

WE CAN BE HEROES

Titanic Belfast is the city's new icon, taking its place among buildings of international repute, such as Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao. Signature architecture can be catalytic in the successful regeneration of a city's waterfront and it is now Belfast's turn. From Sydney to Lisbon, Capetown to Shanghai, there are heroes behind the scenes who make it happen. *Estates Gazette's* **Nick Whitten** reports

The £100 million-plus Titanic Belfast is the world's largest visitor attraction dedicated to the ill-fated White Star Line ship. The 14,000sq m centre – twice the size of Belfast City Hall, opened on 31 March 2012, in time for the centenary.

The feat of designing, engineering and constructing the world-class building is comparable to building the leviathan ship.

Heritage was a central consideration during the design stage of the project. CivicArts, led by London-based US architect Eric Kuhne, masterplanned the entire Titanic Quarter scheme and designed the Titanic Belfast building. Kuhne says: "This is truly one of the most magnificent things we have ever worked on."

CivicArts worked closely with lead consultants Todd Architects in Belfast

to develop the detail, taking the scheme through planning and on to construction. Todd's managing director Paul Crowe says: "Todd Architects invested almost four years of work into this truly global project, delivering a building which has changed Belfast's skyline and will help transform international perceptions of the city itself."

"Developing a building that reflected the ingenuity, ambition and scale of Titanic was an immense professional challenge – one we are delighted to have met."

In 2009, Pat Doherty, chairman of Harcourt Developments, began construction at risk and ahead of government funding approval. Without this investment, the building would not have been completed in time for the centenary.

Titanic Belfast is the centrepiece of the £7 billion Titanic Quarter development,

Top right: Hundreds of skilled tradespeople from scores of firms contributed to the project.

Below: Workers put the final touches to the huge metal panels, similar in size to those on Titanic's hull.



one of Europe's largest urban waterfront regeneration schemes, transforming a 75-ha site on Belfast's River Lagan into a mixed-use maritime quarter with a mile-long waterfront.

The ground floor level totals 1,796sq m, which includes an 18-metre high wall covered in sheet metal panels, similar in size to those used on Titanic's hull.

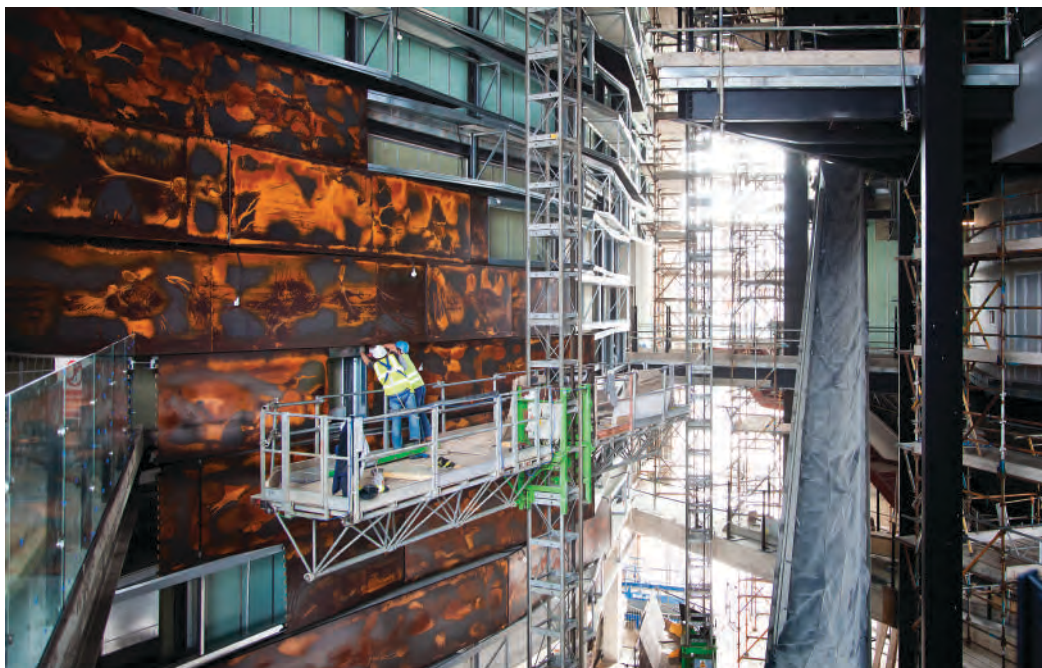
The ticketing desks are designed to duplicate wooden keel blocks akin to those which Titanic's massive 46,328 tonnes rested upon in the Titanic Dock. The entire external facade, which replicates four 27-metre high hulls, is clad in 3,000 individual silver anodized aluminium shards, which are enhanced by reflective pools of water surrounding the base of the structure. Harcourt Construction commissioned German facade constructor, Metallbau Früh, to install the aluminium facade, manufactured by EDM Spanwall.

