

**NEW YORK NEW BELFAST**

**LEN O'HAGAN, CHAIRMAN, BELFAST HARBOUR**

---

Thank-you and good morning Ladies and  
Gentlemen.

Everybody loves George Bernard Shaw; if you  
were to compile a list of the greatest ever  
Irishmen, Shaw – he apparently hated the  
name George and never used it by the way –  
Shaw, would be up there with the best of them.

Like many of his generation, Shaw was part of the Irish diaspora, leaving his native Dublin in 1876 at the age of 20 to move to England.

His contribution to the English language is beyond reproach, but his legacy to British life also lives on through the Fabian Society, a left-leaning political think-tank which he helped co-found and which still shapes Government policy to this day.

He also left part of his not inconsiderable estate to the British Museum as well as the National Gallery of Ireland.

Out of the millions who make up the Irish diaspora, why pick out Shaw for special mention?

Frankly, not only is he so very quotable, he's also brutally honest.

This may not be the most politically correct quote to let loose on a gathering determined to attract people to the opportunities available in the New Belfast, but Shaw viewed his departure from Ireland in these terms:

*“I showed my appreciation of my native land in the usual Irish way by getting out of it as soon as I possibly could.”*

For how many of us here this morning - or / for our ancestors - does that confession ring true?

The Irish diaspora is characterised by many traits, not least the preponderance of its members to reach the top of their chosen professions.

There are many theories for this and perhaps we could discuss them afterwards, but I think

we could all agree that those who have had to start life over again, without the usual structures of family or community support, tend to have a 'can do attitude'.

Shaw summed this up in nicely in one of his plays, 'Mrs Warren's Profession', a rather avant-garde piece which was initially banned because, how shall I put this, / the profession in

question was not something which appealed to Victorian sensibilities.

Anyway, I digress, but the point Shaw made, to quote from the play, was:

*“People are always blaming their circumstances for what they are. I don't believe in circumstances.”*

*“The people who get on in this world are the people who get up and look for the circumstances they want, and, if they can't find them, make them.”*

That, to me, is / as good a definition as any as to what the New Belfast is about.

This is a City that is pulling itself up by its own bootstraps, that is leaving its past behind and which is remaking its circumstances to provide a better life for this and future generations.



We're not in the business of relying on the luck of the Irish, we're in the business of making our own luck.

And what better role model than New York?

I'm not going to delve into Northern Ireland's history in great detail this morning, but I think it is fair to say that historical circumstance has not gone out of its way to give Belfast a hand-up.

However, given the rather poor hand which fate has dealt us, I take a perverse pride in what we have achieved, and what we have to offer - despite the duff odds which have been stacked against us.

I'm not just talking about the cultural fault lines which one often associates with Northern Ireland, nature hasn't bestowed us.

One of the nice perks of being Chairman of Belfast Harbour is that I'm based in a grand Victorian and Edwardian Harbour Office, as splendid a building as Dublin, New York or London can boast.

The office was built at a time when Belfast sat at the apex of the Industrial Revolution; her shipping and heavy engineering companies

were some of the largest and most innovative in the world.

That, / is an achievement in itself, but it belies the full story.

I don't know if many of you have been to Belfast, but one thing you will not see are the remnants of a mining industry. It's an important observation to make.

This is a land bereft of coal and bereft of iron ore – the two vital ingredients usually required to kick-start an Industrial Revolution. Belfast managed without either and ended up with the world's largest shipyard, which in turn gave us the Titanic. Owned by a New York company – JP Morgan (the founder of the White Star Line). Pierpont Morgan visited Belfast in 1911 and chose the fittings for his cabin.

Creative Belfast also managed to invent air conditioning and the defribalator, among other things. Belfast was the centre point of the world's linen trade – so much so that it earned the nickname of 'Linenopolis'.

Commercially, we are a people who are used to making do without helpful circumstances.

If we fast forward 100 years, the new political arrangements in Northern Ireland are also proof positive that this / is a society which is working hard to put the circumstances of its recent painful history to past.

It's not easy, it's not straightforward, but it is getting better, with huge commitment from all sides to making things work..... And today is a good example.

The truth is, we, the ancestors of those who stayed behind, are not that dissimilar to the diaspora. In business and in politics, we are people striving to create a better set of circumstances.

Work with us, and I believe that you will find that you will be working with people of similar values and similar ambition.



As I keep saying, Belfast doesn't want a 'hand out', it wants a 'hand up'.

There are any number of ways that you can lend your skills and networks to help Northern Ireland focus on making a better future for itself, be that philanthropic or commercial – and I would commend, incidentally, both the work of the New York based Ireland Funds and

the New York based Irish US Council in that regard.

For those of you who are looking beyond the fall-out of the mother-of-all recessions, Belfast, which sits right on the axis between America and Europe, has a very compelling investment case to make – but more of that will emerge from throughout the conference.

If you take one point away from today, go home with the thought that Northern Ireland is a place that is ambitious to succeed; a place, which despite its smallness, aspires to be a world leader.

Queen's University Belfast Law School has developed close links with Fordham University including a highly successful summer programme.

For example, our main university, Queen's University, Belfast, has set itself the not inconsiderable challenge of becoming a global Top 100 university within the next five years.

Within Belfast's Harbour Estate, we are in the process of redeveloping 185 acres of city centre land – one of the largest urban regeneration projects in Europe.

Titanic Quarter, by name and Titanic in scale, this is an immense scheme; a new city centre

quarter for Belfast complete with a Science Park, a Financial Services Centre, commercial and industrial space, movie studio, up to 5,000 residential units, and a \$200m Titanic visitor attraction to which Belfast Harbour Commissioners has contributed around \$40m.

The development is already home to US firms such as Citi,(employing 1000 people) Microsoft, NYSE, GE and many more.

At present around 20,000 people live and work within the Harbour Estate – Bombardier alone

employ 4,000 people. Upon completion of Titanic Quarter and City Quays that figure should be closer to 50,000.

Belfast, however, isn't just about bricks and mortars – it's also a city with atmosphere, with soul, a sense of presence and a sense of community. Last summer Belfast hosted the final leg of the 2009 Tall Ships World Challenge: an event which drew 500,000 visitors.

Belfast is also a city of festivals. The Queen's Festival is the second largest in the British Isles, surpassed only in size by Edinburgh, Scotland.

The Queen's Festival is, however, only the largest in a sea of smaller festivals which adds to the vibrancy and soul of the community.

Belfast also offers an embarrassingly good selection of arts venues such as the Black Box,

which provides a home for everything from live music to comedy and live art, 'Oh Yeah Music Centre' and the magnificent Opera House, to name but a few.

Belfast's Lyric theatre is currently being rebuilt at a cost of \$30 million and when completed next year will be a state of the art theatre to N Ireland for audiences both home and visiting. Liam Neeson has been a highly motivated patron in the US for this great project.



You will hear later from Anne McReynolds CEO of the new European Example - \$40 million Metropolitan Arts Centre which is being built in Belfast's historic Cathedral Quarter. This will be a new flagship visual and performance arts venue and was launched by Meryl Streep personally in Belfast 2 years ago. It will give Belfast a visual receiving gallery as large as the Glucksman as well as a contemporary drama and dance space in two theatres.

All of this activity is feeding the soul of Belfast and starting to spawn a growing creative industries sector – outlined so eloquently last night by David Lyle - which currently employs about 5% of the local workforce and, among other things, can avail of that film studio in Titanic Quarter which has already hosted HBO, Playtone and Universal Studios.

All in all, this adds up to Belfast being back in business, and I know that we're in the process of creating somewhere special.

I also know that while we're on the right direction, a little help from our friends would help ensure that we arrive at our destination well ahead of schedule – and that's where you fit in.

Let me finish where I started with Shaw:

*“Life is no brief candle to me; it is a sort of splendid torch which I've got a hold of for the moment and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations.”*

If you have the time and the inclination, Belfast would be delighted if you could share some of your light with us.

I assure you, your torch will shine even brighter in return.

Thank-you.