

Working Paper on Berkeley's Legacies at Trinity

Dr Mobeen Hussain, Dr Ciaran O'Neill and Dr Patrick Walsh | November 2022

Purpose of Working Paper

This report provides detailed historical evidence on Bishop Berkeley's slave-owning activities and his ideological support for the slave system and settler colonialism. Secondly, it details the different forms of memorialisation of Berkeley by successive generations in TCD. Thirdly it draws on international best practice to show how peer universities have dealt with/are dealing with similar issues in the contemporary context.



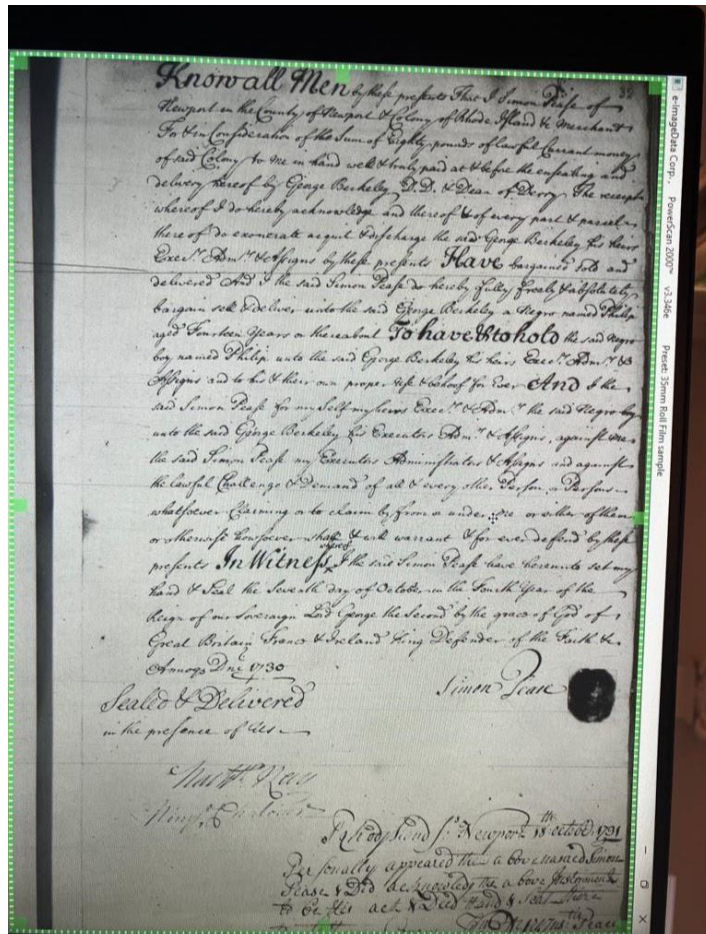
The New Library, c. 1967.

1. George Berkeley and slavery: Reviewing the Evidence

Philip, Anthony, Edward and Agnes Berkeley were the property of George Berkeley, formerly a fellow at Trinity College Dublin and Dean of Derry in the Church of Ireland on his Rhode Island estate in 1730-31. Berkeley was resident in Rhode Island from 1729, where he had acquired a plantation while setting plans in motion for a colonial university in Bermuda intended to educate missionaries to proselytise amongst the Native American population.¹ Upon arrival in Rhode Island Berkeley had acquired a 96-

¹ The most detailed account of Berkeley's slaveownership can be found in Craig Steven Wilder, *Ebony and Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America's Universities* (London, 2013), pp. 94-95.. We are indebted to Dr Kenny Pearce and Dr Clare Moriarty both formerly of the TCD Philosophy Department for their expert advice on this document.

acre estate which he named Whitehall.² In October 1730 he purchased 'Edward aged twenty or thereabouts' for £76 and Philip aged fourteen or thereabouts for £80', presumably to help work his plantation.³ In the following June the records of Trinity Church, Newport show that Berkeley baptised Philip, Agnes and Anthony Berkeley who were described 'as some of his negros,' implying there may well have been more enslaved people on the estate.⁴ T



Excerpt from the Deed of Conveyance of negro boy 'Philip' to George Berkeley, 13 Oct. 1731 (British Library, Add Ms. 39316 f. 32 Berkeley, Papers). Consulted on Microfilm (P1063) in National Library of Ireland.

