 Thorneycroft lorry belonging to
Cantrell & Cochrane Ltd**
© National Museum NI. Ulster Transport Museum Collection

Background photo
Main Offices
© JP Corry

Cantrell & Cochrane (C&C Ltd)

The company was set up by Thomas Joseph Cantrell in 1852, who was a medical practitioner and the inventor of ginger ale. After forming his own chemist business, Cantrell & Dyas, which manufactured ginger ale, mineral waters, and soft drinks, Cantrell went into business with Henry Cochrane in 1868. By 1884 Cantrell & Cochrane (C&C) had become the largest soft drink manufacturer in the world across sites in Belfast and Dublin, with an annual production of 30 million bottles at each site. C&C is still in existence today, and owns the Magners, Bulmers and Tennants brands

Tedfords

Tedfords Ship Chandlers, Sail & Tentmakers, was started by James Tedford in Donaghadee, and moved to Donegal Quay in Belfast during the 1850's. Tedford expanded into ship–owning, his ships travelling to South America and the Caribbean. The sail loft sits at the original level of the Donegal Quay, and the dockside was once directly in front of it, with the warehouse used for sail making said to date from 1760–1790. The Tedford's sailmaking business is still in existence in larger premises on the Ormeau Road in south Belfast.

Harland & Wolff

The company first began as Edward James Harland & Co, after Harland acquired his employer Robert Hickson's iron shipyard on Queen's Island in 1858. Gustav Wolff became partner in 1861, and the company is still very much in existence today. They designed over 1700 ships across yards in Belfast, Glasgow, Londonderry, London, Southampton and Liverpool. Today the company specialises in ship repair, and offshore and maritime engineering, and has four sites across the UK. At its height it employed 30,000 workers in Belfast, and another 20,000 across their other UK yards. Harland & Wolff was acquired by Infrastrata in 2019.

JP Corry

In 1814 John Corry established a small timber business on the banks of the River Lagan with William Montgomery trading under the name Corry and Montgomery. The firm became JP Corry and were one of Harland & Wolff's earliest customers, ordering 12 ships. The company supplied materials for some of Belfast's landmark buildings, and has 17 branches across Northern Ireland supplying building materials to trade and the public.

Heyn

The business was set up in 1823 by Gustavus Heyn, who married Captain Pirrie's daughter Letitzia. He was also a Harbour Commissioner, and bought and sold sailing ships. In 1877 his sons set up the Ulster Steamship Co Ltd. Ships were built for Heyn by Workman Clark, McIlwaine & McColl and Harland & Wolff. G Heyn & Sons became the Heyn Group in 1896 and are still in business today as stevedores and agents, providing engineering and environmental services.

Acknowledgements

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Lisa Rea Currie and EastSide Partnership for facilitating a discussion on the history of East Belfast and its maritime links.

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Discover more

The Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) holds a huge collection of documents from Harland & Wolff dating from 1861 to 1987, as well as archives for Mutters & Zoon, Victor Coates, Workman Clark and others. The H&W collection includes minute books detailing key decisions throughout the company's history, sea trial records, photographs, and other items that document most aspects of the history of Belfast's famous shipbuilding firm. The Harland & Wolff archive is one of the most extensive business archives held in the Public Record Office, with around 16,000 documents.

PRONI also has a large collection of historic maps relating to the development of Belfast Harbour.

The National Museum of Northern Ireland also has an extensive archive of Harland and Wolff documents and photographs. The company's official photographer, Robert Welch, took hundreds of images of the shipyard when building its most iconic ships, and the images, taken on glass plate negatives, are a fascinating glimpse into the business. NMNI also has a large collection of ships' plans and technical booklets relating to many of H&W's ships, as well as archives on Workman Clark and other shipbuilders. They also have William Dargan's personal train carriage.

Historical Timeline

The timeline notes key people and events which influenced Belfast's industrial and maritime landscape over the course of its 400–year history.

Top row (above timeline):

Small village established at the lowest fording point of the River Lagan

Carrickfergus's Custom House relocates to Belfast bringing new trade into the town

Glass House Company establishes on banks of Lagan at Short Strand

BALLAST BOARD ACT

Corporation for preserving and improving the Port and Harbour of Belfast is established

Ballast Board become Belfast Harbour Commissioners with new legislation vesting the management of Belfast Harbour in 17 Commissioners

Robert Hickson establishes an iron shipyard on Queen's Island

Custom House built

Edward Harland goes into business with Gustav Wolff after acquiring Hickson's Yard

Albert Clock is built on reclaimed land on the banks of the Lagan, gradually gaining its lean

St George's Market is built on the site of early markets

Harland & Wolff expand their shipyard and build their ornate Drawing Offices

Titanic slipways and Arrol Gantry are built to construct H&W's biggest passenger liners, RMS Olympic and RMS Titanic

During WW1, H&W and Workman Clark make numerous naval vessels: cruisers, gun boats, aircraft carriers and mine sweepers

Long Bridge completed across the River Lagan

Timeline years:

688 | 1613 | 1640 | 1688 | 1752 | 1769 | 1784 | 1785 | 1791 | 1839 | 1847 | 1848 | 1853 | 1854 | 1856 | 1861 | 1868 | 1869 | 1870 | 1876 | 1879 | 1880 | 1881 | 1885 | 1906 | 1908 | 1911 | 1912 | 1914

