



Northern Ireland
Assembly

**COMMITTEE FOR
CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE**

**OFFICIAL REPORT
(Hansard)**

Maritime Museum Provision

19 November 2009

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Barry McElduff (Chairperson)
Mr Dominic Bradley
Mr Francie Brolly
Lord Browne
Mr Trevor Clarke
Mr Kieran McCarthy
Mr Raymond McCartney
Miss Michelle McIlveen
Mr Ken Robinson

Witnesses:

Mr Liam McBrinn)	Shared History Interpretive Project (SHIP)
Mr Brian McCann)	
Mr Frank Robinson)	
Dr Gordon Millington)	HMS Caroline Committee
Ms Primrose Wilson)	

The Chairperson (Mr McElduff):

The Committee has received a written submission from Sean Neeson MLA, who has a strong personal interest in the preservation of maritime history and heritage. A copy of a paper on the Museum of Sea and Sky, as referred to by Mr Neeson, is available from the Committee office. Before I move on to the first presentation, do Members have any comments on the information that Sean has submitted?

Mr McCarthy:

Sean has apologised that, for one reason or another, he cannot be here today. Therefore, I want to remind members of his huge commitment, and that of others, to preserving our maritime heritage. It is in everybody's interest that we take the issue seriously and come to a reasonable and sensible conclusion.

The Chairperson:

We will continue to study Sean's submission.

I move now to the submission from the Shared History Interpretive Project (SHIP), and I invite the witnesses from SHIP to join us: Liam McBrinn and Brian McCann. I welcome Liam, the chairperson of SHIP, and Brian, its secretary; thank you both very much for coming and for providing a written submission. After you make your presentation to the Committee, members will ask you questions.

Mr Liam McBrinn (Shared History Interpretive Project):

At the outset, I want to thank the Chairman and the Committee for giving us the opportunity to present evidence and information about the work of SHIP.

We have always held the view that dockers in Belfast, or anywhere, have been major contributors to the economy of their city or country. SHIP was established in 2006 primarily to look at the role of dockers, their area of work, their history and, in particular, the dockers themselves, their wives, families and children. Over the past 100 years or so, that history has been neglected, although not deliberately — it just happened because no one has had an interest in it.

The founders of SHIP are all ex-dockers, and we wanted to ensure that our experience and the information that we got from our families would contribute to the maritime history of Belfast. In considering the sweep of history that brought us from the grim days of 1900 up to the present day, you will be familiar with the recent recognition of the 1907 dockers' strike and the contribution that those dockers made to society at that time.

Although there is some information about Sailortown, which plays a very important part in Belfast's maritime history, written history had not been fully recorded. We set about creating a

programme and strategy to record that history. It has been quite difficult because we have no structured support. We are voluntary workers, and we are all retired dockers, and, in my case, a retired trade union official. Bear in mind that most of our families came to Belfast in the mid-1800s, in the days of the famine, and settled around the docks area because that was where work was to be found. They made a significant contribution to the building of the city of Belfast and the port itself, now Belfast Harbour.

This is not the proper time to ask for money or resources, because times are tight and difficult. However, when we consider the days of the 1900s and the circumstances that our forefathers and mothers and fathers lived in, there is clearly no comparison. We still think that the history and heritage of the deep sea docker, and dockers generally, would make a significant contribution to the maritime work that we are engaged in.

We examined the social circumstances that brought the dockers and their families to Belfast, and the regeneration that took them out of Sailortown. In the 1950s and 1960s, many moved to the new housing estates. From their one-bedroom houses in the Sailortown area of Belfast, they found themselves being shipped out to places such as Rathcoole, Turf Lodge, west Belfast, Holywood and even Carrickfergus, to live in new houses with shiny new baths. That was quite strange for many of the families involved. It destroyed the small area of Sailortown, and we have been trying to recreate what it was like, what lessons can be learned from it and how we can celebrate the maritime history of the Port of Belfast.

We sought friendships and encouraged other organisations throughout the greater Belfast area to participate in our work. As a former member of the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU) — as opposed to the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union (ITGWU) — I was in a unique position to make that happen.

People from all over Belfast, of all religions and no religions, come to our events. They have a strong background in the docks. As recently as last Sunday, we had the annual remembrance service, which was celebrated by a Presbyterian minister from Stormont and a Catholic priest from Ardoyne. Over 200 dockers' families attended, as has been the case for the past three or four years. Five years ago, 10 or 12 people attended the Church service, but now we have brought over 200 people together.

We want to actively engage everyone. We wrote to the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure and the chief executive of the Arts Council, setting out our case and asking for a meeting to discuss the issues involved. We have always thought that a maritime museum or a similar type of building would be well placed on the north shore of Belfast. We are aware that tremendous work is being done on the south and east shores on the Titanic project, and we welcome that. However, there is nothing in north Belfast to represent the history and contribution of working people and their families, and our work helps to recognise that.

If we take a forward-thinking approach in our discussions on what we want to do, we might also talk about the creation, at some stage, of a rapid-transport system that links the Titanic Quarter, the Ulster Museum and any maritime museum in the Port of Belfast. That would be tremendous. We are having discussions and sharing ideas with the Belfast Harbour Commissioners.