² Deed of sale from Joseph Whipple to George Berkeley, 19 Feb. 1730 (Printed as Appendix III (a) in A.A. Luce, *The Life of George Berkeley, Bishop of Cloyne* (London, 1949, p. 234-35).

³ Deeds of Sale dated 4, 7 October 1730 in British Library Add Ms 39316 ff.31 r, 32r. See also Tom Jones, *George Berkeley: A Philosophical Life* (Princeton, 2021), pp. 233-34.

⁴ George C. Mason, *Annals of Trinity Church: Newport, Rhode Island. 1698-1821* (1890), p. 51.

These records demonstrate clearly that Berkeley bought slaves, a fact recognised by some of his biographers.⁵ By 1732 Berkeley's Bermuda scheme had failed, and he decided to dispose of his American property, He donated his plantation and a substantial portion of his library to Yale College, while he donated another carefully curated selection from his American library to Harvard College.⁶ At Yale the profits from Berkeley's slave worked plantation became the college's first endowment and was used to fund prizes into the 20th century, and a residential college, Berkeley College, was erected in 1934.⁷ Recently these connections to the slave economy have come under scrutiny as the Yale community has reckoned with its historic connections to slavery and there have been calls to rename the buildings named after the philosopher.⁸

While these Yale connections are important George Berkeley (1685-1753) is most prominently associated with TCD where he first entered as an undergraduate in March 1700, graduating with a BA in 1704 before being elected a fellow in 1707.⁹ As librarian from 1709 he played an active role in bringing the project for a new library (now the Old Library) to fruition while he also held a number of other college offices. During his time in TCD he published some of his most important philosophical works including *An essay towards a new theory of vision* (Dublin, 1709), *A treatise concerning the principles of human knowledge* (1710) and *The three dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* (London, 1713). From the mid-1720s onwards he began to develop the idea of a university in the American colonies – the so-called Bermuda Scheme.

Berkeley's American project involved the establishment of a college – St Pauls – in Bermuda where the sons of plantation owners as well as Native Americans could be educated to MA level allowing them to preach the gospel in the colonies or as he put it, to provide a steady 'supply of zealous

⁵ See Edwin, S. Gaustad, *George Berkeley in America* (New, Haven, 1979), pp. 17, where he casually lists 'bought and baptised slaves' amongst a list of Berkeley's actions in Rhode Island. Jones, *George Berkeley*, p. 234 is more explicit stating Berkeley was 'resident in a slaving colony, practised slavery, and may have entertained a project for extending slavery in Europe', A.A. Luce, *Berkeley*, pp. 115-135, significantly though dealing in great detail with Berkeley's American experiences does not mention Berkeley's ownership of enslaved people.

⁶ Deed of Conveyance between Berkeley and Yale College, 26 July 1732 (Beinecke Library, Berkeley Papers) which established the Berkeley graduate scholarships at Yale with funds generated in perpetuity from the Whitehall estate. The current lease granted by Yale to tenants expires in the year 2761. On his library donations to Yale and later Harvard, see Gaustad, *Berkeley in America*, pp. 82-86.

⁷ For Berkeley College and its 'christening' in 1934 with tar water see Gaustad, *Berkeley in America*, p. 202.

⁸ On Yale's investigation into its connections to slavery see <https://yaleandslavery.yale.edu/>

⁹ Biographical information taken from his entry in the *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (2009), <https://www.dib.ie/biography/berkeley-george-a0611> which ignores his ownership of enslaved people.

Missionaries, well fitted for propagating Christianity among the Savages'.¹⁰ He also proposed that if necessary Native Americans could be kidnapped and then educated at his college.¹¹ This project from its outset was connected with Trinity and at least four of the nine founding fellows proposed (including Berkeley) were also TCD fellows.¹² Having spent much of the 1720s lobbying the government in London and securing philanthropic and government support Berkeley departed for America in 1729 and upon his arrival in Newport, Rhode Island acquired his property there.