Bottom row (below timeline):

Belfast declared a free port in the Charter of Belfast

King James I authorised the construction of a small wharf on the River Lagan

The Belfast Charitable Society was formed, building a poor house and infirmary

William Ritchie establishes his Belfast shipyard, launching his first ship, The Hibernian

Chichester Quay constructed at the lower end of High Street

William Dargan appointed to straighten the Lagan and deepen the Harbour

Dargan Island – later Queen's Island is created

Belfast & Co Down Railway established on Queen's Quay

Belfast Harbour Offices opened

Cantrell & Cochrane established selling mineral waters and gingerale

St Joseph's Church is built in Sailortown

Frank Workman establishes a small shipyard, and George Clark joins the business in 1880 forming Workman Clark

Belfast Ropeworks Company established by Gustav Wolff

Sirocco Works are established at Short Strand by Samuel Davidson, by 1904, the site spanned 40 acres

Belfast City Hall is completed

Thompson Dock is completed

RMS Titanic makes her maiden voyage and strikes an iceberg on 14th April, sinking hours later, losing around 1500 passengers and crew

Timeline

1938 — Belfast City Airport opens

1941 — Belfast Blitz devastated large parts of the city and industries in WWII

Queen Elizabeth II bridge is opened

1960 — H&W launch their last passenger liner, the SS Canberra

1966 — H&W launch their drilling rig, the Sea Quest off three slipways

1969 — H&W's gantry crane Goliath is constructed

1970 — The Belfast Urban Project begins, leading to widespread demolition across Sailortown to build a new motorway

Samson joins Goliath on the Belfast skyline

1974

1989 — Laganside Corporation set up to redevelop the waterfront area

First Tall Ships visit to Belfast

1991

1993 — H&W launch their last ship, the Anvil Point

1994 — The Lagan Weir is completed, controlling the tidal flow of the River Lagan

1995 — Titanic Park is formed, later renamed Titanic Quarter

Waterfront Hall opens

1997 — NI Science Park – now Catalyst Inc established

TITANIC FOUNDATION

1999

2000 — Odyssey Arena and Pavilion are completed for the Millennium

2008

2010 — Connswater Community Greenway begins work

Belfast Met opens its Titanic Quarter campus

Public Record Office of Northern Ireland on site

2011

2012 — Titanic Belfast opens on 31st March 2012, marking RMS Titanic's centenary. It wins World's Leading Tourist Attraction in 2016.

ARC Apartments completed – welcoming new waterfront residents

SS Nomadic opens after restoration as a museum ship

2013

2015 — New Lagan Weir footbridge opens

HMS Caroline opens as a museum ship

2016 — Sam Thompson bridge opens, connecting Victoria Park to the Belfast Harbour estate
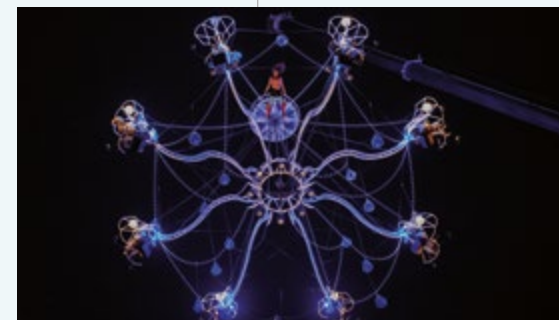
2017 — H&W Drawing Offices restored into Titanic Hotel Belfast.

2018 — Titanic Walkway & Great Light are completed
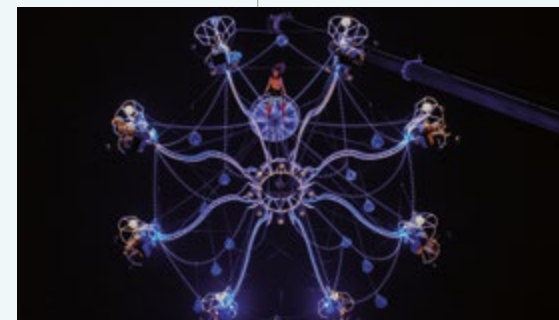
2019 — Belfast Harbour Cruise terminal opens in response to increasing numbers of cruise ships
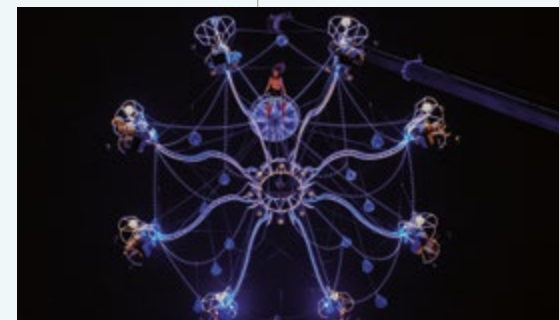
2022 — 10 years of Titanic Belfast

175 years of Belfast Harbour Commissioners

150 years of St Joseph's Church

Open air spectacle, Cristal Palace

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#MaritimeBelfast   #belfaststories

maritime mile

The Maritime Mile has been the focus area for our research, from the point where the three rivers met and the small village of Belfast began. The Maritime Mile is an award winning initiative developed by Maritime Belfast Trust in association with Belfast Harbour, Odyssey Trust and Titanic Quarter Ltd.