

BELFAST CIVIC FESTIVAL TRAIL



Belfast City Hall

2. City Centre Northwards to
The Irish News

Distance: 1½ miles approx.

Time: allow 1 hour not counting stops

The trail starts at Belfast's splendid City Hall, opened in 1906 at a cost of £360,000. Inside the railings, the statues of mayors and MPs, Victorian knights of economic substance, include one of Sir Edward Harland, the Yorkshire engineer who built up the famous Belfast

shipyard, Harland & Wolff. Stand in front of the large statue of Queen Victoria, facing down to the shops in Donegall Place and Royal Avenue.



Pearl Assurance Building



On the corner of the square to your left is the enormous block of the Scottish Provident Institution, decorated with dozens of lion's heads and queens. It was built at the same time (1902) and by the same architects (Young & Mackenzie) as the five-storey pink-coloured building on the corner to your right, the Pearl Assurance. Note the asymmetrical skyline and the heads of Edward VII, Queen Victoria and Queen Alexandra. Across the road is a fine sandstone linen warehouse of 1869, also pink, which has been well restored by Marks & Spencer. Next door, on the corner of Donegall Place, Robinson & Cleaver's copper domes and carved facade (featuring some of the store's distinguished customers, e.g. the Maharajah of Cooch Behar) were preserved after the store closed in 1984.

TSB

Cross the road at the lights and walk down Donegall Place, once a fashionable residential area for gentry and merchants. Turn right into pleasantly pedestrianised Castle Lane. Pause near the flower sellers at Castle Arcade. By 1790 the linen industry was booming and Callender St, on the right, was the main depot for pressing, weighing and packing the cloth. Calendering is the smoothing process that imparts the final sheen and beauty to bleached linen.

Straight ahead five streets meet at Arthur Square, the oldest square in the city, named after Sir Arthur Chichester, founder of Belfast. This Elizabethan adventurer, an able (and ruthless) lieutenant of the Queen's Lord Deputy in





Ireland, defeated the Clondeboye O'Neills and was given the town lock, stock and barrel, in 1603 as a reward for services rendered. Now with a pretty bandstand and clock, the square is a haunt of buskers and fire-and-brimstone preachers, a place where tired shoppers sit eating ice cream. September 1870 saw the publication from offices in

Arthur St, off to the right, of Ireland's first halfpenny newspaper, the *Belfast Evening Telegraph*.

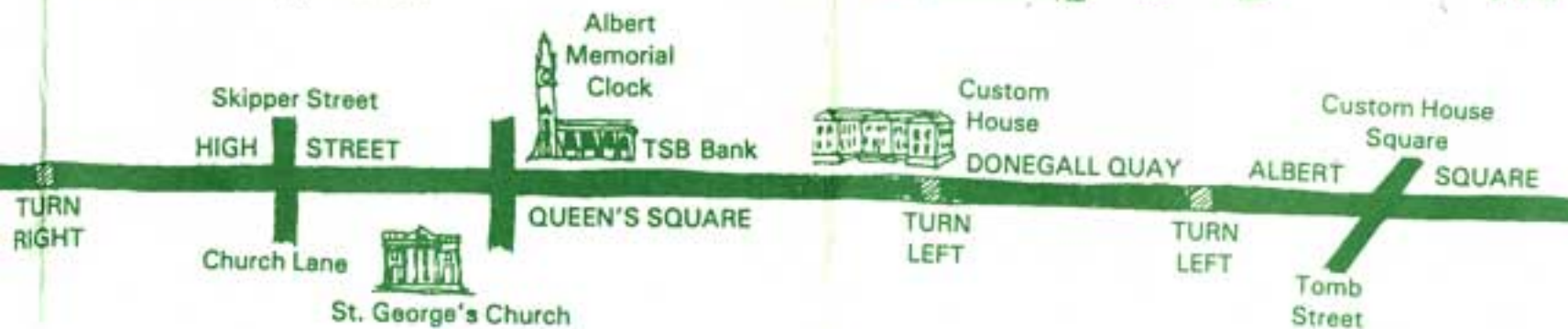
Going down Ann St, note on your left the half-dozen small courts and 'entries' — narrow alleyways — some of which still connect with High St. In the 19th century half Belfast's streets were like this. Joy's Entry preserves the name of the family which published the first British daily newspaper, the *Belfast News Letter*, that celebrated its 250th anniversary in 1987. Printed in this entry for many years, the paper was founded by Francis Joy, whose ancestor came to Ulster with Chichester. Under his grandson, Henry Joy, the newspaper supported the Volunteers, the liberal movement which swept Ireland in the late 18th century. Another of Francis's grandsons, Henry Joy McCracken, was executed for his part in the United Irishmen's rebellion in 1798.