Of the 3,000 panels, 2,000 are completely unique in form while none of the typical panels

repeat more than 20 times – presenting the image of a cut diamond. From the central atrium, a series of glass escalators, each over 20 metres long, stretch up through a jagged central void. In December 2009, the concrete pour to form Titanic Belfast's foundations became the largest in Ireland's history. MR Concrete oversaw 4,200 cubic metres of concrete from approximately 700 concrete lorry deliveries. More than 100 men from five different companies worked in shifts throughout a single night.

Harcourt Construction's Martin Conway says: "Overseeing the biggest concrete pour in Ireland was a major challenge, which required huge preparation and effort from those people involved."

David Gavaghan, chief executive of Titanic Quarter, adds: "The concrete pour had a strong historical resonance as it took place in sight of the famous slipway on which work began on the Titanic in 1909. The project brings the story of Titanic back to Belfast and helps the city celebrate its proud maritime history and achievements." **TQ**



STAR ATTRACTION

One hundred years after its sinking, the Titanic's tragic tale has gained legendary status, with travellers from 125 countries visiting Titanic Belfast in its first six months, smashing all the predictions. **Lucy Purdy** looks at how Titanic Belfast's interactive approach keeps the story alive



When the Titanic Belfast project opened to the public in March 2012, First Minister Peter Robinson hailed the complex “a must-see attraction, up with the best in the world” and symbolic of an exciting new era in Northern Ireland. As he cut the ribbon, he stood beside not only visiting dignitaries and journalists from every corner of the world but also to Cyril Quigley, who was just a young boy when he saw the Titanic being launched in 1911.

Titanic Belfast smashed predicted visitor numbers in its first five months, as 500,000th visitor Canadian Lynda Price and her family walked through the doors of the iconic building. The original target for the year was 425,000, but 800,000 visited.

Vast and multi-dimensional, Titanic Belfast extends over nine galleries and combines special effects, full-scale reconstructions and innovative interactive features to whisk visitors along on a fascinating and fresh exploration of the Titanic story, from its conception in Belfast in the early 1900s, through to her construction and launch, to the ship's tragic maiden voyage and catastrophic demise. The focus then shifts to the aftermath of the sinking and discovery of the wreck, then continues into the present day with a live undersea exploration centre.

Titanic Belfast opened its dramatic building 100 years after the great ship set sail. Designed by Event Communications and arranged over more than 3,000sq m of floorspace, the exhibition is the world's largest Titanic attraction. Exploring Edwardian Belfast, it charts the growth of the Harland and Wolff shipyard and tells the stories of both the passengers who sailed on Titanic and the scientists who found her. While it gives visitors an opportunity to peek behind the scenes of the ship, it also dispels some myths and legends about the tragedy.

Tim Husbands, the dynamic chief executive of Titanic Belfast, once described the ship as the second biggest brand in the world after Coca-Cola. Husbands joined Titanic Belfast after a tenure at Belfast's Waterfront Hall. He was also at the helm of the Tall Ships Festival in 2009 and instrumental in securing the MTV Music European Awards, held in TQ's Odyssey Arena in November 2011.

Husbands emphasises the interactive dimension to the experience – as far from staid museums as you can possibly get.

“We have nine galleries and have spent a great deal of time and investment to get the story accurate,” he says. “People might think that once they've seen the galleries, they've seen it all, but there are so many layers that there will always be something new to see. We're conscious that we need to keep things moving and fresh.”



Left: At Titanic Belfast, the visitor experience tells the full, fascinating story of the Titanic, not just her sinking. **Above right:** Nine large galleries take visitors on a powerful and multi-layered journey through Titanic's past.

To that end, Dr Robert Ballard, the marine archaeologist who led the first manned dive to the wreck of the Titanic in 1985, and has become synonymous with the ship's legend, was brought on board to get involved in the dedicated ocean exploration centre and immersive theatre at the complex. He has provided footage of the wreck to be incorporated into a hi-tech interactive floor, giving visitors a fly-over of Titanic's final resting place. Further remarkable images of Titanic, including a chandelier, remnants of equipment in the gymnasium, silver serving trays, champagne bottles and a ceramic doll's head, came from further successful dives, also spearheaded by Ballard.

