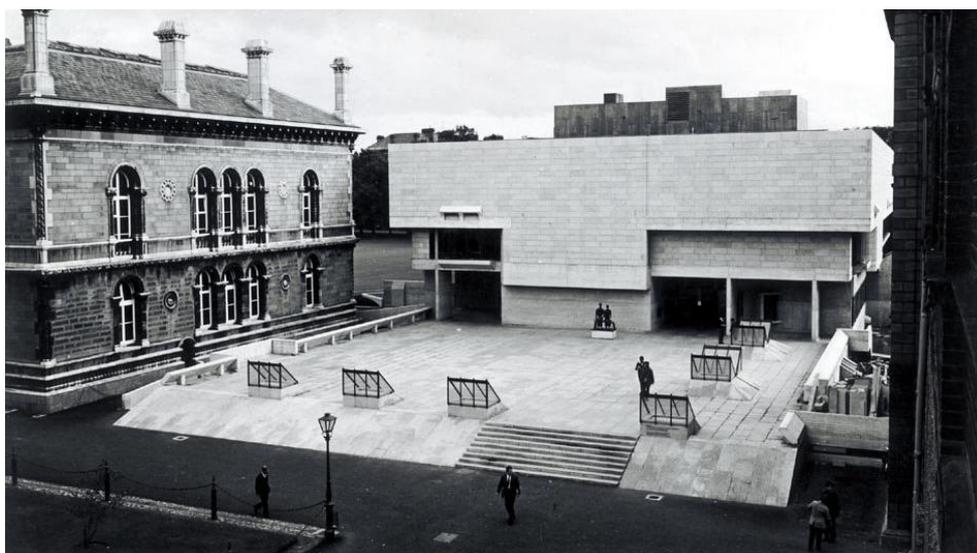


## **-Working Paper on Berkeley's Legacies at Trinity**

**Dr Mobeen Hussain, Dr Ciaran O'Neill and Dr Patrick Walsh | March 2023**

### **Purpose of Working Paper**

This Working Paper details the memorialisation of Bishop George Berkeley (1685-1753) at Trinity College Dublin. It begins by first explaining who George Berkeley was, before moving on to discuss how he has been memorialised by successive generations in TCD, including but not limited to the Berkeley Library. The next section then provides detailed historical evidence on Bishop George Berkeley's slave-owning activities and his ideological support for the slave system and settler colonialism. Section 4 then moves on to address the public submissions made to the Trinity Legacy Review Working Group (TLRWG) in January 2023 in response to the first working paper published by the TLRWG. The final section 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. Bishop George Berkeley D.D.**

George Berkeley was born at Dysart, Co. Kilkenny in March 1685.<sup>1</sup> Educated at Kilkenny College he entered TCD in March 1700 receiving his BA degree in February 1704. He took holy orders and became

---

<sup>1</sup> This brief biography draws on Paul O'Grady's entry in the *Dictionary of Irish Biography* available at [www.DIB.ie](http://www.DIB.ie)

a fellow of TCD by competitive examination in 1707. He subsequently held a number of college offices including librarian (1709), junior dean (1710), junior Greek Lecturer (1712), senior Greek lecturer (1721) divinity lecturer and preacher (1721) senior proctor (1722) and Hebrew lecturer (1723) before relinquishing his fellowship in 1724 to become Dean of Derry. As librarian in 1709 he was instrumental in overseeing the building of the then new library, now the Old Library

While at TCD he published the three books upon which his fame and reputation as a philosopher rests. The first of these, *An essay towards a new theory of vision* was published in 1709 and developed his ideas on vision which became would later support his more famous immaterialist hypotheses. His *A treatise concerning the principles of human knowledge* followed in 1710 and is generally regarded as his masterpiece. It developed his full-blown philosophy of materialism or subjective idealism and continues to have a significant influence on modern philosophical scholarship. Finally the third of these pioneering works, *The three dialogues between Hylas and Pilonius* was published in London in 1713. His reputation established; Berkeley embarked on two extensive grand tours of Europe from 1714-20 before eventually returning to his fellowship.