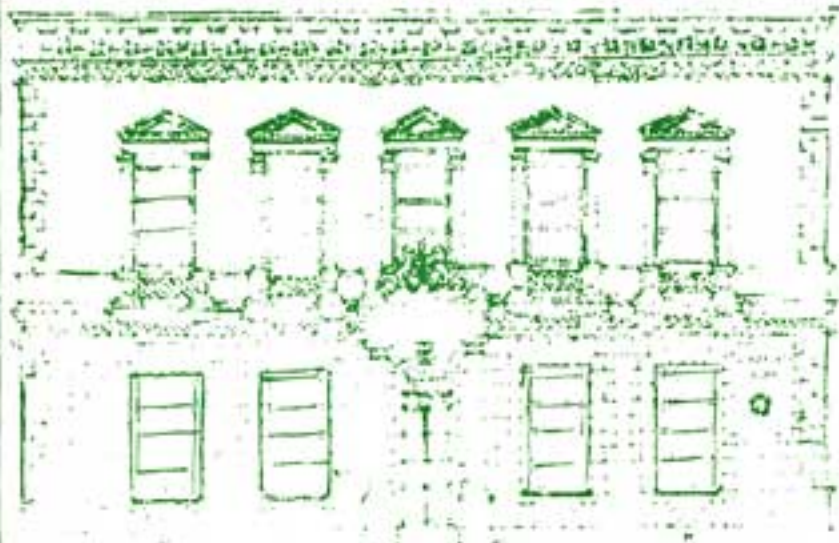
Turn left through the green arch of Pottinger's Entry. It is opposite an umbrella shop where a delightful piece of Belfast eccentricity catches the eye — sticking out from the wall at first-floor level a hand at the end of a blue sleeve grasps a gold umbrella. In 1822 Pottinger's Entry had 34 houses and was a smart address. The most interesting building today is the old Morning Star public house which has been carefully preserved.

Emerging into High St, turn right, towards the clock tower, with the huge cranes of the shipyard beyond. Across the road are the copper domes and charming red and yellow facade of the National Bank of 1897 (charming, that is, apart from the modern ground-floor frontage), now a Bank of Ireland branch. Some of Belfast's best buildings are banks, as we shall see. Next to it are the old Imperial Buildings. Both are dwarfed by River House, a 13-storey slab of offices. The corner of High St, and Victoria St, ends with an imposing Anglican church, St George's, opened in 1816. The magnificent classical portico once graced Ballyscullion House, a palatial house near Bellaghy which was started by Fredrick Hervey, Earl Bishop of Derry. He never got round to finishing it. After his death it was dismantled and the facade moved here. A very long time ago, the Lagan river flowed past this spot, and so did the little Farset river, which still runs underneath High Street. The ancient Chapel of the Ford, Belfast's original parish church, which stood here then, was where William III stopped to offer a prayer en route to the Boyne in 1690.

The Albert Memorial Clock Tower, with a niche statue of the Queen's Consort in his Garter robes, was designed in 1865 by W.J. Barre who won the commission in a