He says: “Our first dive to Titanic started out in picture-perfect fashion on a gorgeous summer day. But it was a risky venture, as there was no back-up submarine.

“With no hope of rescue if something



“Our first dive to Titanic started out in picture-perfect fashion on a gorgeous summer day. But it was a risky venture, as there was no back-up submarine”

Dr Robert Ballard
Marine archaeologist

Right: The rusted steel sign welcoming visitors is in sharp contrast to the shimmering angles of the new building.





went wrong, we felt a bit like astronauts landing on a distant planet.

"Titanic will always continue to fascinate, because it is a tragedy worthy of Shakespeare himself. She was the largest moving object of her time; some claimed she was unsinkable, but in one of the greatest acts of hubris in history, she sank on her maiden voyage."

"For me, discovering Titanic has been an opportunity to motivate young people to become more interested in science and also to encourage further ocean exploration."

A connection has also been established with the Ryan Institute for Environmental, Marine and Energy Research at NUI Galway, as well as the University of Ulster and Queen's University, to provide local link-ups and learning opportunities.

"Right from the start, we saw this as a great opportunity to bring the project home," says Steve Lumby, designer at Event Communications. "We went from a starting point of a deep reluctance on the part of Belfast to tell this story. But there was a chance to bring the project right back to the slipway where Titanic was first built.

"My priority from day one was to bring the human story back to life – to put that first and regenerate Belfast's sense of pride in the craftsmanship and workmanship of this ship," says Lumby. "Any museum is nothing without a story and Titanic is a great story to tell, so it got a head start."

The project involved a dazzling amalgamation of media techniques: from an atmospheric cart-ride through the shipyards of boomtown Belfast, to a film projection which recreates the completed Titanic on the slipways outside, as well as other smaller but still thought-provoking flourishes such as touch-screen displays of Titanic folklore.

Above: A first class passenger room aboard Titanic, recreated.

Above right: Exhibits required months of meticulous research.

Right: A display showing how Titanic passengers were served meals through a maze of galleys and service rooms.



"More than other exhibitions I've worked on, this was interactive," says Lumby. "One of the most difficult aspects was in getting the balance right between celebrating Belfast's contribution to the Titanic and commemorating those who died. Originally, the sinking was only told from Belfast's point of view, unlike films or the TV series, which have focused exclusively on the tragedy itself. But a need for more detail became clear. We couldn't ignore the huge loss of life, but I hope we handled it as sensitively as is possible."

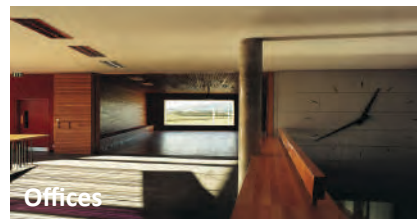
And was Lumby happy with the Titanic Belfast experience, as its 800,000 visitors appear to be? "I've been back recently and I can safely say that I'm happy with it. I can't compare the Titanic project with any of the others I've worked on.

"That's the best thing about working in this industry – you are always working on a completely unique design – and Titanic Belfast certainly is that." **TQ**

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Steve Lumby
Event Communications

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When US financial services giant Citi opened its Titanic Quarter offices in 2010, it came for the airport on its doorstep and the stream of highly qualified graduates. Now other big businesses are following in its footsteps.

Elizabeth Pears charts Belfast's corporate goldrush

CITI LIVING

Exceeding expectations:
Citi's impressive Gateway offices.



Belfast is finally having its moment. Critics are falling at its feet, with *National Geographic* naming it 2012's must-see destination and the *Financial Times* saying it's one of the top ten places in the UK to host a major event – no doubt, off the back of the success of the MTV Europe Music Awards it hosted in 2011.

That event was a pivotal moment for the city, and helped prove it had the infrastructure to meet the demands of an event that requires no fewer than 39 hotels to house production crews, celebrities and their entourages.

The city's boom in tourism attests to this rising profile. In 1998, a trickle of 400,000 tourists made the journey, while today that figure is closer to 1.6 million and rising.

The city is cosy and intimate, with a skyline that mixes the old – historical Georgian, Victorian and Edwardian buildings – and the new – contemporary

“The relatively open access to government is one of the aspects of doing business in Northern Ireland that our senior executives particularly appreciate”

Brian McAreavey
Managing director, Citi Belfast

designs such as the MAC, Belfast's brand new £18 million arts centre.

