Working Paper on Human Remains from Inishbofin held in the Haddon-Dixon collection at TCD

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Background

In February 2021 a group representing the residents of several communities on the West Coast of Ireland petitioned the Provost of TCD requesting the return of human remains housed in Old Anatomy.[1] Of these connected cases by far the most well documented is that of human remains taken from Inishbofin. These remains were taken illegally in 1890 by two academics connected with TCD Anthropometric Lab , Alfred Cort Haddon (Royal College of Science) and Andrew Francis Dixon (later Professor of Anatomy, TCD). The islanders are seeking the return and reburial of these remains on Inishbofin. This was the latest in a series of requests from this community to TCD in recent years and in September 2022 the Provost of TCD organised a meeting between representatives of the university and community representatives. It was agreed that a process would be established to explore this issue under the auspices of the Trinity Legacies Review Working Group chaired by the Senior Dean.[2]

Purpose of report

This report was authored by the Trinity Colonial Legacies project team and provides historical evidence documenting the acquisition of the Inishbofin Human Remains collection drawing on archival materials and on a public consultation exercise conducted on Inishbofin in November 2022.[3] It begins by situating the Inishbofin remains within the wider context of the Old Anatomy collection and the contemporary practices that informed the creation of that collection. It then moves to the specifics of the taking of the human remains from Inishbofin by Haddon and Dixon.

[1] Marie Coyne, Dr Pegi Vail, Pádraig Ó Direáin, Máirtín Ó Conceanainn, Niamh Cotter, Deirdre Casey, Pat O'Leary, Dessy Cronin, Susan Walsh, Cathy Galvin, Ciarán Walsh. "A Discussion Document Prepared by Community Representatives and Associated Researchers for the Office of the Provost, TCD." The Haddon-Dixon Repatriation Project, February 22, 2021.

[2] For an account of these requests see Sarah Morley Horder, 'There's Bound to be Skulls': Legacy Issues in the Trinity College Dublin Skull Passage Collection (TCD: M.Phil, 2021), 36-64.

[3] The Trinity Colonial Legacies project was established in 2021 as a research and public history project to contextualise and historicize the university's deep links to colonialism both in Ireland itself and in the wider world. It also seeks to raise awareness of college's physical and intellectual colonial legacies, monuments, and endowments in the present. More detail can be found at https://www.trinityscoloniallegacies.com/

Limits of the Evidential Review

The process for the return and reburial of historic human remains in Ireland is defined in legislation and differs from the repatriation of human remains to international communities of origin, as in the 2009 return of Maori remains from TCD to the Te Papu museum in New Zealand.[4]

It should also be stressed that this document focuses specifically on the Inishbofin case though it has potential relevance for future requests from other communities of origin in Ireland seeking the return and reburial of other human remains in the Haddon/Dixon collection including those collected from St Finan's Bay, Co. Kerry and the Aran Islands as well as other human remains' collections at TCD.

The Old Anatomy Collection in Context

Trinity College Dublin holds in excess of 484 human remains sourced from various parts of the globe, including Burma, Nigeria, Thailand, New Zealand, South Africa, Australia, and a number of Pacific Islands in our historic collections.[5] These human remains were mostly obtained between the eighteenth and early twentieth century and were used either for teaching purposes or as research specimens in Trinity's Anthropometric Laboratory. They are held under the care of the Old Anatomy Steering Group, who are involved in an ongoing project to catalogue them with a view to receiving Museum Standards Programme for Ireland accreditation by the Heritage Council. A significant portion of the collection is colonial in origin and can best be understood within a wider international context that saw the collection of such human remains by universities like Trinity as essential for pedagogical and research purposes.[6] Such collections of human remains were often acquired in ways that are not only problematic for modern sensibilities but were also problematic and illegal at the time. There is

[4] The relevant legislation is found in the National Monuments Act as amended in 1994 whereas all ancient archaeological remains are vested in the state under the auspices of the National Museum of Ireland, but there is 'no consensus on the meaning of the term 'ancient'. See Jerry O'Sullivan and Jim Kilgore, *Human Remains in Irish Archaeology* (Kilkenny: Heritage council, 2003). For an overview on current national policy see Human Remains Policy, National Museum of Ireland (2019). https://www.museum.ie/getmedia/80bd1b97-7ffb-4bac-adf9-c45f71041611/NMI-Human-Remains-Policy-2019-2023-FINAL.pdf