Custom House

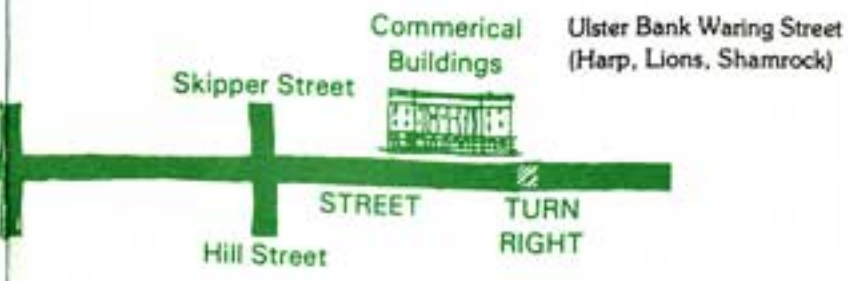




Northern Bank Waring Street

competition. He died aged 37 in 1867 — the year the tower was completed. Its pronounced tilt from the vertical — about four feet — was already very noticeable in 1901. The 19th-century sloblands on which it was built provided an unreliable foundation. Beyond the tower, the reassuringly solid building in white stone (now a TSB computer centre) opened in 1852 as the Northern Bank's head office. The architect was the distinguished Sir Charles Lanyon. He was capable of fierce professional jealousy and was not above string-pulling to get commissions. Chagrined at coming second to young Barre in the clock tower competition, he tried to pinch the job! Lanyon designed many excellent buildings in Belfast, several of which lie ahead on this trail.

Cross Victoria St, at the lights and continue down Queen's Square. Your goal is the Custom House, the large mellow yellow Italianate building on the far side of the swirling traffic.



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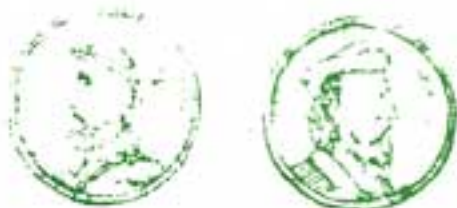
Cross, again at the lights — be patient! — and pause on the traffic island to admire the splendid E-shaped rear of the Custom House, built by Lanyon in 1857, before scooting round to the front. The pavement is not the best place from which to view the seaward facade, but by standing near the Calder Fountain you can see the sculptured pediment, with Britannia, Neptune and Mercury gazing out to sea. The old fountain, now derelict, was erected to a Royal Navy



Northern Whig & Belfast Post (Northern Whig House)

commander who installed 10 cattle troughs in Belfast in the 1840s. An inscription across the top reads: 'A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast'.

Passing the grand public toilets, make your way back via Albert Square to Victoria St. Cross to Waring St, and walk down to the lacy railings and lovely cast-iron lamp standards of the Ulster Bank Head



Northern Bank

Church Street

Royal Avenue

Irish News

ROYAL A

DONEGALL STREET

Talbot Street

St. Anne's Cathedral



Cathedral Gardens

University of Ulster



DONEGALL

TURN AROUND & RETRACE STEPS

STREET

TURN RIGHT

Cent



St. Annes Cathedral

Office of 1860. The sculptured rooftop figures of Britannia flanked by Justice and Commerce, and a dozen large classical-style pitchers, were carved by Thomas Fitzpatrick — the same craftsman who did the *Britannia et al* on Custom House. The bank's ornate hall has some extravagant plasterwork. The building escaped damage when a bomb destroyed virtually all the others round it during the Blitz.

Passing Skipper St, so named because sea captains lodged here in the 19th century, you soon reach Commercial Buildings, later

taken over by the Northern Whig Printing Company. This restrained granite block with Ionic pillars was built in 1822 as the city's new Exchange. Several roads meet at this important Exchange. The oldest public building in Belfast opened



Clifton



Belfast Library

in 1769 as a single-storey market house, it acquired an upper floor for balls and banquets - the Assembly Rooms - in 1777. The Belfast harp festival held here in 1792 marked a great revival of interest in traditional Irish music. A young organist and collector of songs, Edward Bunting, came to listen to the harpers, many blind and all very old, and recorded the sweet melodies. The Belfast Bank bought the Assembly Rooms in 1845 and hired Lanyon to make the building even more imposing.



house

Cross to the bank and turn up Donegall St. Pause opposite No. 59, the admirable facade of the *Belfast News Letter*, a building of 1873 now painted mushroomy brown, decorated with eight yellow lunettes containing portraits of literary personages (whose names the paper has forgotten), and a pretty little first-floor balcony with ironwork picked out in white and yellow. The paper's stance today is firmly Unionist and conservative.