So, it's young, pretty and buzzing with energy. But it's also blossoming into a global financial and technology location, a decade of rapid economic growth inspiring developers to make significant investment in the area.

Driving forward the city's reinvention is Titanic Quarter – Europe's largest urban regeneration project and one of the five biggest waterfront projects in the world. The 75-ha development is a mix of apartments, stretches of bars and restaurants and affordable business space – among the cheapest in the developed world – overlooking the River Lagan.

As they say: “If you build it, they will come”. Titanic Quarter's plush Gateway Offices caught the eye of US financial giant Citi, which snapped up two offices in 2010 as a new base for the highly skilled team it has grown, from 500 to almost 1,200, since it set up home in Northern Ireland seven years ago.

“Citi Belfast continues to develop and is now considered one of the premier locations for Citi globally,” says Brian McAreavey, managing director at Citi Belfast. “We have grown to almost 1,200 roles in technology, securities and banking operations, and legal and compliance, with plans to increase this figure to around 1,500. I think it is fair to say that Belfast has exceeded our expectations.”

In turn, Belfast has benefitted from Citi’s presence. As well as an annual injection of £50 million into the economy, and creating hundreds of high-end jobs, Citi coming here has helped send a message to the world that Belfast truly means business.

The mutually beneficial relationship has led to a successful partnership between Citi and the regional government, which understands only too well how important Belfast’s reinvention is to the country’s prosperity.

McAreavey says: “Along with the peer companies in our sector who are also doing business in Northern Ireland, we find these relationships with government at all levels to be open and constructive.

“In fact, the relatively open access to government is one of the aspects of doing business in Northern Ireland that our senior executives particularly appreciate.”

To cement the city’s attractiveness to Citi-style relocators, Northern Ireland is pushing a pro-business agenda, offering incentive packages for investors including loans, grants and tax breaks as well as full advice and support for new companies.

Citi has been happy to play a role in hosting out-of-towners and singing the praises of its new base. “We view this as part of the contribution that Citi can make to the broader economic development of Northern Ireland,” says McAreavey. “There is also something in it for us if other companies decide to set up operations in Northern Ireland, thereby also contributing to training staff and deepening the talent pool over time.”

With conditions so ripe, the domino effect has already started. Financial companies that have recently expanded into Northern Ireland include the New York Stock Exchange and Chicago Mercantile Exchange, while international fund administration firm Augentius has committed £14 million to open a centre of excellence in Belfast, ahead of competition from Canada, China, India and Dublin.

This latest development means a further 160 jobs over the next two years, with salaries of around £45,000 – an income which goes a long way in Belfast,

The base for Citi’s highly skilled and expanding team.

Below left: MAC, Belfast’s new £17 million arts centre.

Below right: Citi is working closely with Queen’s University to attract graduates



where the cost of living is lower than in any other UK city.

Sensing forthcoming demand for their services, international legal firms like Axiom, Allen and Overy and Herbert Smith have also set up in Belfast, in a perfect example of supply chain in action.

McAreavey says: “The financial services sector is one of the major employers in Northern Ireland. We have operations here from the UK and Irish banks, as well as global banks, insurance companies and exchanges.

“Activities include software development and support, capital markets operations, legal and compliance support, and customer service delivery. We are gaining the reputation of a financial services and capital markets ‘cluster’ at a national and international level.”

As well as its booming economy and government incentives, another big draw for these multinationals is the city’s well-developed communications and transport infrastructure.

George Best Belfast City Airport, minutes from the city centre and right next to Titanic Quarter, offers regular flights to London and other European business destinations. British Airways recently opened a route to Heathrow, and Aer Lingus relocated its operations there from Belfast International Airport, where United Airlines have daily scheduled flights to New York.

For McAreavey, the presence of two world-class universities – Queen’s

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Brian McAreavey

Managing director at Citi Belfast

University Belfast and the University of Ulster – is another key resource at the city’s disposal.

The majority of staff at Citi’s Belfast office have been employed locally, with staff including 24 different nationalities helping to create a vibrant multicultural working environment.

Headhunting experienced staff from outside Northern Ireland, if there are any skills gaps, is not proving a problem, as no-one’s going to feel shortchanged by Belfast’s quality of life: competitive salary packages, affordable and stylish accommodation in the city centre and plenty to do in terms of recreation.