The baptism of his slaves is important and speaks to Berkeley's importance not just as an owner of enslaved people but also as a theorist of slavery and racial discrimination. This aspect of his thought was most clearly expressed in the 1725 pamphlet promoting the Bermuda scheme, *Proposal for the Better Supplying of Churches in our Foreign Plantations and for Converting the Savage Americans to Christianity*. In this text he advocated for the baptism of slaves not for only the betterment of their souls but because it would make them more obedient: 'that it would be to their advantage to have slaves who should obey in all things masters according to the flesh, not with eye-service as men pleasers, but, in singleness of heart as fearing god. The gospel liberty consists with temporal servitude, and that their slaves would only become better slaves by being Christian.'¹³ Berkeley's views on baptising slaves were part of an ongoing contemporary debate and had a long-term impact in providing an ideological support for slavery.¹⁴ They are now recognised by leading Berkeley scholars as arguably at least as significant as his documented ownership of human beings when they consider his legacy.¹⁵

His other American writings notably his 1725/26 poem *America. Or The Muse's Refuge* have also been re-assessed by scholars. This poem belongs to the classical *translatio* belief in the constant

¹⁰ *A Proposal for the Better Supplying of Churches in our Foreign Plantations and for Converting the Savage Americans to Christianity* (London, 1725), p. 4. For the most penetrating analysis of this episode see Scott Breuniger, 'Planting an Asylum for Religion: Berkeley's Bermuda Scheme and the Transmission of Virtue in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World' in *Journal of Religious History*, 34 (2010), pp. 414-29.

¹¹ For some contemporary doubts about the likely effectiveness of this policy see Gaustad, *Berkeley in America*, pp. 44-45. It is worth noting that the first beneficiary of the Berkeley medal at Yale was Eleazar Wheelock later president of Dartmouth which had as part of its founding mission the education of native Americans.

¹² See *A Proposal for the Better Supplying of Churches*, p. 21. The TCD fellows named here were William Thompson, Jonathan Rogers and James King, of whom little is known, while Dr Robert Clayton of TCD, later bishop of Killala was entrusted with the charter, Luce, *Berkeley*, p. 136.

¹³ *A Proposal for the Better Supplying of Churches*, p. 5.

¹⁴ Gaustad, *Berkeley in America*, pp. 90-95, 124-25.

¹⁵ For more modern analyses which show how significant Berkeley's views were and how they deviated from contemporary mainstream thinking see M.J. Rozbicki, 'To Save Them from Themselves: Proposals to Enslave the British Poor, 1698-1755', in *Slavery & Abolition*, 22 (2001), pp. 34-35; Jones, *George Berkeley*, pp. 234-37. See also Scott Breuniger speaking to the Trinity Early Modern History seminar on Monday 11 Oct. 2021 on Rethinking George Berkeley's Legacy' Podcast available at <https://soundcloud.com/tlrhub/tlrh-early-modern-history-rethinking-george-berkeleys-legacy?in=tlrhub/sets/trinity-centre-for-early-modern>

westward migration of empire and learning and it has been described as perhaps ‘the clearest enunciation of the translatio tradition in the eighteenth century. It later acquired new significance when the founding trustees of the University of California quoted his settler colonialist lines ‘westward the course of empire takes its way’ approvingly when naming their Berkeley campus in 1866.¹⁶

Finally, it is worth noting that upon his return to Ireland, Berkeley continued to draw on his American experiences in his writings on Irish political economy. In his celebrated text on Irish economic development, *The Querist* he included a number of references to the benefits of slavery and servitude to what we would call economic growth. Two examples will suffice to illustrate this point: ‘Query 214: Whether other nations have not found great benefit from the use of slaves in repairing high-roads, making rivers navigable, draining bogs, erecting public buildings, bridges and manufactures?’ and ‘Whether all sturdy beggars should not be seized and made slaves to the public for a period of ten years?’¹⁷ Elsewhere in his *Words to the Wise* (1749) he describes the Irish poor as ‘a lazy destitute race’ and furthermore ‘that these people are more destitute than savages and more abject than Negroes. The Negroes in our plantations have a saying if Negro was not Negro, Irishman would be Negro’.¹⁸

How and where TCD has memorialised George Berkeley?