St Anne's Anglican Cathedral next door was started in 1899 and took some 80 years to complete. The interior, with its enormously high nave and fine mosaic Baptistry ceiling, warrants a side trip. Continue up the street, past the art college (part of the University of Ulster), and across the lights. Pause opposite the blue-painted office of the *Irish News*, Northern Ireland's principal Nationalist paper, founded in 1855. It sports some nice gold lettering. The pub at your back is called The Front Page (what else). This is as far as you go. Further on is St Patrick's Catholic church, built in 1877 of sandstone that has not weathered well, and away at the end of the street, the spire of the city's Georgian Poorhouse. It opened in 1774 after a public lottery raised £7,000.



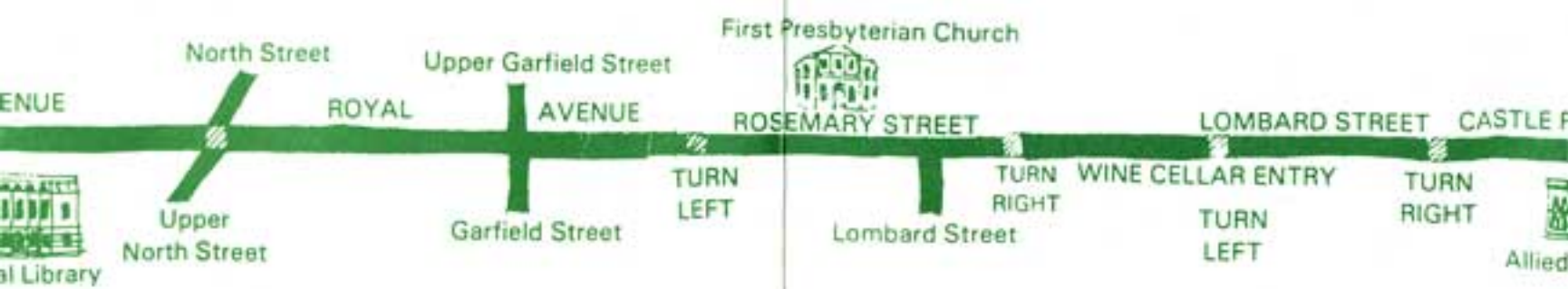
White's T

Retracing your steps to the lights, turn right, into Royal Avenue past the offices of the province's evening paper, the *Belfast Telegraph*, founded, as we have heard, in 1870. The Public Library next door is an impressive red sandstone block. It has a fine domed reference library and interesting pictures on the stairs. Further along is the Art Deco 1920s' Bank of Ireland, you find yourself looking down Royal Avenue. Walk down to Rosemary St and turn left to see the First Presbyterian Church (now Unitarian) built in 1783 by Roger Mulholland, with an elliptical interior, fine plasterwork and curved pews.



Bank of Ireland

Continue to the end of the street and turn right into three-cornered Wine Cellar Entry, with White's Tavern, Belfast's oldest pub (opened 1630, rebuilt 1790) on one side. Turn right again, into Lombard St, emerging thereafter



al Library

Allied



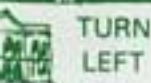
ern "since 1630"

into High St. The clothing store opposite, on the corner of Cornmarket, occupies the site of a 17th-c market house which had the inevitable gibbet outside. After the United Irishmen's revolt, many of the rebels were hanged here. According to one contemporary account: 'The gallows was seldom without its

occupant, the spikes had their revolting effigies, men were flogged through the streets . . . and all the time there was feasting at the Exchange.'

Turn right and walk up to Castle Place. The open space in front of the Old Bank Buildings (now a chainstore with tinted windows) was the scene in 1816 of the last public executions in Belfast, when two cotton weavers were hanged after a violent strike in 1816. Barre designed the bank on the right (now Allied Irish Bank). It was completed in 1868, after his death. The 18th-c white-washed tavern visible down Bank St (named after the Farset river bank, not the finance house) is Kelly's Cellars, where the United Irishmen plotted rebellion. It has an atmospheric ground-floor interior. Behind the tavern you can see the site of Belfast's first Roman Catholic church, St Mary's, opened in 1784. Return to Donegall Place and so back almost to where you started.

PLACE DONEGALL PLACE



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