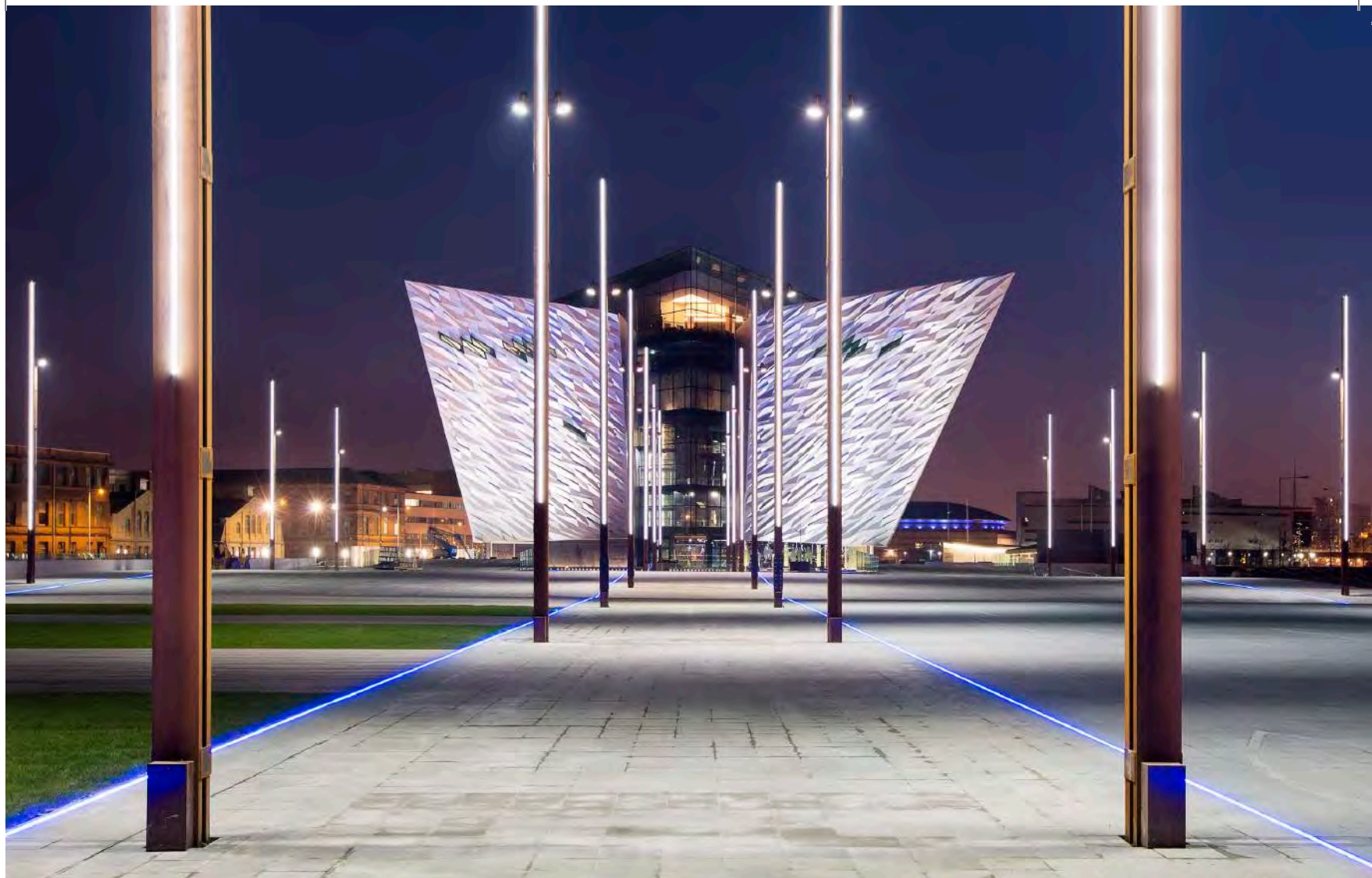
Even so, Citi is working very closely with both universities to raise the firm’s profile on campuses to attract the brightest young graduates, and is involved in shaping course content as well as helping to devise new Masters programmes tailored to its needs.

“It is the availability of market relevant skills that will ultimately drive the economy in Northern Ireland forward,” says McAreavey. “Having said that, there is still a shortage of skills in some areas. We and our peer companies in the sector are addressing this by a variety of strategies including comprehensive and high quality training programmes for graduates, seconding in experienced staff from other offices, and attracting hires from more established financial hubs such as London.”

McAreavey adds: “The growth we and our peers in the industry are enjoying show that these strategies are working and that Northern Ireland is a great place for financial services companies to do business.” **TQ**

Below: Belfast: a must-see destination as well as a great place to live and work.





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