We worked towards a formal recognition of the dockers' corner, to which, over the years, hundreds of dockers came casually to be schooled twice a day before work. Most times there was no work, at all times there was no money, and every day was a poverty day. We held an event in May this year to rename the dockers' corner formally, and it was attended by around 300 or 400 people, many of whom were from families who had never known about the dockers' corner. The event was quite a success for us.

We ask the Committee to think about encouraging the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) to approach us directly with an offer of help or to talk to us about what we would like to do so that we can explore taking our work to another stage. The people who are driving and supporting SHIP have an invigorating sense of purpose. I know that I will get a good response, and I hope that the Chairperson will help and support us in that regard.

Mr Brian McCann (Shared History Interpretive Project):

The history of Belfast cannot be forgotten. Not only must we remember the many families concerned, but we must remember that we had the fastest discharging port in the world. Very few people know that. The Port of Belfast also had ship owners, and it had the headline of 26 ships on the sea. They won the Blue Riband for being the first ships up the lakes in Canada on many occasions, and the captain was presented with a gold walking stick. There is so much history attached to the port.

Before that, J P Corry had sailing ships that brought timber into the port, and on the cross-channel side, there was Kelly's. Is all of that history going to die with old people like me, who are the few remaining dockers? The Dockers' Club has been established, and it has supported not only SHIP — naturally, being dockers — but the community. Cross-community work is so important. Things are not right in the community today. Bridges must be built, and the Dockers' Club has been doing that since the start of the Troubles. People left their politics at the door of the club before they went in.

We are all part of that history. We have coaxed and cajoled and, as Liam said, met people from different parts of the community to try to get them involved in the project of uniting both sections and progressing to better things. We need advice and help, and we thank the Committee for inviting us here.

The Chairperson:

Thank you, Brian and Liam.

Mr McCarthy:

Thank you for your presentation. I support the work that you are doing, and I am interested in what you have said. How is SHIP funded? As Belfast City Council is the richest council in Northern Ireland, has it given you any cash?

Mr McBrinn:

We have had support from Belfast City Council. Many of the events that we have held over the past couple of years would not have happened without the full support of Belfast City Council. I will mention one area that may interest you. As the work was hazardous and dangerous over many years, people died of asbestosis and mesothelioma, both dust-related illnesses. We hope to engage with the Harbour Commissioners and the Coroner's Office to see whether we can secure a research project that will give us information about the men who died of those illnesses over the past 40 or 50 years.

Mr McCarthy:

You mentioned Belfast City Council, but do any other funding bodies help you to make presentations and run your clubs?

Mr McBrinn:

The Awards for All programme has been very helpful, and it has provided finance for us to put together a photography exhibition that has been seen right across the country.

Mr McCarthy:

I wish you every success.

Mr K Robinson:

Thanks for your presentation, gentlemen. I had the benefit of talking to you before the meeting, and I see that some of the points that I mentioned have been included in your presentation.

I have an official question to ask you, but there are also a couple of other things that I would like to tease out with you. You know that we are considering the development of a museums policy. The recommendations made by the Committee will, I hope, lead to a cohesive policy. However, we think that there is a gap in that there is little left of the tangible maritime history of Belfast. What are your views on that, and what do you think the Committee should be working towards?

My other question is tied into that. I spoke this morning about parts of the docks system, particularly the cross-channel docks, that do not appear to have come on board as yet. Will you discuss how those aspects might be brought in so that we can see the docks of Belfast in their totality? As you spoke, it struck me that there was no mention of the “wee yard”. It has almost vanished from history. The only thing that we have from the wee yard is the innards of the SS Divis. Goodness knows where they are, but I think that they still exist.

You spoke of the social history too, which is extremely important, and of folk moving out to estates such as Rathcoole. I remember them arriving in that area and the great culture shock that we experienced on receiving them and they had on arriving. The whole social balance in that area changed. Can you give Committee members the information that we need to try to fill the gap that we think we have identified in the maritime history of this city?

Mr McBrinn:

I will start with your first point. Museums should not just be about artefacts, machines or images;

they should also be about people. The lack of recognition of the role of the docker generally is obvious. A recognition of that role would make a significant contribution to any museum or any attempt to promote what the Committee is considering.

You asked about how we are co-operating with others who are involved in the docks. The relationship with the Transport and General Workers' Union ex-dockers has been difficult only because of the recent mergers undergone by that union. It merged with Amicus to become Unite, so it is difficult to trace records. Many of our active participants, however, are from the cross-channel docks. One of the most famous people — to us, though perhaps not to the Committee — is John Campbell, who is renowned for his work, poetry and stories about the docks in York Street. His book, 'Saturday Night in York Street', epitomises the poor description of a drunken docker — I would deny that that type of behaviour ever happened anyway.

Of the areas that have remained hidden from history, the one that springs to mind is the area behind the Belfast Harbour Commissioners' office, where there are two dry docks. This has been Brian McCann's pet subject. He has argued successfully that we should reopen that area for the first time ever, and that we should involve a range of young people and use the skills that have been lost through the death of the Belfast shipyard to build a sailing ship. It is not just about building a sailing ship; it is also about recreating the conditions of the docks and involving young people. It would create an opportunity for people to realise that the skills have disappeared and reintroduce those skills into the Port of Belfast.

I hope our thoughts are in line with yours and that we have answered your questions.

Lord Browne:

I declare an interest as a member of Belfast City Council. I am delighted that we have been able to assist you with your excellent project. Your presentation, too, has been excellent. I also declare that I have been to the Dockers' Club for many boxing tournaments. Again, they do an excellent job on those evenings.