[5] The exact number of human remains is still unknown, but there are at least 463 skulls recorded in the catalogue, and at least 21 fully articulated skeletons in the collection. At present the pathological museum collection remains uncatalogued and until that is completed we cannot give an exact figure for historic human remains at Trinity. The human remains collection falls into four categories, the Anthropological collection, the Pathological collection, The Collection of Disarticulated Bones, and the Human Anatomical Dissections. Catherine Giltrap, ed. "Trinity College, Dublin The Academic and Artistic Collections- a Summary." Trinity College Dublin, 2016. https://www.tcd.ie/artcollections/assets/pdf/Academic-Artistic-Collections-TCD.pdf.

[6] Samuel J. Redman, *Bone Rooms: From Scientific Racism to Human Prehistory in Museums* (Harvard, 2016); James Poskett, *Materials of the Mind: Phenology, Race and the Global History of Science* (Chicago, 2019); and Craig Steven Wilder, *Ebony and Ivy: Race, Slavery and the Troubled History of America's Universities* (London, 2013), ch.6.

documentation in TCD archival collections that shows that some of this collection came to the College through illegal routes, something which was recognised by and acknowledged by the collectors themselves in their correspondence. What follows contextualizes the colonial origin of many of these human remains and the processes by which they were sourced illegally for the study of racial science.

Fig. 1 – Location of the community of origin for some of TCD's historic human remains as surveyed by the TCL project.[7]

Museums and other cultural institutions in Britain, Ireland, and elsewhere have begun the process of returning or repatriating human remains back to descendant communities.[8] In this context it is worth noting that TCD has previously returned Māori remains to descendant communities in what was described as a 'gesture embodying the ethical paradigm shift in the approach to studying anatomy introduced in the 20th century'. [9] Elsewhere in Ireland, the Ulster Museum has recently repatriated human remains to Hawaii.

[7] The source document for these locations is the TCD Anthropometry Catalogue, currently held in Old Anatomy.

[8] Chip Colwell-Chanthaphonh, Rachel Maxson and Jami Powell, 'The repatriation of culturally unidentifiable human remains', in *Museum Management and Curatorship,* 26:1 (2011): 27-43; James O. Young and Conrad Brunk (eds) *The Ethics of Cultural Appropriation* (London, 2009); Lizzie Wade. "The Ghosts in the Museum." *Science*, August 7, 2021.

[9] For the return of Māori remains at TCD in 2009 see Catherine Giltrap (ed), Trinity College Dublin: The Academic Artistic Collections: A Summary (2010), p. 6.

The Human Remains Collection in the Old Anatomy Museum

The human remains in the Old Anatomy Museum were collected by generations of Trinity researchers between the eighteenth and twentieth century and can be connected to contemporary interests in phrenology, craniometry, anthropometrics, and colonial specimen collection. In this respect Trinity played an important role in the circulation of knowledge and in the development of contemporary race science.[10] Direct links can be established between Trinity-affiliated academics such as Andrew Dixon, Daniel Cunningham, Charles Browne, and Alfred Cort Haddon and international scientific networks including figures such as ethnologists Charles Gabriel Seligman and Francis Galton, at University College London.[11] The extant Trinity catalogue documents crania collected by Trinity men from around the world, most of which remain on campus and in their original display cabinets. These are part of a human remains collection containing c.463 crania and c. 21 fully articulated skeletons.[12] A few key examples help to explain the problematic legacies associated with them, and to contextualise the direct relation between the skulls collected from within Ireland and those collected externally in a colonial context.

Archival correspondence and catalogue records show how skulls from across the empire were sent to TCD for anthropometrical experimentation and teaching on racial difference and disease. Many were donated by those aware of the work of Trinity's anthropometric laboratory and others were presented by naturalists or engineers connected to colonial surveying and teaching at Trinity including geologists Rev. Samuel Haughton and Valentine Ball. Skulls obtained and donated from South Africa were classified under the racial categories of Kaffir, Hottentot, and Zulu.[13] Likewise, many of the skulls and skeletons from the Indian Subcontinent are described through markers of caste (Chammar),[14] religion (Hindu, Mohamedan),[15] and region (Punjab, Madras).[16] Correspondence also highlights that many human remains were taken by stealth and by digging up sacred burial grounds and graveyards. A number of donators acknowledge that human remains were often acquired without the consent and

[10] Ciaran O'Neill. '"Harvard Scientist Seeks Typical Irishman": Measuring the Irish Race, 1888–1936', in *Radical History Review,* 143 (2022):89-108.
[11] See Greta Jones, 'Contested Territories: Alfred Cort Haddon, Progressive Evolutionism and Ireland', in *History of European Ideas,* 24:3 (1998), 195-211. Tanya O'Sullivan, *Geographies of City Science: Urban Life and Origin Debates in Late Victorian Dublin* (Pittsburgh, 2019); Ciarán Walsh, 'Anarchy in the UK: Haddon and the Anarchist Agenda in the Anglo-Irish Folklore Movement,' In *Folklore and Nation in Britain and Ireland* (Routledge, 2021), pp. 78-99.
[12] Source: Email from Evi Numen, Old Anatomy Museum Curator, 15. Aug. 2022.
[13] Catalogue of the Anthropological Laboratory, Trinity College Dublin,, pp.24-26; p.48.
[14] Ibid, p.510.
[15] Ibid, p.118; p.54.
[16] Ibid, p.82; p.431.

knowledge of origin communities or by contravening with local death customs. In 1896, for example, Dr. N. L. Watts sent the skull of a 'female Lushai' from an Indian 'aboriginal race' to Cunningham for 'anthropological purposes', indicating that the skull may have been damaged in the act of 'digging the ground' and reveals that the skull was transported via tour escorts with 'great difficulty' because the 'Lushai are particular their dead are unmolested'.[17] Human remains were also collected from victims of colonial negligence and violence including skulls of those who were executed or died from diseases in captivity (like in Rangoon jail) or as a result of famines.[18]

TCD's collections also contain sets of skulls taken from Southern Nigeria by R.G. Sheckleton and from North Central Nigeria by Captain H.L. Norton Traill, and then Commissioner and later Resident in Charge of Nasarawa Province (1904-1923).[19] Correspondence in the TCD catalogue indicates that the skulls from Southern Nigeria were stolen from the territory in 1895 and then donated to TCD in 1904. The donor noted the following in correspondence with Andrew Francis Dixon, by then one of the leading anatomists in TCD:

> 'As regards the skulls I brought them home about Easter, 1895. They were got in.. "Dezerna" in the "New Calabar" District of Southern Nigeria. The main tribe is "Eboe" but I do not know which subdivision the skulls belong to as they had to be got by stealth.'[20]

Andrew Francis Dixon was the Trinity academic that took the Inishbofin skulls with Alfred Cort Haddon in 1890, and later succeeded Cunningham as Professor of Anatomy. There is a visible memorial to him on the front entrance of the Lloyd Building, formerly the site of the Dixon Memorial Hall, which was named in his honour in 1939 but has since been demolished.

[17] Skull of Lushai (female) from South Lusha, Catalogue of the Anthropological Laboratory, Trinity College Dublin, p.117, A136.
[18] Valentine Ball, *Jungle Life in India or the Journeys & Journals of an Indian Geologist*, (London: Thos. De La Rue & Co., Bunhill Row, 1880), pp.78-79; Catalogue of the Anthropological Laboratory, Trinity College Dublin, p.53, A115.
[19] Catalogue of the Anthropological Laboratory, Trinity College Dublin, p.2; p.457; College Calendar 1916-1917 Vol II, p.117. Norton-Traill also donated Nigerian artefacts to the National Museum of Ireland showing how collectors of human remains were active more generally as colonial collectors as detailed in W.A. Hart, 'African Art in the National Museum of Ireland', in *African Arts,* 28:2 (1995), p. 46.
[20] Letter dated 11 March 1904, from Sheckleton to Dixon, Catalogue of the Anthropological Laboratory, Trinity College Dublin, p.2.

The Inishbofin Collection.

Of especial significance within the TCD collections are not just the human remains collected by Trinity men overseas but also the human remains brought to Trinity from several sites in the west of Ireland in the 1890s.[21] In particular, the skulls of islanders from Inishbofin collected by Alfred Haddon, Andrew Dixon, and studied by Charles Browne. It is clear from Haddon's own account that these remains were acquired without the permission of the islanders:

> *'We two climbed over the gate, went down the enclosure which is practically a large graveyard, disturbing some cattle, stumbled along and entered the church, tumbling over the grave stones. In the corner we saw by the dim light the skulls in a recess in the wall. There must have been 40 or more, all broken, mostly useless, but we found a dozen which were worth carrying away, only one however having the face bones. Whilst we were thus engaged we heard 2 men slowly walking along the road and like Brer Fox we lay low and like the Tar Baby, 'kept on saying nothing'. When the coast was clear we put our spoils in the sack and cautiously made our wat back to the road. Then it did not matter who saw us. The sailors wanted to take the sack when we got back to the boat but Dixon would not give it up and when asked what was in it said 'Potheen'. So without any further trouble we got the skulls aboard and then we packed them in Dixon's portmanteau and locked it and no except our two selves had an idea that there are a dozen human skulls on board and they shan't know either.'*[22]

[21] The Inishbofin crania are described in A.C. Haddon, 'Studies in Irish Craniology: II Inishbofin, Co. Galway', in Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy, 3 (1893-96), pp. 311-316, where they are described as thirteen crania gifted to TCD Anthropological Museum by Haddon.

[22] Cited from Haddon's letters in Alice Hingston Quiggin, *Haddon the Head Hunter: a short sketch of the life of A. C. Haddon,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1942), pp.70-71.

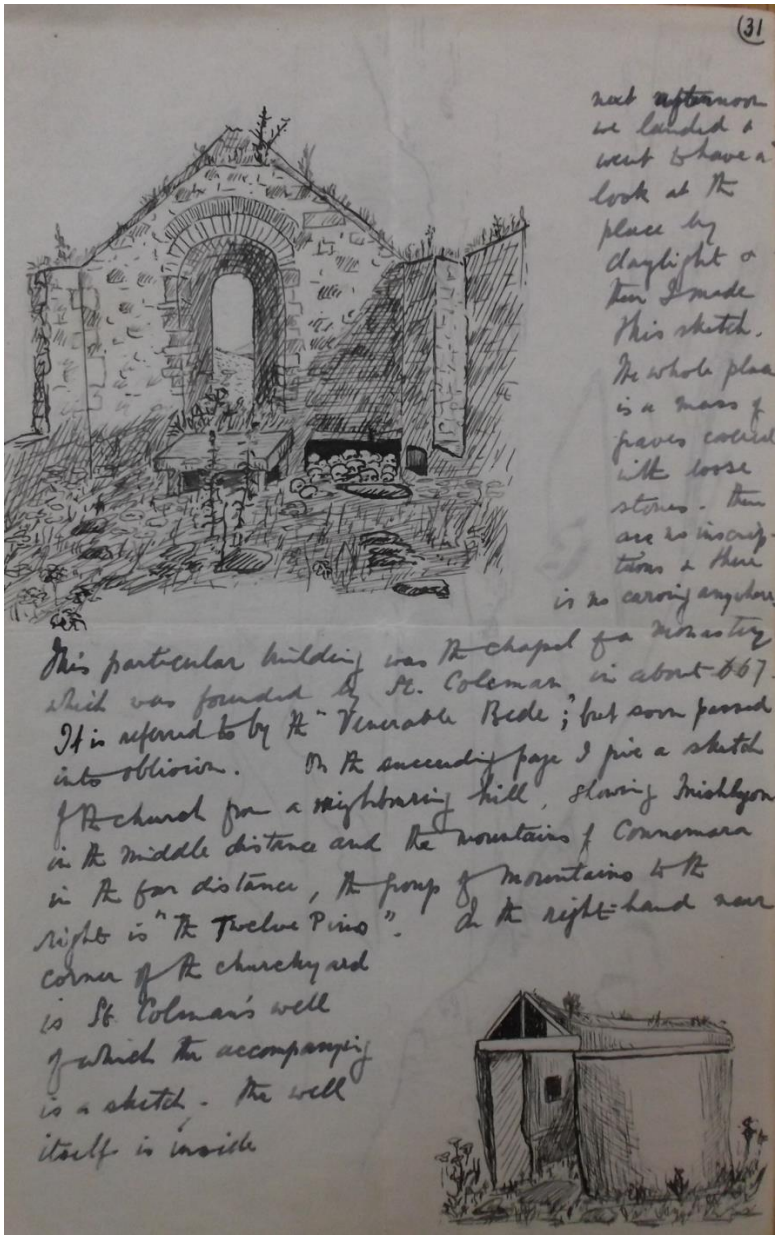

Figure 1: Haddon's diary sketch of St Colman's, including the nook from which he removed the skulls.[23]

Returning to the site in 1893 while conducting a series of live measurements on the island (Figure 2) Charles Browne noted contemporary resistance to his attempt to conduct subsequent measurements of additional crania on the site. On returning to St Colman's a second time the remaining crania had been removed:

> *In addition to the observations made on the living subject , the measurements of a series of crania, the first ever put in the record from this island (Inishbofin) were obtained at St. Colman's Church,*

[23] Alfred Cort Haddon to Ernest Haddon, July 12, 1890, "Journal on board the SS Fingal June–July 1890," Haddon Papers, Cambridge University Library, Manuscripts, box 22.

in Knock townland. As they could not be removed at the time of my first visit, I was forced to measure them on the spot, and, as it turned out afterwards, it was well that this precaution had been taken, as, in revisiting the place some time after, I found that they had all disappeared, having in the meantime been removed to some place of concealment.[24]

This demonstrates a certain level of contemporary resistance to the Trinity study in the 1890s.

Figure 2: Example of a craniometer being used to measure the cranial length of an unidentified islander on Inishbofin (1893) Photo: CR Browne MS 10961 (image courtesy of TCD)

Discussions with members of the community in November 2022 revealed further contextual information about the historic treatment of human crania in St Colman's church up to the twentieth

[24] Charles R Browne, 'The Ethnography of Inishbofin and Inishshark, County Galway,' *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy (1889-1901) , 1893 - 1896*, Vol. 3 (1893 - 1896), 317-370, at 334.This is reminiscent to how Māori communities reacted to the taking of their ancestral remains. See Brian Hole , 'Playthings for the Foe: The Repatriation of Human Remains in New Zealand,' *Public Archaeology*, 6:1, (2007), pp. 10, 13.

century and how the chamber where the crania were housed was maintained. The graveyard attached to the chapel continues to be a functioning graveyard today.

Haddon's explicit comparisons in his own writings of the links between his collecting practices in the Torres Straits islands and of his collecting and anthropometric surveying activities in the West of Ireland (he also conducted experiments and collected crania from St Finan's Bay, Co. Kerry and from the Aran Islands) testify to how this research was international in scope. Haddon's interest in ritual skull display is well-documented in his published work. His chapter on the 'The Cult of Skulls in Sarawak', based on his 1898 expedition in Torres Straits and Sarawak, details the social significance of ceremonial skull trophies in social practices of marriage and mourning.[25] Whilst recognising the importance of such practices to origin communities, Haddon was also invested in acquiring as many implements, curios, skulls, and skull ornaments as possible in the Torres Straits and New Guinea through 'trading', bartering, and the assistance of the local colonial Resident and missionary-educated native intermediaries.[26] Many colonial administrators and anthropologists had written about the collection of crania as part of ritual practices in order to 'distil objective "truths"' about local communities as well as to curb practices that deemed primitive in efforts to civilise indigenous peoples.[27]

How are peer institutions responding to these issues?

Haddon's work in Ireland was part of a transnational research agenda. It is important for us to recognise this and ensure that our present-day policies and actions match the highest ethical standards developed by institutions working in a very different global context. In the United States, the Smithsonian Institute and the University of Pennsylvania have led in this area by either returning or interring human remains previously on display in their museum collections.[28] In Finland and New Zealand, museums and other institutions have developed policies for the return of indigenous human remains. The case most comparable to this request is the case of the Sami, an indigenous group living in an area known as Sápmi, which is spread over northern parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia. Requests from the Sami community are also cases of internal acquisition of human remains in the context of colonial racial science projects. The community in Finland requested skulls to be

[25] Alfred C. Haddon, *Head-Hunters: Black, White, and Brown*, (London, C.S. