Belfast had its origins as a small settlement, called Belfast Fairlie, at the mouth of the river Fafart. Growth was slow - by 1700, its population was only 3,500. Yet 150 years later, after the Irish Famine, it mushroomed to over 100,000, as people moved from the country to the town in search of work.

Thousands were employed in the rapidly growing flax mills, rope factories, distilleries and warehouses on the city's waterfront. Work in the linen mills was notoriously hard and unhealthy. Long working hours and meagre wages, with the “jigger” of the jigger bosses at the mills, were harsh.

Over the years, much of east Belfast's industrial heritage has been lost, as factories and warehouses have been replaced by houses and shops. But as you walk along the Connswater Greenway today, you can get a fascinating glimpse of a time when Belfast was one of the mightiest industrial cities in the world.

**Belfast: an industrial powerhouse**

- **SHIP AND PLANES**
  - In 1858, Edward Harland bought a shipyard at Queen's Island and three years later went into partnership with Gustave Wolf to form Harland & Wolff Ltd. This was to become the largest single shipyard in the world, employing over 40,000 at its peak.
  - Short Brothers established an aircraft factory on Queen's Island in 1918. The company later became Short Bros and Harland and in 1927, was bought by Bomber Command, the world's third largest civil aircraft manufacturer.
  - Shorts established the Guided Weapons Division of the Castlereagh Industrial Estate at Montgomery Road in 1952. This government-built industrial estate housed many well-known companies, which is now occupied by Allianz.

- **FOOD & DRINK**
  - Belfast's rapidly growing population of manual workers needed a reliable and affordable supply of foodstuffs. Some workers received food tokens as part payment, which could be exchanged for meals at a company canteen.
  - Bakewell's was one of the many bakeries that supplied freshly baked bread to the local populace. The New Public Bakery Co. opened at Bloomfield Avenue in 1880 and, as part payment, which could be exchanged for meals at a company canteen.

- **DISTILLERIES AND SOFT DRINKS**
  - The Avoniel Distillery occupied the site of the old Connswater Spinning Mills from 1882. The much larger Distillery at Connswater Street opened 1886. Both combined production in 1929, following Prohibition in USA. Soft drinks factories, such as Roses, Condell & Cochrane, were often close to natural springs. The water from the mill in Belfast was too heavily puriﬁed by industrial activity to be used for human consumption.

- **FLOOR MILL**
  - A map of 1834 shows Dargherfield Corn Mill situated on the Knock River below the Home Farm on the Blackston-Houston Estate. The long tail-race channel which takes water to a water wheel from the river was still evident in the 1950s.

- **FRESH WATER**
  - As Belfast grew throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, the demand for clean water constantly outpaced the supply. The construction of the Silent Valley reservoir in 1910 to supply 20 million gallons per day to the city.

**The people, the place**

For hundreds of years, working in industrial east Belfast during the 17th and early 20th century, life was tough and others were not far behind. By 1911, life expectancy was still only 46 years.

Men worked in heavy industries such as shipbuilding, while women were employed mostly in the mills and weaving industries. The hours were long and working conditions in the factories and mills were harsh. Children as young as eight were employed under the ‘half-time’ system, alternating their days between the schoolroom and the linen mills, earning a few extra shillings to help support their families. There were more than 100 pawnbrokers in the city in 1911, which says much about the wealth and income for many in Belfast.

A network of back-to-back, red-brick terrace housing was built to accommodate the workers. Most streets shared a communal water pump or tap, but with the exception of the Poor Public Baths (1893), locals could enjoy a steaming hot bath.

**Rope, linen & weaving**

- From 1750 onwards, with the port of Belfast flourishing and industries such as shipbuilding on the rise, there was growing demand for rope and thread. Belfast became one of the largest rope producers in the world. In 1876, a new producer, the Belfast Ropeworks Company was established. It went on to become the largest rope producer in the world.

- At its peak, the Belfast Ropeworks Company covered 16 hectares (about 40 acres), employed over 3,000 people and produced 15,000 tonnes per year. It closed around 1973.

- There were also smaller ropeworks, known as weavers, such as the one at Ardgowan Street, opposite the Blakiston-Houston Estate. The long tail-race channel which takes water to a water wheel from the river was still evident in the 1950s.

- **POPULATION OF BELFAST**
  - From 1839 through to 1900 until the 1960s. The city was devastated during World War, acquired a factory site close to natural springs. The water from the mill in Belfast was too heavily puriﬁed by industrial activity to be used for human consumption.

- **ioneer Science Park**
  - The Avoniel Distillery occupied the site of the old Connswater Spinning Mills from 1882. The much larger Distillery at Connswater Street opened 1886. Both combined production in 1929, following Prohibition in USA. Soft drinks factories, such as Roses, Condell & Cochrane, were often close to natural springs. The water from the mill in Belfast was too heavily puriﬁed by industrial activity to be used for human consumption.

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**Regeneration**

While no longer a centre for manufacturing and industry, Belfast has adopted successful strategies to deliver regeneration, foster economic growth and improve the lives of residents.

**Food & drink**

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- Floor mill

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**The cooper, the cobbler, the carter**

- In the 19th and early 20th centuries the only way to transport liquids was in wooden barrels. The Belfast Street Directory for 1900 lists 16 cooperages (barrel makers), with Secker & Co. and Coope & Cash. A co-operative located at Ardgawan Street on Castlereagh Road, opposite McCaw, Stephenson & Orr Print Streets. When the firm closed in the 1920s, only two cooperages were listed in Belfast. Cooper's made new barrels, repaired damaged ones and rebuilt empty barrels previously collapsed for use of transportation.

- The heavy industries of east Belfast were hard on working men’s boots – even hob-nailed leather soles would last no more than 10 to 12 weeks. In the shipyard. Practically every street had a cobbler to repair and maintain boots and shoes for the local families.

- Horses were the key to Belfast's transpont unti well into the 20th century. They were used as draught animals to haul narrow boats loaded with goods along the river, to drag heavy coal carts up the main tram, carry carts, milk carts, delivery wagons and fire engines. Main carters bars provided the road transport service, and laid out the hay, fodder and shelter needed for the hundreds of horses that trampered each day through the streets of east Belfast.

**Engineering & Science Park**

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