It is important that we maintain Belfast's maritime heritage and its connection with shipping. Have you had much contact with the Catholic Church in Sailortown or the Sinclair Seamen's Church? Is there much engagement with those two organisations or with local people who used to live there in order to keep a cross-community balance? It is sad that, in some cases, people

have had to leave that area.

Mr B McCann:

We had engagement with the Sinclair Seamen's Church. We gave money to help the church when it was vandalised. With regard to Sailortown, a bit of a dispute arose over the closure of St Joseph's Church. At one stage, it became vicious. Division flared between many people who had used the church and people who had not used it, but who had, all of a sudden, come along wanting to claim it. I will not go into that in depth. Those wounds are beginning to heal. We are beginning to become more involved with St Joseph's Church.

Mr McBrinn:

I want to return to a point that Lord Browne raised. As members will know, the lost community of Sailortown has been strongly and formally recognised by Belfast City Council. It seems that St Joseph's Church and its residential house is about to become the subject of debate again.

We believe that it is the ideal building, and provides ideal circumstances, for the maritime museum; if not for the museum, then for a contributory part of it. It could have cross-community input through a multi-faith centre. A historic area could be annexed to the museum that could display living material.

We want to remember the Sailortown community, who were all dockers and workers, with a memorial garden or a standing piece of art. Again, I recognise that a cost is involved. If there were an opportunity for consideration, we would like departmental officials to visit us in order to advise and guide us on what is possible. We want discussion on whether a small memorial garden could be created, which could display living articles of history, such as parts of a ship's winch, a docker's truck and a dock hook, as well as images with stories and information. That would be a major step. That is why we need guidance from people who are involved and well experienced in that activity.

Mr McCartney:

Thank you very much for your presentation and the accompanying material. I have two questions. First, do you believe that emphasis should be on oral history rather than on artefacts? Do you have any ideas about where archives should be stored in future?

Secondly, have you considered the impact of the docking industry's decline on communities, and your links with Liverpool and Dublin, particularly through the labour movement? Is that part of your programme?

Mr McBrinn:

The international docks industry died due to modernisation, mechanisation and containerisation. Those are the three main developments that changed the Port of Belfast.

When we worked during the early days of container boats — by the way, I do not know why we called them container boats instead of ships — one ferry with two or three lorries or containers onboard would come into port each week. Now, I see on television regularly that between 1,000 and 10,000 containers are shipped internationally from San Francisco to ports in the Middle East. Those vast changes have impacted on Derry, Coleraine, Larne, Belfast and Newry. Of those places, Belfast has survived better than most because it has reorganised.

Cork, New York and Liverpool have maritime museums that include a reference in support of workers' contributions. We are conscious of that. We have been in contact with a national organisation to gain ideas and views. That is not easy because we do not have secretarial support. We do the work ourselves on laptop computers. Last year, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions provided one for us, which has been useful.

Mr McCartney:

As part of its programme, the Committee visited the Merseyside Maritime Museum at the Albert Dock in Liverpool.

Mr McBrinn:

As a starting point, we would like some of that museum's characteristics to be represented in Belfast.

Mr D Bradley:

I suppose that I must express, rather than declare, an interest in maritime heritage, as my grandfather was a merchant seaman. Sadly, in 1948, he lost his life at sea. He served on a ship called the Teasel, which sank off the Isle of Man. Therefore, I have some feeling for your efforts to commemorate the work of the dockers.

I am also interested in folk music, and many ballads, songs and shanties are connected with the sea and sailors. Are there any songs or ballads associated with the dockers that preserve certain events or parts of history?

Mr McBrinn:

I would not sing some of those songs in this company.

Mr D Bradley:

They might be suitable.

The Chairperson:

You could forward them in writing. *[Laughter.]*

Mr McBrinn:

We put together a DVD of still images of the docks last year, in which the images were hastily accompanied with music and songs. The project was a ham-fisted attempt to be creative, but it became very emotional and quite difficult. We invited a few people to the club to have a look at the DVD, but, on the night, the club was packed with people reminiscing about grandfathers who had died at sea and so on. Music can evoke that type of response. Brian is a musician and singer, so I will let him to talk about the musical side.

Mr B McCann:

The club holds cross-community services to remember deceased dockers and friends, after which dockers usually have a bit of a sing-song. For example, a fellow called Joe McGreevy wrote, and sings, a song about Sailortown and the docks. You are all very welcome to come along to one of our social gatherings, but I advise you not to drive. *[Laughter.]*

The Chairperson:

The last singer to appear before the Committee was Brian Kennedy. He sang a song for us, so you might have to oblige, Brian.

Mr McBrinn:

May I leave before that, Mr Chairperson? I would like to present the dockers' ballad to each

Committee member at the earliest opportunity, and I would welcome feedback on it.

Mr D Bradley:

I suggest that the Committee should go on a tour of the docks and the shipyard if the opportunity arises. As a Newry man, I am not as familiar with Belfast as I should be, and I think that that would be extremely interesting.

The Chairperson:

Dominic, I find Belfast people to be very parochial. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Brolly:

Like Wallace, I always associated the Dockers' Club with boxing, and, indeed, I thought that Paddy Fitzsimmons owned the venue.

You referred to half a dozen different publications, including a major publication. Will you be producing a major history of the docks or periodicals?

