



27 January 2023

The Senior Dean
The Trinity Legacies Review Working Group

Dear Colleagues,

I would like to make three points and a suggestion with regard to the de-naming of the Berkeley Library.

The first point is that there is absolutely no question that Berkeley owned human beings. Thus the question before us is not really one of evidence, it is one of what Trinity wishes to do with the evidence. There is also no question that what allowed Berkeley and other intellectuals to do their work was an income derived from the labour of immiserated people, and it is not possible to right all those wrongs. However, slaveholding is a bit different. Berkeley lived before the British antislavery movement but was certainly aware of discussions over the morality of enslavement that had been going on since the Middle Ages and with renewed vigour since the development of the transatlantic trade; indeed, he wrote theoretical justifications of enslavement. He is not perhaps as far implicated as, say, the Colston family in Bristol, whose wealth derived mainly from the slave trade, but again there is no question that he chose not only to own enslaved people but to engage intellectually with the desirability of doing so and conclude that he should.

The second point is that the library was named in 1978. It is thus not part of a very long tradition in the larger scheme of things. People weren't asking the kinds of questions in the 1970s as they are now, but situations change. In terms of holding onto Trinity's traditions as the oldest university in Ireland, the name of this library is very much a late addition.

The third point is that there is no apolitical position on this issue. There seems to be a sense among people who wish to keep Berkeley's name on the library that making a change would be political and that College should somehow stand above that. Retaining the name, in an atmosphere in which other institutions are taking action, is also a political act, and sends a message we at Trinity do not care about historical injustice or about honouring someone who would gladly and deliberately have enslaved people who are members of our staff, our students, or our potential students.

The suggestion is that a compromise could be made by renaming the library the Agnes, Anthony, Edward, Phillip and George Berkeley Library. The signage and the name in common usage could remain the same, but any plaques or informational brochures could list all the names and indicate that while we honour the intellectual

contributions of one of our graduates, we also recognise and honour the known names among the enslaved people whose coerced labour made Berkeley's work possible. The problem of course is that these are their baptismal and not their birth names, and they may not have chosen them. However, this is all the historical record has given us. While the most appropriate course of action in my view would be a de-naming, and the selection of a new dedicatee, a re-naming that does not erase Berkeley but provides an expanded understanding of the name would be a step in the right direction.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ruth Mazo Karras". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Ruth Mazo Karras
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