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Viewpoint

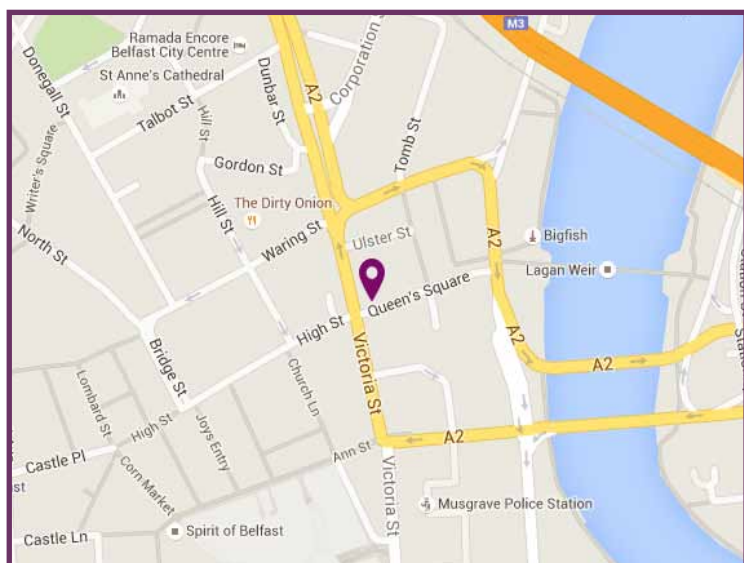
## A timely reminder



Time: 15 mins

Region: Northern Ireland

Landscape: urban



### Location:

Albert Memorial Clock Tower, Queen's Square, Belfast BT1 2DL

### Grid reference:

NW 46636 29931

### Keep an eye out for:

A nearby musical instrument you can play with your feet!

The Albert Memorial Clock is one of Belfast's best-known landmarks. It was built in tribute to Prince Albert, Queen Victoria's husband who died aged just 41 in 1861. On the side of the clock tower a life-sized statue of Albert gazes along the High Street. Look carefully at the tower as it rises from the ground. Do you notice anything unusual?

You should see that it doesn't stand perfectly upright. Sometimes called 'The Leaning Tower of Belfast', it tilts by four feet (1.25 metres). By 1924 the tower leaned so much that some decorative parts were removed to prevent them falling off and injuring people. But it wasn't built this way.

Why does the Albert Memorial Clock lean over?



The reason the clock leans over is because of the ground beneath your feet. Queen's Square was built on an area of marshland. The Albert Memorial Clock was mounted on a wooden base which couldn't support the 113-foot tall structure's weight. So the clock tower began to sink.

The land around Queen's Square was marshy because it was drained from the banks of a nearby river. With the statue of Albert behind you, look along the High Street for a slight curve in the road. This is where the River Farset flows through a tunnel. The tunnel below the High Street is said to be large enough for a bus to drive through it!

The Farset is a tributary, a smaller river that flows into a larger one. In this case the Farset flows into the Lagan, near Queen's Square. Though we can no longer see the Farset it was central to Belfast's creation. Belfast's first settlers made their homes at a ford over the Farset. This ford was located very near to the Albert Memorial Clock.

## The sands of time

The name 'Belfast' comes from the Irish words 'béal feirste' or 'sandy mouth of the ford'. 'Farset' itself is from the Irish for 'sand spit'. The Farset's sandy banks were Belfast's first quays and trade centre.

By the 18th century, however, the Farset had become an open sewer. Traders dumped waste such as offal into the river and it was a dangerous health hazard. In 1804 the High Street section was covered up.



The River Farset

It's incredible to think that Belfast's foundation site is out of sight. But as the city's name and tilting clock tower show, the Farset is unseen but not forgotten.

## Fishy tales

A short distance across Queen's Square from the clock, look beside the River Lagan for a giant salmon. The Big Fish sculpture celebrates Belfast's watery heritage.

The scales are a mosaic of tiles and many highlight the city's riverside industries. See if you can spot references to linen, rope making and shipbuilding - including the RMS Titanic which was built at the nearby Harland & Wolff shipyard.



The Big Fish