Mr McBrinn:

We recently published a book called 'Early Days in Belfast'. It is the history of a north Belfast man called William McMullen, who was a Stormont MP, a docker and the general president of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union. McMullen was born in Lilliput Street in north Belfast, and, in one of our silly journeys, we went to see whether that street still existed. We wanted to put up a blue plaque because he was an MP, but we could not do that because, sadly, like other parts of north Belfast, Lilliput Street has been pulled down completely.

We intend to produce a coffee-table book of some sort in which each photograph is accompanied by a narrative. We have collated more than 300 photographs dating from 1904 to the present day. We even have a photograph of Brian singing, which will obviously be the book's centrefold. We intend to publish that if we have the proper resources. Again, we are looking to Belfast City Council to give us some support on that.

We would like to produce a written history of the Port of Belfast, which would include the work of the deep sea docker, and we have engaged a number of professionals in that regard. Martin Lynch, who you are probably aware of, has been responsible for some plays, such as

'Dockers'. John Campbell has written some of the most extensive poetry, and Dennis Smith has also written a lot about the Port of Belfast. We want to pull together all those different people and parts of the organisation. So the answer is yes, as part of the development programme, we want to produce a number of publications.

Mr McCarthy:

You mentioned earlier that your community moved from Sailortown to Rathcoole. One large family came to live in Ballyesborough in my neck of the woods, if you know where that is. When the children joined our class in school they all talked about "battles" and "clacks". It took us ages to work out what they were talking about — it was bottles and clocks. That family is still there, and they still talk about "battles" and "clacks". *[Laughter.]*

Mr McBrinn:

We have an unpardonable history in that we have our own language. Sometimes it is not so sweet. We do not talk about working on ships — ships are for other people. We talk about boats. A vessel weighing 20,000 tons is a boat. Even in closing the session today we would say something like "Mr Chairman, can you close the hatch?"

The Chairperson:

Thank you, Liam and Brian, for your presentation. You have made a number of suggestions and requests, which we will consider. There are also a few proposals floating around about visiting the docks, so we will consider them, too. Thank you very much for coming along today. I invite the following witnesses from the HMS Caroline Committee to deliver their presentation: Frank Robinson, the chairman of the committee; Gordon Millington, the secretary of the committee; and committee member Primrose Wilson. Good morning; you are very welcome.

Mr Frank Robinson (HMS Caroline Committee):

Thank you for inviting us to the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure. The HMS Caroline Committee is a five-man committee that includes Dr Millington and Primrose Wilson; the other two members are in the Public Gallery. That makes a 100% turnout, which is more than I normally get.

Our story begins in 2005 when, by a series of coincidences, I met the then Second Sea Lord of the Royal Navy on board HMS Caroline. None of the committee's members has anything to do

with the Navy, and a condition of membership was that we would not bring any baggage with us to the discussion. He pointed out to me that HMS Caroline would be decommissioned within, at that time, between five and seven years. He wanted to know what local opinion might be on holding the ship in Belfast and whether the public might want it to be held here, and, if so, whom the Navy should speak to about taking that forward. The Navy was determined to decommission the ship at some time in the future.

I formed a committee that comprises members who had nothing to do with the Navy but were interested in the heritage of Northern Ireland. You have been provided with copies of their CVs, so you can see that they are dedicated to keeping, and showing off, the historic built environment, as well as the industrial and maritime environment in Northern Ireland.

The committee started off by visiting a series of organisations and teams. We visited the Titanic Quarter and the Science Park; we talked to Jim Rodgers and Tom Hartley when each was the Lord Mayor of Belfast; we talked to Tim Cooke at the Ulster Museum and Marshall McKee at the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum in Cultra; and we talked to the Harbour Commissioners.

We met Nigel — later Sir Nigel — Hamilton, the then head of the Civil Service, who has now retired. He directed us towards Paul Sweeney, the permanent secretary at the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL), who was instructed to get a committee together that crossed some four Departments. That is a slightly unusual operation, but it seems to be bringing some sense to the maritime sector. We talked to Sean Neeson, who represents Northern Ireland on the Advisory Committee on National Historic Ships. Finally, we caught up with Jonathan Hegan, who is the chairman of the Titanic Foundation, which looks after the iconic building that is being built in the Titanic Quarter.

At all those visits, we discovered that people are super-enthusiastic about keeping HMS Caroline in Belfast. We spoke to a range of people on the political spectrum and on the commercial side, and they wanted to keep the ship here and intact, perhaps as a museum. Nowhere did we hear the opinion that it should be scrapped, as you suggested in an e-mail.

We considered the finances of a museum project, because we will be asked how it would fund itself. We looked at the examples of HMS Victory in Portsmouth, which is owned by the Royal Navy, and of HMS Belfast, the Royal Yacht Britannia and the SS Great Britain. Those ships

cover most of the countries in Britain. None of those vessels has independent status; the money that they receive from the footfall of visitors along the gangplank does not pay for them. Therefore, it is obvious that HMS Caroline would not be able to stand on her own. We considered other ideas about how the ship could be funded, and we decided that its funding needed to be based on a bigger picture rather than on one ship. It could be the jewel in a bigger crown, but we need a bigger crown to make it work.