While Dean of Derry, he developed his idea for establishing a university in the American colonial territory of Bermuda. This eventually involved Berkeley moving to Rhode Island in 1729 where he purchased a farm at Whitehall worked by enslaved people. His university plans were ultimately unsuccessful but his time in America can be considered a critical hinge point in his life. It established his reputation in America where through his donations of books, property and intellectual networks he influenced early American higher education. Upon his return from America, and following a period living in London with his growing family, Berkeley was appointed to the provincial bishopric of Cloyne, in which role he remained until his death. During this period, he wrote his influential work on Irish political economy, *The Querist* (1735-37) as well as series of other pamphlets.

He was also an active bishop in his diocese where he took his pastoral role seriously, including providing significant charitable donations during the famine of 1740-41. More controversially he developed his recipe for tar water, a substance he had first observed in America which he believed could cure many of the ailments affecting the local population. Amongst those upon whom he tested this substance was the Irish giant Cornelius McGrath whose remains are today held by TCD.

George Berkeley died in Oxford in 1753, where he was buried in Christ Church cathedral. His will stipulated that:

*It is my will that my Body be buried in the church-yard of the parish in which I die: Item, that the expense of my funeral do not exceed twenty pounds, and that as much more be given to the poor of the parish where I die.*

These instructions were ignored as a large marble monument was erected over his grave. They do give indication of how modestly he himself wished to be memorialised.

## **2. How and where TCD has memorialised George Berkeley?**

### **2.1 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 the following description is taken.<sup>2</sup> 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.

### **2.2 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 listed in the College Calendar today but have not been awarded by the Dept. of Classics since 2011.<sup>3</sup>

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.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> MUN VOL/5/3, p.91. The medals while still listed amongst College prizes are last known to have been awarded by the Classics Department in 2011.

<sup>4</sup> College Calendar 1944-1945, p.457.

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.

### 2.3 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.<sup>5</sup> The exact provenance and continued endowment of this lectureship is uncertain, but 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.<sup>6</sup>

### 2.4 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.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> The decision to name the Library rather than a lecture theatre after Berkeley was accepted by the Board after a

---

<sup>5</sup> College Calendar 1849, p.32.; *Armagh Guardian*, 22 July 1850; *Saint James’s Chronicle*, 18 July 1846