1.1 Berkeley Memorial Window

The Berkeley Memorial window is one of three major pieces of stained glass sited in the chancel of the College Chapel and dates to 1866. It is not well-known – even within college – and the only scholarly article written about it is a 1972 piece by E.J. Furlong in *Hermathena*, from which the bulk of

For contemporary concerns about the appropriateness of Berkeley’s name been celebrated at UC Berkeley see <https://www.dailycal.org/2017/11/17/who-is-berkeley>.

¹⁷ George Berkeley, *The Querist* (Dublin, 1735-37). See also Jones, *George Berkeley*, p. 237-38, Rozbicki, ‘To save them from themselves’, pp. 36-37.

¹⁸ George Berkeley, *A Word to the Wise: Or an Exhortation to the Roman Catholic Clergy of Ireland* (Dublin, 1749), p. 8.

the following description is taken.¹⁹ The idea of a window dedicated to Bishop Berkeley emerged alongside suggestions for windows in honour of Archbishop Ussher and Richard Graves, Dean of Armagh and was approved by board in 1867. It was funded by the gift of £300 from Richard R. Warren, then MP for Trinity, and a further gift of £72 from the incoming Provost Humphrey Lloyd – both given in 1867. Designs were considered for the window in February 1868, and the London firm of Clayton and Bell were successful: being paid £219, 12s for the window, substantially less than the funds secured for the purpose.

1.2 Prizes and Medals

Bishop Berkeley's Gold Medals- On 8 May 1752, 'the Provost and Senior Fellows agreed to give annually, for ever, two Gold Medals for the encouragement of Bachelor of Arts in the Study of the Greek language: having received a Benefaction of one hundred and twenty guineas, besides a die, from the Right Rev. Dr. George Berkeley, Lord Bishop of Cloyne for that purpose.' These medals are still awarded today.²⁰

Berkeley has a broader legacy within academic circles at Trinity including via the Luce family. Professor A.A. Luce was a prominent Berkeley scholar and donated £500 to College in 1941 to found a Prize in Mental and Moral Science in memory of his wife, to be called the Lilian Mary Luce Memorial Prize.²¹ This award is still awarded on the result of a written examination in philosophy held annually in Trinity term. A stipulation of the award is that the course of study 'consists in the main of portions of Berkeley's philosophical works' and that other 'works on the Berkeleian philosophy may be included'. The current value of this award is €38 annually.

1.3 Lectureship in Greek

Historically, there was also a Berkeley Lectureship in Greek who gave three or more prelections every term. The post became vacant in 1849 when the occupant, Rev. Frederick H. Ringwood, left to take up a Chair in Greek at Queens University Belfast, and from there became Master of Dungannon School in 1850. Ringwood was a former undergraduate at TCD and had been appointed in 1846 for a term for five years.²² The exact provenance and continued endowment of this lectureship is uncertain, but

¹⁹ Furlong, E. J. "The Berkeley Window in Trinity College: With an Account of Berkeleian Studies in the College 1830—1900." *Hermathena*, no. 114 (1972): 70–87.

²⁰ MUN VOL/5/3, p.91.

²¹ College Calendar 1944-1945, p.457.

²² College Calendar 1849, p.32.; *Armagh Guardian*, 22 July 1850; *Saint James's Chronicle*, 18 July 1846

Berkeley had been a lecturer in Greek during his own fellowship at the college in the early eighteenth century, thus providing a logic for the creation of the position. In 1953 a Berkeley Professorship of Metaphysics was created for Professor A.A. Luce with life tenure for himself only.²³

1.4 The Berkeley Library

In 1967 Trinity's New Library opened. The library, one of the College's architectural modernist masterpieces, was arguably a key physical manifestation of Trinity's expansion in student numbers and concomitant opening up to Irish society following a period of quiet detachment after Irish independence.²⁴ While initially just called the New Library it was renamed the Berkeley Library in 1978 when the adjacent Arts and Social Sciences building was opened.²⁵ The naming of the library was part of a general scheme to attach the names of distinguished graduates to the newly completed lecture theatres in the Arts Building as well as the then new Lecky Library. Interestingly Berkeley's name was initially destined for a lecture theatre and the library was to remain as the New Library.²⁶ The decision to name the Library rather than a lecture theatre after Berkeley was accepted by the Board after a recommendation by the Registrar, George William Percy Dawson, in 1977. Dawson cited Berkeley's 'relationship with America [having] increased his fame' and his 'continued relevance' as reasons for the suggestion which would ultimately enhance the 'image of the college'.²⁷ Indeed, in 1957 and subsequent years, the College had distributed pamphlets to appeal for funds for the Library. The second appeal did mention Berkeley's contributions as a former Trinity librarian.²⁸ Although the pamphlet does not mention the possibility of naming the library after Berkeley, his prominent inclusion in the appeal as an attractor for donors (particularly American ones) does gesture to his popularity within College at the time and even to internal conversations about possible candidates for naming.²⁹

²³ See Luce's entry in the *Dictionary of Irish Biography* www.D.I.B.ie

²⁴ On this see Tomas Irish, *Trinity in War and Revolution 1912-1923* (Dublin, 2015), ch. 6.

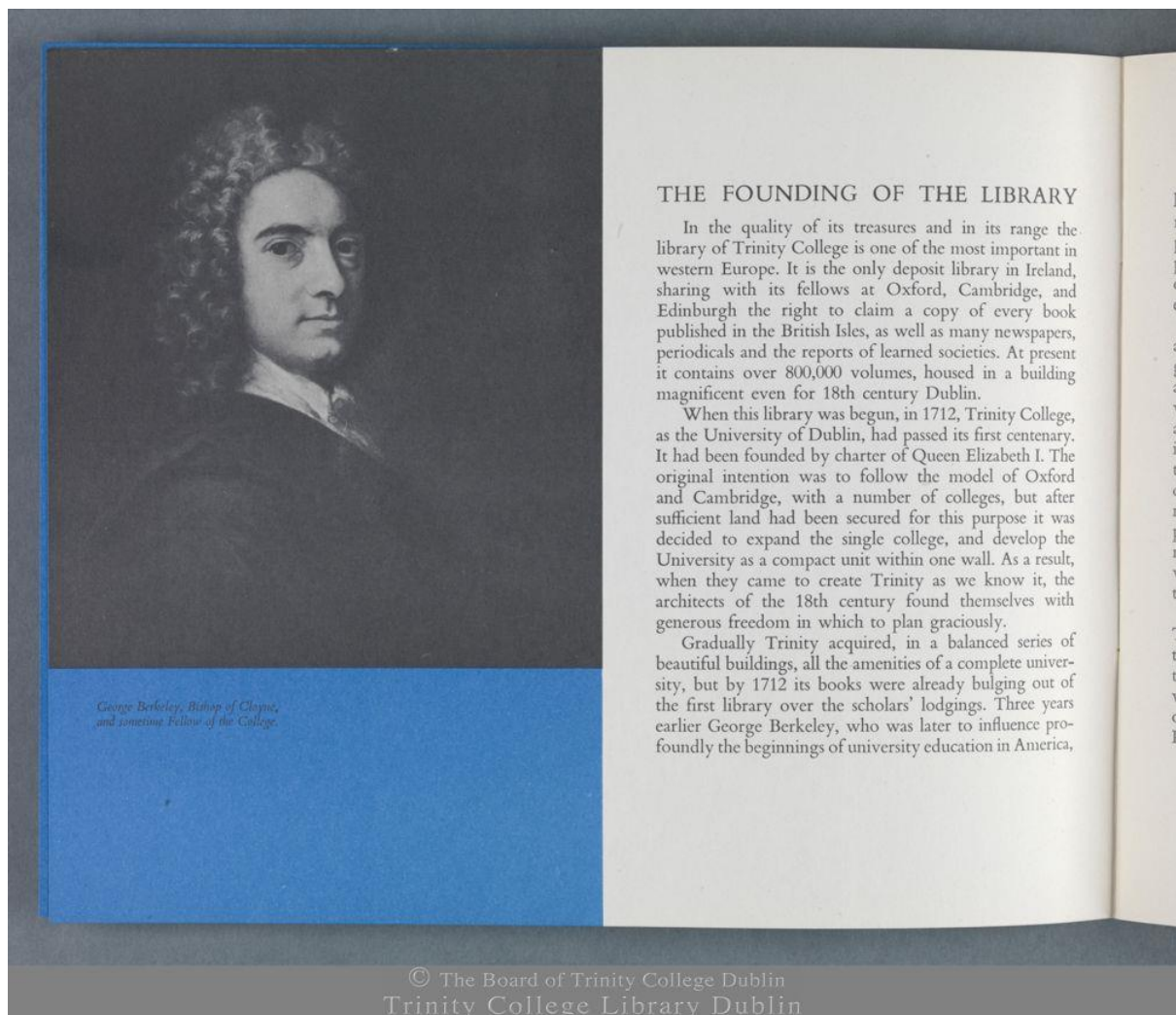
²⁵ *Irish Times*, 11, Dec. 1978. For the original opening of the New Library see *Irish Times*, 13 July, 1967; Dublin University Calendar 1978-89, p.148.

²⁶ Board Minutes, *Register of Trinity College*, Trinity College Dublin Archives, MUN/V/5/45: 5 October 1977, minute 8/3; For this use of 'eponyms' to celebrate the names of distinguished graduates see Gordon Herries Davies, 'Hosce meos filios', in C.H. Holland (ed.) *Trinity College Dublin & the Idea of a University* (1991), pp. 323-24.

²⁷ 26 May 1977, Memo from the Registrar, Provost's Secretary Office, p.2; Dawson, a prominent geneticist, served as Registrar between 1976-80.

²⁸ Trinity College Dublin library extension appeal, <https://digitalcollections.tcd.ie/concern/works/4j03d241c?locale=en>.

²⁹ The appeal references Berkeley's work to improve education in the Americas but do not mention his connections to slavery.



There is no other evidence that any debate occurred over the naming of the library. As a result, Berkeley became familiar to successive generations of students less as a philosopher and more as a thing or place- the Berkeley. The radical changes in student and staff profile, in terms of racial and class diversity and internationalisation (28% of students are now international) are also important to consider when understanding responses to Berkeley's association with the library.

2.5. Berkeley Portraits in the College Art Collection.

There are at least three portraits of Berkeley at TCD. One is hung very prominently in the Examination Hall, another is in the Senior Common Room, and the last is currently in the West Theatre, but has also been hung in the Provost's House. There are several general accounts of representations of

Berkeley in art.³⁰The most important portrait of Berkeley by John Smibert, who accompanied Berkeley to Rhode Island, and hangs in Yale.³¹



The earliest completed portrait (above) is by James Latham and dates from 1741 (some date it to 1734-38) and was purchased for college for 20 guineas in 1865 (around the same time the window was commissioned in the Chapel) and is currently on display in the west theatre. This portrait was done from life.³²

³⁰ See a useful summary here: <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/personExtended/mp00391/george-berkeley?tab=iconography> but also A. A. Luce, *The Life of George Berkeley*, 1949, pp 239-44.

³¹ <https://artgallery.yale.edu/collections/objects/21>

³² Walter G Strickland, 'James Latham,' *A Dictionary of Irish Artists* (1913); Andrew O'Connor, 'James Latham: Further Documentation,' *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 64, no. 256 (1975), 379-85; Anne Crookshank,, 'James Latham 1696-1747,' *The GPA Irish Arts Review Yearbook* (1988), 56-72.

A second portrait by Robert Home (below) dates from 1782 and is the one that hangs in the Examination Hall, thus making it the most 'public' of the Berkeley portraits in college. Home later became famous as a court artist at Lucknow, but was quite young when he painted the posthumous portrait of Berkeley.³³ Home is responsible for 7/8 portraits hung in the examination hall, having been commissioned in 1782 to paint 8 figures, including Henry Grattan (from life), but also Berkeley, Queen Elizabeth, Swift, Molyneaux etc. His portrait of Grattan was removed after the Act of Union in favour of Hoppner's portrait of Burke, and unfortunately is presumed destroyed.³⁴



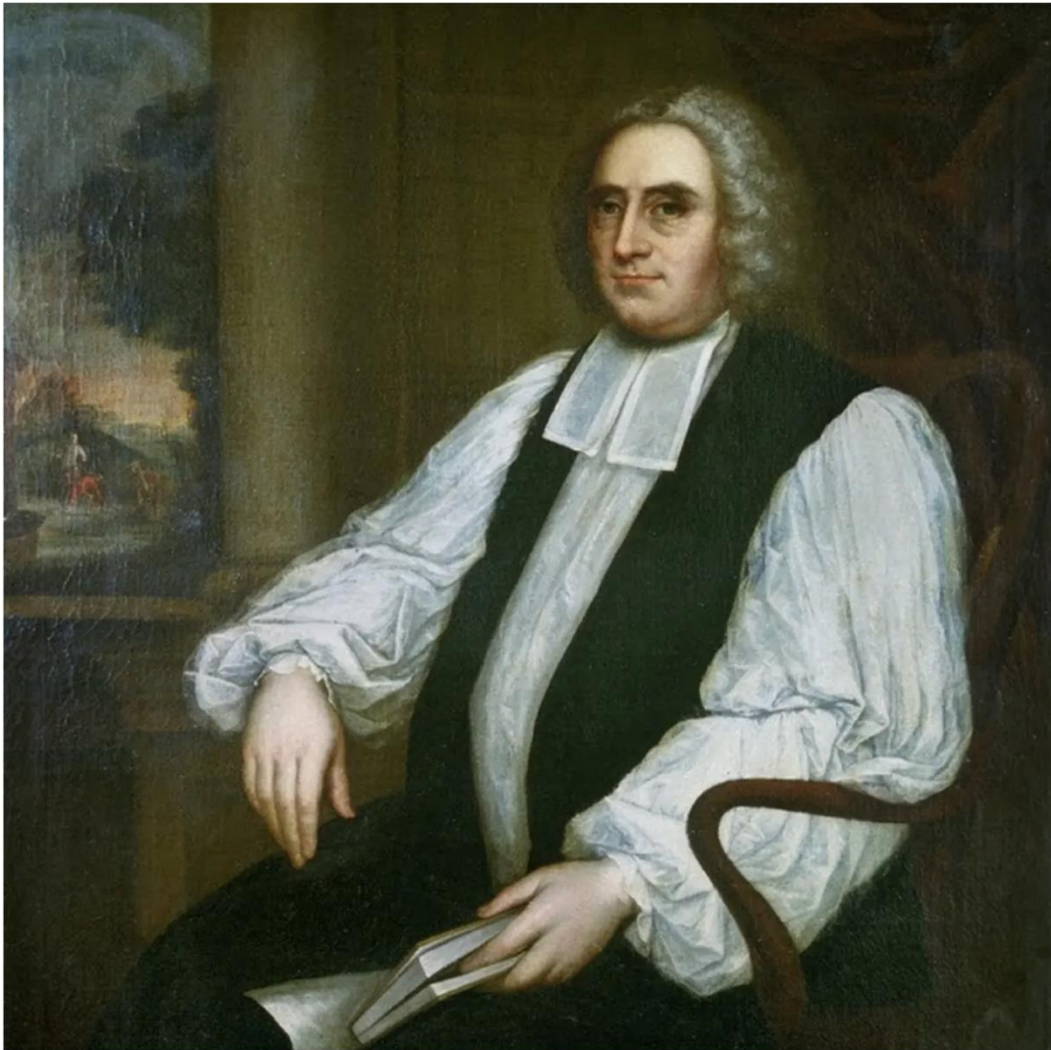
George Berkeley (1685-1753), Robert Home, 1782, From the collection of: The Library of Trinity College Dublin

A third painting, by Francis Bindon (1690-1765), hangs in the Senior Common Room, and thus occupies a space that is frequented by staff of the college as well as visitors to the college (by invitation). It too was purchased by the college relatively late, in 1870, but was started in 1733 and perhaps finished c.1765. Bindon is more famous for his portraits of Swift, but it is very possible that this portrait was done from life also, since Berkeley was in Dublin in this period in the 1730s.³⁵

³³ Stephen Markel, "This blaze of wealth and magnificence": the Luxury arts of Lucknow,' *India's fabled city: the Art of Courtly Lucknow* (2010): 199-200.

³⁴ Walter G Strickland, 'Robert Home 1752-1834,' *A Dictionary of Irish Artists* (1913); Bridget Hourican, 'Robert Home 1752-1834,' *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (2009)

³⁵ Helen Andrews, 'Francis Bindon 1690-1765,' *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (2009)



George Berkeley, Francis Bindon, 1733/1765, From the collection of: [The Library of Trinity College Dublin](#)

2. International Approaches to De-Naming

Peer universities across the globe have been investigating their colonial or slavery legacies and have in many instances reckoned with similar issues to those raised by Berkeley's material legacies at TCD.