We talked to the ship's immediate neighbours at the Science Park and to the Harbour Commissioners, who own the docks. They were sensitive to what we were doing, and they thought that some ground there could go with HMS Caroline and augment the income, making it a more viable proposition. Our proposal was to develop a parkland type of museum, which would be predominantly maritime but possibly with the industrial side added in. Industry and maritime heritage are linked; a huge input from the industrial side helped to make maritime heritage what it is today. The ship would become part of that.

The neighbours in the Science Park are keen to demonstrate what nineteenth- and twentieth-century shipbuilding and engineering were like. The Science Park carries out work that people cannot see; it is all software and hardware on the end of a pinhead. It wanted to show something big and chunky that represents where it came from. The engines that were kept at the Ulster Museum would be ideally suited to the Science Park to show what engines were like in the past. They were the link between the linen industry and the shipbuilding industry in the times when the shipyards suddenly needed engines rather than sails. The skills to make the engines were in Belfast, because the engines had been here driving the linen industry's mills, which, at that time, were probably the biggest employer.

Many other bits and pieces could help. The Result is at the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum, and the Donaghadee lifeboat, which was instrumental in the rescue, or otherwise, of the Princess Victoria in the 1950s, belongs to the museum.

Coincidentally, in September 2009, the Royal Navy, which has a few museums around GB, launched the National Museum of the Royal Navy. It was interested in having all the expertise to look after ships in one centre and in ensuring that they were open to the public, and that museum could give us advice. A fortnight ago, Rear Admiral Martin Alabaster, Flag Officer Scotland, Northern England and Northern Ireland, announced that the National Museum of the Royal Navy

would have no problem in accepting HMS Caroline as one of its outposts. Therefore, it would support whatever we did. On the same occasion, he announced that HMS Caroline would stay in Belfast. The Navy had no notion of taking HMS Caroline anywhere else. Rear Admiral Alabaster managed to have the Wikipedia entry for HMS Caroline changed to state that it will stay in Belfast rather than Portsmouth as a museum ship. The Navy is dedicated to keeping the ship in Belfast so long as we can make it work.

One of our suggestions, which the Committee may wish to consider in its deliberations, is to pull all the other players in our maritime heritage together. We have the Lagan Legacy, the independent company that runs the little boat; the barge *Confiance*, which is another independent strategy that is coming on stream next year; the Nomadic Trust; and the Thompson dock and the pump house, which are now open to the public. The pump house and the Thompson dock are located in the Science Park, and the iconic building is coming on stream, not far from where HMS Caroline is docked at present. I am not saying that they should become part of one company; rather, I am saying that we should find a way to join them together, end the inertia and fund HMS Caroline as part of that bigger picture. We view HMS Caroline as part of a bigger picture that is starting to grow together. The little bus that takes tourists round the city two dozen times a day is also part of that.

The story of the River Lagan is the greatest untold story, and we think that that needs to be addressed. HMS Caroline — a gem that we have been given almost for free — offers a wonderful opportunity to develop a tourist destination that would equal anything else in the world.

Belfast has a proud and important history. Charles Brett has written that it was only the city in Ireland to be hit by the full gale force of the Industrial Revolution. Although those industries have now gone, the bits and pieces that remain should be used to celebrate our maritime and industrial heritage. However, we do not have enough elements of our maritime heritage left because they are elsewhere in the world. In fact, many Belfast ships are preserved in museums on most continents.

In 1900, this tiny corner of the island had the largest shipyard and rope works and was a world centre for textiles. The stories of the Sirocco works, Mackie's factory and the Dunlop tyre should also be told. A great opportunity exists to tell the world that we are emerging from our problems.

Visitors from cruise liners, tourists who come here because of the strong euro and the indigenous population who holiday at home for that same reason can visit those places.

Belfast went from being the twenty-second largest city in the British Isles in 1800 to the ninth largest in 1911, and that growth has been unmatched. The iconic building that is being built in the Titanic Quarter will tell many of those stories through different media such as films and history books, and there is no doubt that that will be well presented well. People need to be able to see the historic places and buildings. They want to walk on ancient ships, look at the docks, see the huge anchors and marvel at the real machines that this part of the island produced, and they want to have that history explained to them. We do not want one big museum down at the docks; rather, we want that to be a taster that will send people to Lisburn to learn about the linen industry, to somewhere else to see aircraft at Long Kesh.

This country punched way above its weight for more than 100 years, and, if we do not take a grip on it now, we are going to let that go. We will work with whoever wants to keep that heritage alive. However, our main target is to keep HMS Caroline in Belfast. Some of our ideas are just that, but it is worth taking them into account in your deliberations.

Mr D Bradley:

Good afternoon — I assume that it is now the afternoon, although that is not a reflection on your input today. The Committee took evidence from some dockers this morning, who spoke about the need for a museum for dockers. You said that you hope to maintain the HMS Caroline, and another group is restoring the SS Nomadic, or at least I think it is. The city has an industrial history, as does the port. Is there a need to co-ordinate all those projects rather than allowing groups to do their own thing even though they are it doing well?

Dr Gordon Millington (HMS Caroline Committee):

We need co-ordination; that is vital. You have hit the nail on the head. If groups do their own thing, their work will cross over and will not be properly related. Our aim is to determine which form of co-ordination is required to ensure that everybody works on a vision of the future for our brilliant heritage.

Mr D Bradley:

What do you suggest is the best method of co-ordination?

Dr Millington:

We have a vision of appointing someone in whom everybody has confidence. We have not found that person.