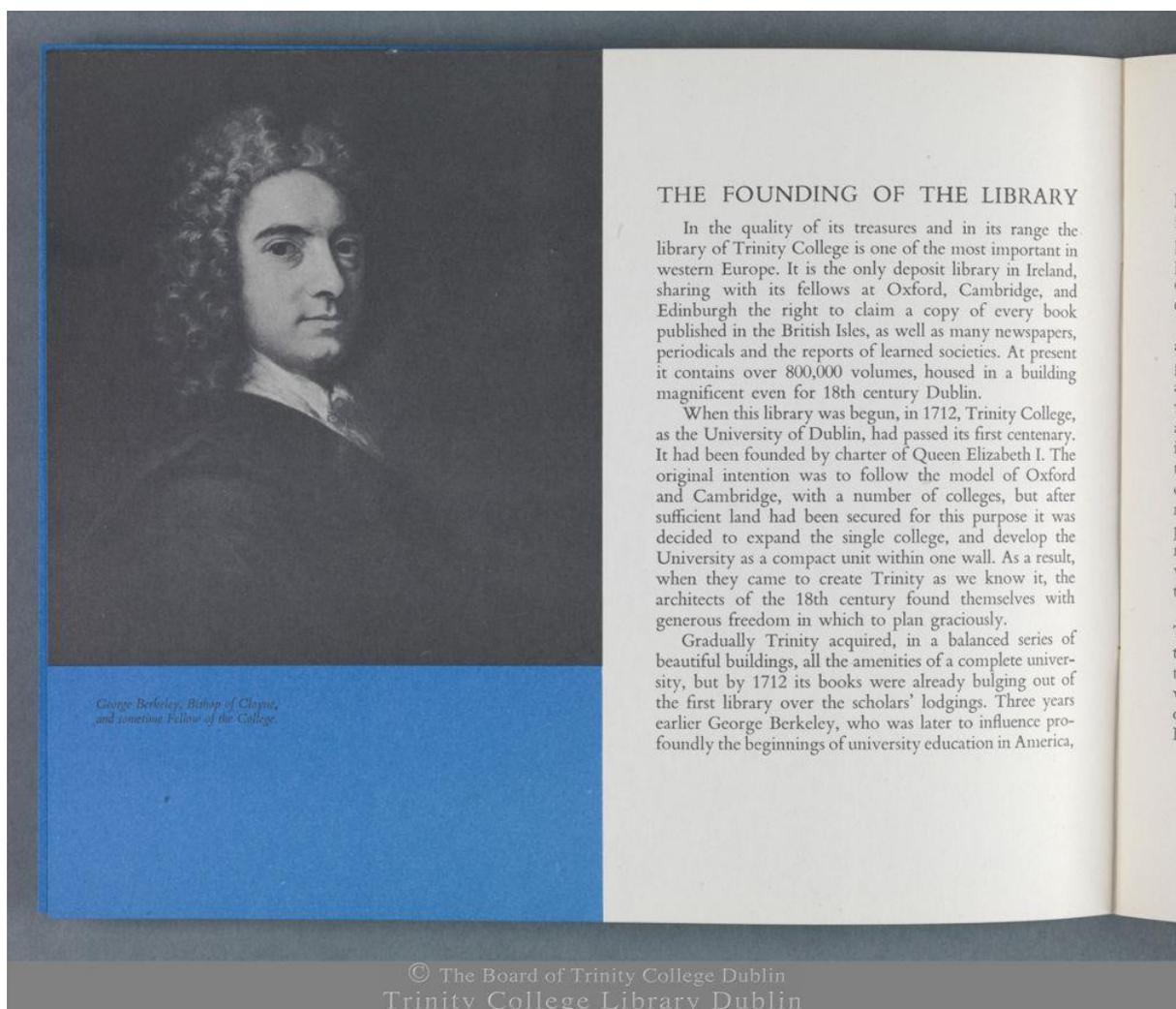
<sup>6</sup> See Luce’s entry in the *Dictionary of Irish Biography* [www.D.I.B.ie](http://www.D.I.B.ie)

<sup>7</sup> On this see Tomas Irish, *Trinity in War and Revolution 1912-1923* (Dublin, 2015), ch. 6.

<sup>8</sup> *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.

<sup>9</sup> 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.

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'.<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup>



<sup>10</sup> 26 May 1977, Memo from the Registrar, Provost's Secretary Office, p.2; Dawson, a prominent geneticist, served as Registrar between 1976–80.

<sup>11</sup> Trinity College Dublin library extension appeal, <https://digitalcollections.tcd.ie/concern/works/4j03d241c?locale=en>.

<sup>12</sup> 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 was listed in the 1992 catalogue of the art collection as hanging in the West Theatre. It has also previously been hung in the Provost's House. There are several general accounts of representations of Berkeley in art.<sup>13</sup> The most important portrait of Berkeley by John Smibert, who accompanied Berkeley to Rhode Island, and hangs in Yale.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> 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.

<sup>14</sup> <https://artgallery.yale.edu/collections/objects/21>



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 was previously on display in the west theatre. This portrait was done from life.<sup>15</sup>

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.<sup>16</sup> Home is responsible for 7/8 portraits hung in the examination hall, having been

---

<sup>15</sup> 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.