In Yale there have been calls from student activists to rename Berkeley College. In January of this year, Yale Divinity School's Dean Greg Sterling issued an acknowledgment of the School's "historical complicity in slavery and racism". Sterling specifically noted that early scholarships or "[Berkeley premiums](#)" were funded by "profits from George Berkeley's farm in Rhode Island, which was worked by enslaved people". The School has promised to allocate an \$20 million endowment to fund 10 social justice scholarships each year for incoming students dedicated to social justice work. The Episcopal Seminary within the Yale Divinity School, however, still bears the bishop's name to [honour his "American experiment in higher education"](#) and gifts including a "farm in Newport". Harvard University have in April 2022 created a \$100 million endowment for slavery reparations.³⁶ Meanwhile in California local residents have raised the possibility of renaming the city of Berkeley.³⁷ U.C. Berkeley have preferred to address the four hundred year-old legacy of slavery in North America as part of a reconciliation programme which does not specifically address George Berkeley's American legacies.³⁸

Moving beyond Berkeley there are a number of pertinent examples where universities have reckoned with buildings named after slaveowners. In 2020 Columbia University – a university Berkeley had a hand in founding - moved to dename Bard Hall, first named after slaveowner John Bard in 1931.³⁹ Of even greater significance was the decision of Toronto Metropolitan University to change its name from Ryerson University in April 2022 following an internal and external engagement process.⁴⁰ Other examples of universities grappling with legacy issues include University of Cape Town, Glasgow, Dalhousie, and Oxford amongst others.⁴¹ Especially influential when dealing with the legacy of slavery in the physical fabric of American universities has been the concept of de-naming. The authors of the Harvard report on principles for de-naming explains that de-naming is used to designate the category of name change where 'a possible change is related to the perception that a namesake's actions or beliefs were "abhorrent" in the context of current values', although it is clear that slavery was always abhorrent to the enslaved and also to many others in contemporary society.⁴²

³⁶ <https://legacyofslavery.harvard.edu/report>

³⁷ [https://www.berkeleyside.org/2022/01/07/opinion-berkeley-is-named-after-a-slaveholder-its-time-to-
rename-the-city](https://www.berkeleyside.org/2022/01/07/opinion-berkeley-is-named-after-a-slaveholder-its-time-to-rename-the-city)

³⁸ <https://400years.berkeley.edu/home>

³⁹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/29/nyregion/columbia-university-slavery-samuel-bard.html> See also

⁴⁰ <https://www.torontomu.ca/next-chapter/renaming-process/>

⁴¹ <https://www.oriel.ox.ac.uk/about/the-rhodes-legacy/> [https://contestedhistories.org/wp-
content/uploads/South-Africa_-_Cecil-John-Rhodes-Statue-at-the-University-of-Cape-Town-in-Cape-Town.pdf](https://contestedhistories.org/wp-content/uploads/South-Africa_-_Cecil-John-Rhodes-Statue-at-the-University-of-Cape-Town-in-Cape-Town.pdf)
The University of Cape Town for example put together a task force that elicited a total of 323 submissions in relation to a shortlist of buildings on their Cape Town campus, but then went through an additional process in 2020-2021 to rename several more.⁴¹

⁴² We are especially grateful to Vincent Brown, Charles Warren Professor of American History, Harvard University, for sharing the Harvard de-naming document with us. See also Dennis, Matthew, and Samuel Reis-

Dennis. "'What's in a name?': The University of Oregon, De-Naming Controversies, and the Ethics of Public Memory." *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 120, no. 2 (2019): 176-205; 'UMN could replace names on over 30 buildings,' *Twin Cities*, 31 December 2021. For a summary of initiatives in the USA since about 2001 see Leslie M Harris, 'Higher Education's Reckoning with Slavery', *Academe* (Winter, 2020). For a history of Irish abolitionism see Nini Rogers, *Ireland, Slavery and Anti-Slavery: 1612-1865* (2007).