Mr D Bradley:

I do not know such a person. We could do with one at Stormont if you happen to find one.
[Laughter.]

Ms Primrose Wilson (HMS Caroline Committee):

It would be lovely to find a wonderful person. Somebody such as Richard Branson could perhaps come from outside, but perhaps we want somebody from the inside. We need a conservation plan to consider everything in a certain area. It would consider the threats to an area, how those threats can be resolved and work out a management plan for the future. It is a large area that has many players. However, a conservation plan would be a good start. If our committee becomes formally constituted, we could probably apply to a body such as the Heritage Lottery Fund or another organisation for funding to set up that plan. However, that would be done with a view to everybody's pulling together, not to us taking the lead.

The Chairperson:

You may know that the Committee has been prompting the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure to adopt a museums policy. Have you been consulted, or will you be consulted? Have you been contacted by DCAL as a stakeholder in that process?

Mr F Robinson:

We visited Nigel Hamilton, who directed us to Paul Sweeney. We have had several meetings with him, and he has been on the ship. In fact, he brought the Minister, and we could not get him to leave because he was moved by the experience. We have spoken to DCAL through Paul Sweeney and have met him several times.

We formulated the idea of a maritime committee, which will also cover other Departments. The Department of the Environment (DOE) did not seem to know much about it. Maritime heritage had slipped between the stools. Monuments and buildings are well looked after, but the maritime aspect had slipped. It seems that Paul Sweeney has a reason to redress that situation or

has been instructed to do so. This gem has been given to us, and it is a good starting point. We spent much time trying to find a champion. Champions do not come easily; they all come with some type of baggage, whether it is commercial, political or whatever.

Mr D Bradley:

Francie says that he is busy at the moment. *[Laughter.]*

Mr F Robinson:

It is appropriate that the Committee asked us to return to discuss the matter, because the time is coming when the ship will be decommissioned. It still belongs to the Royal Navy, which will look after it. However, it has promised that the ship will remain in Belfast until we get our act together. Portsmouth is screaming for it; it has a dock ready, but it would be a pity to lose it.

Lord Browne:

We all recognise the unique heritage value of the ship; it is the final remaining warship from the Battle of Jutland. Although it was built in Birkenhead, it has been in Belfast since 1924. Therefore, we claim ownership. Time is of the essence, and I understand that the Ministry of Defence will make an announcement about the ship's future in the spring. However, I understand that there is optimism that Belfast can retain it, provided we bring together several stakeholders such as DCAL, Belfast City Council and the Harbour Commissioners. The ship has been well maintained since 1924, and a simple lick of paint would spruce it up. It could form part of the Titanic signature project for educational visits, especially if the drill hall were included. That could be used by schools for educational purposes and as a museum.

However, we are up against time, and it is important that committees such as yours make progress and get all the stakeholders together, because the project will cost a great deal of money. I do not know how much it will cost to meet health and safety standards, given the asbestos in the engine rooms. However, the vessel is unique in having its original galley, pots and pans. From the Committee's point of view, it is important to maintain our heritage. Have you talked to other stakeholders? In DCAL's discussions with you, did it indicate that money is available to preserve the vessel in Belfast?

Mr F Robinson:

The Department has not promised any money. We originally met Titanic Quarter officials, who

decided that heritage did not pay. They have now changed their minds and are building £100 million worth of heritage. People at the Science Park would love the ship to stay where it is and to open it to the public from its side of the dock. The Science Park has some land that could be used.

The Harbour Commissioners also want the project to take off as a museum or a visitor attraction. We had not met the SHIP representatives until this morning, but they are doing the same thing. Many players are doing their own little bits. We want to pull those strands together, while everyone continues to do their own individual thing. Everyone is good at that, and they all have a handle on the financial side. However, the project will not work on its own, so we need everyone to pull together.

However, the HMS Caroline project should play into everything that the various groups are doing. The busman must be able to take visitors down to the little Lagan Legacy boat, stop beside it and explain what it is all about. HMS Caroline is original and is the third-oldest commissioned warship in the world.

The Chairperson:

It is the third-oldest? Have you visited it?

Lord Browne:

Yes, I have.

Mr F Robinson:

May I suggest that the Committee organises a visit?

Lord Browne:

We can incorporate that with a visit to the Dockers' Club.

Mr McCarthy:

Thank you for your presentation. We seem to agree on everything that was said in response to Dominic's question.

You alluded to the Sir Samuel Kelly, of which the people of Donaghadee are very proud.

Unfortunately, it is sitting out in the elements, which is not doing it any good. Local people may not want it to leave Donaghadee. However, they probably would not mind its leaving if it were to have shelter and be preserved. Have you talked to local people about the Sir Samuel Kelly?

Mr F Robinson:

We have not spoken directly to people in Donaghadee, but we had discussions with the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum, which believes that it owns the Sir Samuel Kelly and that it was taken back to be better cared for. The vessel was once located at Cultra, next to the Result. The museum would be keen to include it in any of its project.

However, we do not want to create a huge maritime museum that includes everything, particularly on the industrial side. We would rather that it was a pointer, or taster, museum. Other European countries are going down the route whereby there are many tasters at the point of entry. In Bristol, for example, visitors are told that, if they want to see a mine, they have to go up the country. The museum itself, however, is like a display cabinet that shows off our history and heritage.