<sup>16</sup> 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.

commissioned in 1782 to paint 8 figures, including Henry Grattan (from life), but also Berkeley, Queen Elizabeth, Swift, Molyneux 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.<sup>17</sup>



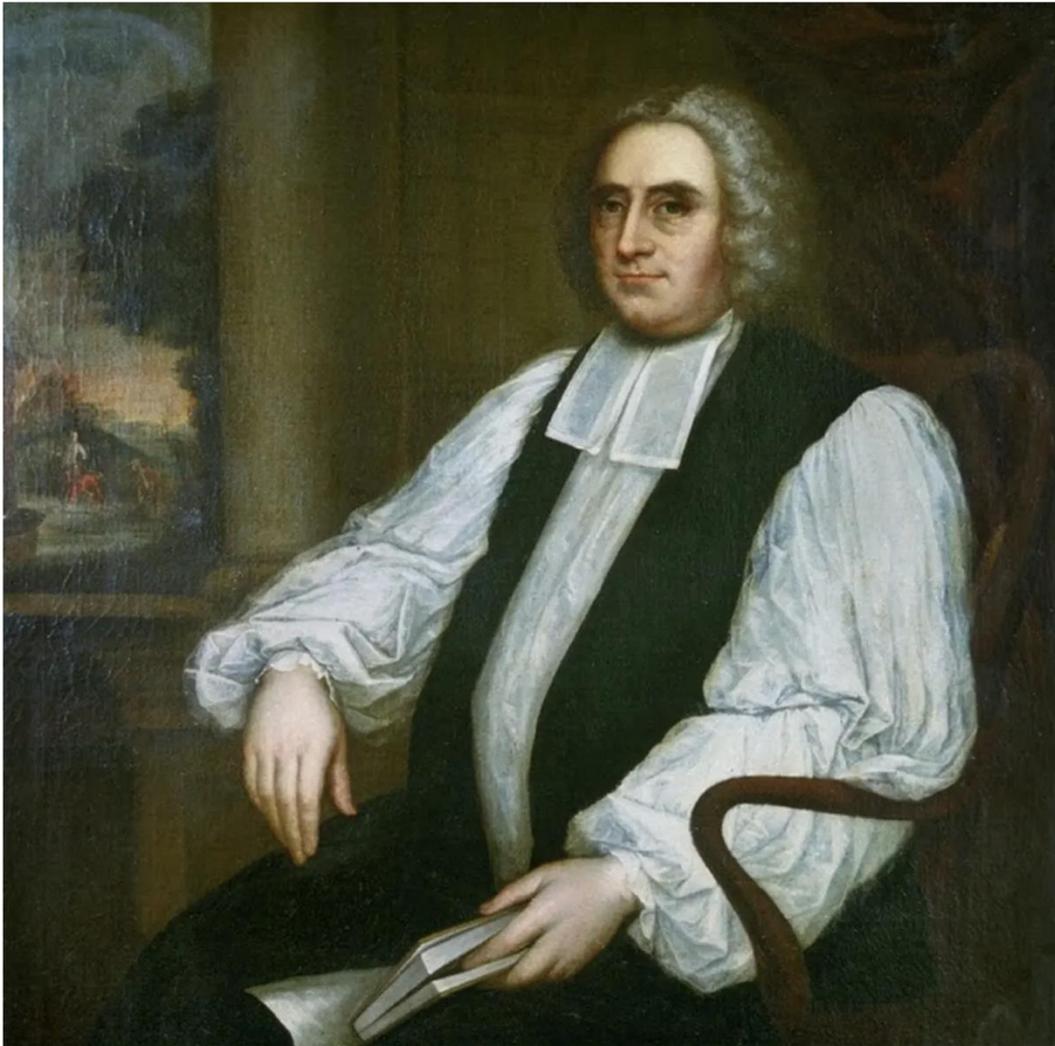
George Berkeley (1685-1753), Robert Home, 1782, From the collection of: [The Library of Trinity College Dublin](#)

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.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Walter G Strickland, 'Robert Home 1752-1834,' *A Dictionary of Irish Artists* (1913); Bridget Hourican, 'Robert Home 1752-1834,' *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (2009)

<sup>18</sup> 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](#)

### **3. George Berkeley and slavery: Reviewing the Evidence**

Philip, Anthony, Edward and Agnes Berkeley were the property of George Berkeley, 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.<sup>19</sup> Upon arrival in Rhode Island

---

<sup>19</sup> The most detailed published accounts 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 and



These records demonstrate clearly that Berkeley bought slaves, a fact recognised by some but not all of his biographers.<sup>23</sup> 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.<sup>24</sup> At Yale the profits from Berkeley's slave worked plantation became the college's first endowment and was used to fund prizes into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and a residential college, Berkeley College, was erected in 1934.<sup>25</sup> 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.<sup>26</sup>

While these Yale connections are important George Berkeley (1685-1753) is most prominently associated with TCD where he established himself as a major figure in philosophy, before embarking on his Bermuda scheme in the 1720s. 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 Missionaries, well fitted for propagating Christianity among the Savages'.<sup>27</sup> He also proposed that if necessary Native Americans could be kidnapped and then educated at his college.<sup>28</sup> This project from its outset was a connected with Trinity and at least three of the nine

---

<sup>23</sup> 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.

<sup>24</sup> 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.

<sup>25</sup> For Berkeley College and its 'christening' in 1934 with tar water see Gaustad, *Berkeley in America*, p. 202.

<sup>26</sup> On Yale's investigation into its connections to slavery see <https://yaleandslavery.yale.edu/>

<sup>27</sup> *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.

<sup>28</sup> 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.

founding fellows proposed (not including Berkeley) were also TCD fellows.<sup>29</sup> Having spent much of the 1720s lobbying the government in London and securing philanthropic (including the profits from Esther Van Homrigh's investments in the slave-trading South Sea Company) 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.'<sup>30</sup> 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.<sup>31</sup> 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.<sup>32</sup>

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 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

---

<sup>29</sup> 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 when Berkeley left for America, Luce, *Berkeley*, p. 136.

<sup>30</sup> *A Proposal for the Better Supplying of Churches*, p. 5.

<sup>31</sup> Gaustad, *Berkeley in America*, pp. 90-95, 124-25.

<sup>32</sup> 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; Travis Glasson, 'Baptism doth not bestow freedom: missionary Anglicanism, slavery and the Yorke-Talbot opinion, 1701-30', in *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 67 (2010), pp. 279-318. Jones, *George Berkeley*, pp. 234-37. See also Scott Breuinger 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>

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.<sup>33</sup>

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?’<sup>34</sup> 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 Negros. The Negros in our plantations have a saying if Negro was not Negro, Irishman would be Negro’.<sup>35</sup>

### **3. 4. Public Submissions to TLRWG on the Berkeley Library.**

In early December 2022 the TLRWG opened up a call for evidence-based submissions from members of the college community as well as the wider public as part of its consultative process on the student-led request to de-name the Berkeley Library. Upon the closure of the submission window on 31 January 2023 there were 93 submissions. These included submissions from current students and staff, emeritus staff, alumni and international experts on Berkeley and other associated subjects. They can be divided into three categories with a small number of submissions proving elusive to categorise. 47 were in favour of de-naming the library. A further 23 suggested new names for the library and should be seen as broadly supportive of de-naming, even if renaming was outside the brief of this consultation (A separate college committee is charged with naming buildings).. Finally, 16 submissions supported retaining Bishop Berkeley’s name on the library.

---

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>.

<sup>34</sup> George Berkeley, *The Querist* (Dublin, 1735-37). See also Jones, *George Berkeley*, p. 237-38, Rozbicki, ‘To save them from themselves’, pp. 36-37.

<sup>35</sup> George Berkeley, *A Word to the Wise: Or an Exhortation to the Roman Catholic Clergy of Ireland* (Dublin, 1749), p. 8.

Considering the student advocacy on this issue going back to 2020-21 it is not surprising that student voices feature prominently amongst those in support of de-naming. Of particular interest are those from students of colour who express their discomfort about the visible presence of a memorial to a prominent enslaver on campus (Luther Lyons, Gabi Fullam). Another student submission (Regan Roseveare) notes how TCD has recently been designated the 12<sup>th</sup> most international university in the world and how this stands in contrast to the ongoing memorialisation of Berkeley: 'The issue is whether or not, in 2023, Trinity should continue to lionise a man who used his wealth to perpetuate the enslavement of human beings'. A contribution from a recent alumnus Sarah McAleese likewise notes, 'as a University that claims to inspire the next generation of global citizens and leaders, we have a duty to engage critically with our past and change when necessary'.

This focus on values is picked up across a number of the submissions. Dr Phil Mullen (School of Social Sciences and Philosophy) notes how the make-up and values of the college community have changed since the original decision to name the library after Berkeley in 1978: 'Trinity College Dublin in 2023 is a different institution to its 1978 incarnation that named the library. It possesses different institutional values and strategic goals, a more diverse staff and student composition and access to a wider and more informed knowledge base.' A similar point is made by Professor Ruth Karras, Lecky Professor of History: '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'. Prof. Siobhan Garrigan, Loyala Chair of Theology, meanwhile in her submission draws attention to the College's current statement of values writing: 'Any decision we make today should reflect today's values, especially our core value of equality'. She also argues that to dename is to take 'responsibility for the harms that institutions like ours casually inflict and deny, both historically (e.g. by excluding so very many people – women, or Catholics at Trinity, anyone?, by making money by nefarious means, by robbing churches) and today (by requiring students to work in spaces named after slave-owners, institutionalising racism again and again). Owning our privilege involves owning the history, good and bad, that produced it'.

The original brief for these submissions requested further evidence to support the arguments been provided. In this regard the submissions by leading contemporary Berkeley scholars are important. Prof. Tom Jones (University of St Andrews), the author of the recent authoritative, *George Berkeley: A Philosophical Life* (Princeton 2021) writes in support of de-naming: 'Berkeley's ownership of

enslaved people and these social and religious views seem to me a rational basis for the discomfort many people are expressing at the retention of Berkeley's name for the new library at Trinity'. He also critically notes that denaming the library will not affect how Berkeley is taught (a concern raised by some of those in favour of keeping Berkeley's name on the library), 'I do not see the changing of the name of the library as having any strong association with or effect on the place of Berkeley in teaching curricula and research agendas. Teaching and research are developing their own reflective practices that may displace figures long regarded as canonical or insist on understanding them in their full context, including the histories of colonialism, racism and exploitation'. Prof. Tom Stoneham (University of York), President of the International Berkeley Society similarly notes in his submission how Berkeley scholars have begun to address 'the problematical Berkeley' while Dr Peter West notes how de-naming Berkeley is not the same as cancelling Berkeley. Instead, he explains how Berkeley continues and will continue to be taught at universities across the globe including TCD though with a better sense of his contexts.

These contexts are the focus of Dr Phil Mullen's submission which critiques arguments made in favour of retaining Berkeley's name on the basis that he was 'a man of his times'. She produces detailed evidence to show that slavery was not universally accepted at the time not least of course by the enslaved themselves: 'It seems incredible to have to state it, but enslaved people believed it was wrong. They revealed their moral dissent through constant rebellion and flight'. She further points to contemporary voices expressing their moral dissent against slavery whether from within the enslaved community or from other white Christian contemporaries of Berkeley including the Irish moral philosopher, Francis Hutcheson. Dr Mullen shows how Berkeley was familiar with Hutcheson's work arguing: 'To continue to justify Berkeley's endorsement of slavery and the exploitation and dehumanisation of people on the grounds that he was simply 'a man of his time' and could not have known any better ultimately fails as his views can be contrasted with the opposing views on the liberty of all men – which were known to Berkeley since he critiqued them in *Alciphron* – of an Irish contemporary of his and eminence of Scottish Philosophy and father of utilitarianism, Francis Hutcheson. Concluding her discussion of the man of his times' argument Dr Mullen states: 'It is not convincing to attribute expiation to Berkeley on such ahistorical terms as the man of his times argument. Even those reduced to a liminal historical presence, the enslaved, manifest their voices and moral dissent through their physical reaction to slavery. Berkeley is best understood as a man of his times who chose to engage in and profit from the pernicious institution of slavery when other articulate moral avenues were available to him. Whatever justifications as propitiation Berkeley may present in his work must be refracted through the lens that these do not amount to expiation.

She also demonstrates how Berkeley expressed support for slavery beyond his ownership of slavery specifically in connection to the Yorke-Talbot opinion which strengthened the legal rights of British slaveowners. Drawing on research by Travis Glasson and Nicholas Leah she shows how Berkeley was instrumental in soliciting for and shaping this important legal statement. Dr Mullen also adds new evidence showing how well known Berkeley's ownership of slaves was from the late nineteenth century citing Alexander Campbell Fraser's 1871 *Life and Letters of George Berkeley* and his observation that 'slavery produced festivity' for Berkeley as well Wylie Sypher's research published in the *Journal of Negro History* in 1939. This is important as it shows this was an established fact long before 1978 despite the omissions and elisions in some twentieth century work on Berkeley, notably by A.A. Luce.

Within the submissions in favour of de-naming a number of contributions (Karras, Stoneham, Geary) suggest that in the event of de-naming an appropriate plaque/display should be commissioned to note that the library was named after Berkeley and why this has changed. The process they argue should be transparent and visible. Dr Dan Geary, Mark Pigot Associate Professor in American History suggests that: 'I would favor the inclusion of a prominently placed plaque in the newly named library that would indicate that this was once called Berkeley library and explain why it was re-named on consideration of the facts of Berkeley's support for slavery'.

The submissions in favour of retaining Berkeley's name tend on average to be shorter and also add less new evidence to the process. A number of these submissions either criticise the very idea of discussing this matter or the process or simply make statements attesting to Berkeley's significance as a philosopher, something that is not in dispute (Berman, Sexton, Jackson and Romagnoli and Laymond). More substantive is the detailed submission by Prof. David McConnell, who while largely arguing for a wider discussion of Berkeley's achievements as a philosopher of immaterialism - Berkeley is one the very few from Trinity whose reputation is secure and likely to endure in the academic world – also points towards this current moment as an opportunity to have wider conversations about the legacy of slavery and abolition in Trinity: 'The naming of the Library offers Trinity a logical and enduring way of promoting discussion of slavery and Ireland.' This is however as other submissions make clear not incompatible with de-naming the library. On the evidentiary side he notes the presence of the Berkeley Institute a secondary school in Bermuda founded in 1859 by the local Black community and suggests that scholarships might be offered to students of this school by TCD, as a form of reparation. In a similar vein to Professor McConnell who notes. 'His (Berkeley's) status as a scholar should not be

diminished by his social thinking, which was not exceptional by the standards of his times'. The historian Professor Nicholas Canny (Emeritus, University of Galway) makes an argument contra to that of Dr Mullen that Berkeley was not exceptional amongst his contemporaries in terms of his slave-owning activities. He argues that 'for most educated people in the western world throughout most of the eighteenth century, slavery was a largely unquestioned dimension to life that contributed to their own relative comfort'. Developing this theme further he concludes his submission by arguing 'the proposal to remove his name from the library because he was, for a short interlude, technically the owner of slaves is, to my mind, entirely unjustified, because, by the moral standards of his own time, there was nothing reprehensible about owning slaves provided their owner treated them fairly'. He also goes on to argue that the intention of Berkeley's college was to ameliorate the conditions of slavery by providing a better education for plantation owners, something he argues makes the Berkeley case significantly different to major American slaveowners like Thomas Jefferson and George Washington who continue to be memorialised in U.S. universities.

## 5. 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.<sup>36</sup> Meanwhile in California local residents have raised the possibility of renaming the city of Berkeley.<sup>37</sup> U.C. Berkeley

---

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

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.berkeleyside.org/2022/01/07/opinion-berkeley-is-named-after-a-slaveholder-its-time-to-rename-the-city>

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.<sup>38</sup>

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.<sup>39</sup> 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.<sup>40</sup> Other examples of universities grappling with legacy issues include University of Cape Town, Glasgow, Dalhousie, and Oxford amongst others.<sup>41</sup> 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.<sup>42</sup>

---

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

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

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

<sup>41</sup> <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.

<sup>42</sup> 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)*.