Mr McCarthy:

You are looking for someone to head the project. I cannot think of a better person than Sean Neeson, whom you mentioned. I am sure that he would agree to let you avail yourselves of his services if you so desired.

The Chairperson:

Surely Sean will be preoccupied with getting re-elected. *[Laughter.]*

Mr F Robinson:

He was co-opted to the Advisory Committee on National Historic Ships; it did not have an election. However, he gave us the impression that the SS Nomadic was closer to his heart.

Mr McCarthy:

I was speaking to Sean Neeson this week, and he is perturbed about the recent adverse publicity that has been emanating — from where I do not know — about the SS Nomadic.

Mr K Robinson:

I want to ask you about the format of the “consortium”, which is the word that I have scribbled down, and how you could bring together a group of vested interests. Individually, the Result, the Sir Samuel Kelly, the SS Nomadic and HMS Caroline do not mean very much, but perhaps they might if we were to get them into some sort of consortium arrangement that would be headed up by a champion. For a minute, I thought that Kieran was going to offer himself as a champion; obviously, however, modesty prevailed. *[Laughter.]*

I have spoken to different people at different levels about HMS Caroline, and I know that a timeline was involved. That timeline, which runs to 2012, has become much shorter and, therefore, we must start to focus. I will run with my idea of a consortium: how would you pull that together? What level of champion do you want: do you want a local champion who is known to the community, or do you want an internationally known champion who may have emerged from Northern Ireland or Great Britain or who may have links to here from overseas?

Is there a sufficient land bank in the Titanic Quarter and enough goodwill to allow that land to be used to realise the sort of park that you talked about earlier?

Dr Millington:

The various proposals that we have seen and the attitude of the Science Park, which holds much of that land, show that there is enough land for the type of operation that we are thinking about. We do not see that as being a problem; in fact, everybody thinks that it might be a good thing to open up the shipyard area.

Mr F Robinson:

I visited the Harbour Commissioners, who are property people as well as harbour masters, and they have no future plans for that section. Where the HMS Caroline is docked, there is some land, with sheds and other buildings, and the Harbour Commissioners have no designs on that area in the immediate future.

Mr K Robinson:

Therefore, there are opportunities. I want to hear your ideas on how you would bring together a consortium.

Ms P Wilson:

There are different ways in which that could be done. One way is to include HMS Caroline in the conservation plan that I suggested. If the Committee felt that that were a good idea, it could put it forward as a proposal. However, I do not mean to suggest to the Committee what it should do.

The Chairperson:

We are open to suggestions.

Ms P Wilson:

Such a proposal needs to come from people such as you. It cannot come from our committee, even though we all come from various backgrounds; we are not even formally constituted.

The problem of a time frame was mentioned. The Royal Navy wants a UK-wide museum that will do different things in different places. We place much hope in that and in what it might do for HMS Caroline. However, that would only be part of the bigger picture; as Frank said, HMS Caroline should be the jewel in the crown.

Northern Ireland has not fared well on major lottery projects; for example, we have never received a big award from the Heritage Lottery Fund. However, we would like to think that our turn will come. I feel that something as spectacular as our maritime heritage could swing it.

Mr K Robinson:

I want to tease that out a wee bit. Primrose, have you had experience of conservation plans in other areas, and, if so, can you briefly share that with the Committee?

Ms P Wilson:

An advertisement is placed, and a suitable person is appointed, who then considers the entire issue, consults the stakeholders and pulls together the strands. That is done on the basis of the quality of the heritage and the threats to it.

Mr K Robinson:

To whom would that person report when he or she has brought that together?

Ms P Wilson:

That person would report to whoever commissioned him or her: it could be the Ulster Museum, the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum or the HMS Caroline Committee, if it were formally constituted.

Mr K Robinson:

In your experience, what might the time frame be?

Ms P Wilson:

It could be done quite quickly, possibly within the next eight months.

Mr K Robinson:

Does the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum think that it owns the Sir Samuel Kelly?

Mr F Robinson:

Marshall McKee certainly thought that the museum owned it. The Sir Samuel Kelly lay beside the Result for a few years. The Ulster Folk and Transport Museum took it to Donaghadee because it thought that it could look after the boat better: those are his words — do not shoot the messenger. The museum seems to think that the boat belongs to it or that it was put in its custody. The museum took it back to Donaghadee and looked after it in a better way.

Mr K Robinson:

In the interim, perhaps the Committee could check out who officially owns the vessel.

Mr F Robinson:

I am repeating information that I have been given.

The Chairperson:

We can seek clarity on that.

Mr K Robinson:

We have spoken about some of the named vessels. For example, the Result is in the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum. Can one go up to the Result, lift the tarpaulin and peer into it? I do not think that any of us want to go down that road with any vessel again.

Mr F Robinson:

The Ulster Folk and Transport Museum appears to be short of cash to do anything. For most of the autumn, the big tarpaulin over the ship has been blowing in the wind like a torn flag.

Mr K Robinson:

I am told that there is material inside that ship that is still intact.

Mr F Robinson:

We went to see the Result with Sean Neeson, and Gordon has a model of it as it was when it left Carrickfergus in its first days. The museum has cut a trapdoor into the bottom of the ship so that people can get inside it. If that is how ships are preserved, I am sorry, but — *[Laughter.]*

Mr McCartney:

Your report states that the Caroline did not feature in Belfast City Council's bid. There seems to be a knowledge gap there, as there seems to be with the Tourist Board, which was keen to preserve it but did not understand its importance. That seems to be a contradiction.

Maritime history is closely identified with social, economic and industrial history. How do we bring all that together so that 40 projects are not competing against one another? The Liverpool experience shows every aspect of maritime history brought together. How do we do that if we are tasked to preserve the Caroline? It will be part of a wider project rather than the Nomadic versus the Caroline.

Mr Brolly:

You say that your committee is not properly constituted. If it were, and if you had a voice that you do not have at the moment, would you express concern about the significance and overbearing nature of private development in the maritime area of Belfast?

Mr F Robinson:

If it brings money and people into the area, we could use it as a strength.

Mr Brolly:

To what extent might it interfere with your vision of preserving the shipyards and the general

area?

Dr Millington:

The present plans would not interfere with that. We have examined the plans and planning permissions and then considered what is left. We are not trying to call a halt to anything that is going on because there are many good projects. All aspects of our maritime heritage need to be brought together.

Mr Brolly:

It would be important if you had a voice with planners, particularly for maintaining the physical structures of maritime history.

Dr Millington:

I have spoken to planners about that, and they are quite happy with the idea. They have pointed us in the direction of examples elsewhere.

Mr F Robinson:

The Environment Agency is also supportive, and it will have to approve our proposals. It is keen for a development that is more in keeping with our intentions. The iconic building sits at the top of the slipways. The pump house is there, and it cannot be moved. HMS Caroline can be moved, but the pump house and the two docks are fixed. They are starting to draw in tourists.

HMS Caroline is probably where she should be, and the Harbour Commissioners do not seem to have a problem with that. The SS Nomadic is a wee bit further up, but it could either be brought down or be left where it is with some sort of transport system laid on. It has to be a maritime experience, but I do not see how that can be divorced from the industrial aspect. Defence also comes into it; people could be directed to the plane museum down at Long Kesh. There are many aspects.

Northern Ireland worked hard throughout the 100 years of its industrial growth. The previous speaker said the same thing: where do people go to see industrial history as well as maritime history? There are elements of maritime history all around the place, and they are being lost. There is a scheme to open up the two slipways and make them part of a parkland. Those elements seem to fit together, but we need somebody to pull it all together.

We are all volunteers, and most of us are getting on a bit. *[Laughter.]* Every time that we met as a committee, we met on the ship. The executive officer of the day was given the set of minutes and they were sent to Portsmouth, so it was known exactly what we are doing and to whom we are talking. Sometimes, it was embarrassing because, having reported two or three months earlier, we would have talked to absolutely everybody, even though there was nothing about the Navy or HMS Caroline. However, we had to be convincing that we were trying to look at the bigger picture: everybody wants to keep HMS Caroline in the existing dock but not at the expense of other matters. We want to include everything, which might be possible if there were an overarching umbrella that was called something like the “Belfast waterfront”. All the little individual pieces work well together and are financially independent. Those pieces of work would still have their independence, but the entirety would be something bigger. The Tourist Board could take it and sell it. People could catch the bus to HMS Caroline, the museum or whatever.

In the springtime, I attended a workshop that the Tourist Board runs down near the docks. I counted 22 buses: people got out of a bus and looked at the big dock. A block from the bottom of the dock, on which the keel sits, is on the quay. People had their photos taken beside that because that is where the Titanic sat. The Titanic is the hook on which we pull tourists in, but that that will not last for ever. It could be a downward slope after 2012, and something else could catch the world’s imagination, and tourists will go elsewhere. We must have something to bring tourists back and keep them coming back.

The Ulster Museum is a good example of how exhibits can be displayed, but it has missed out on our industrial history. It has taken all the industrial pieces away except for a small exhibition. Belfast and the shipyards grew on that industry. Engines here drove the linen mills, which developed the skills to build engines in Belfast. When the shipyards needed engines for their boats, all the skills were here, so the matters are interlinked.

Lord Browne:

You referred to the aircraft at the Maze. I am not really aware of what is there; will you give us a brief outline of what is there and its importance?

Mr F Robinson:

The name to remember is Ernie Cromie. He leads a team of volunteers that has some 30 aircraft, some of which were built by Shorts. The aircraft had been at an airfield at Lough Neagh called Langford Lodge, where Martin Baker tested ejector seats. For whatever reason, the sheds at Langford Lodge had to be emptied, and they were given the two pre-war hangars in which aircraft were assembled at the Long Kesh/Maze complex. Stirling bombers were assembled there: the parts were built during the day at Shorts, and they were trundled down by road and assembled at Long Kesh/Maze so that they were not bombed during the night.

The Chairperson:

It was, effectively, the headquarters of the Ulster Aviation Society.

Mr F Robinson:

It appeals to anyone who is interested in aviation. I am not, but many people are. If people want to see the exhibition, they must go through a three-day security clearance to gain admittance to the sheds in which the aircraft are kept because they are in the Maze complex. If that is a tourist attraction, how does one work it? The aircraft are now down at the two hangars.

The Chairperson:

I have seen them. I must have got my three-day clearance.

[Laughter.]

Mr F Robinson:

I was thinking of the people who visit on cruise liners.

The Chairperson:

Frank, Primrose and Gordon, thank you for your presentation. Members will now consider the two presentations that we heard today.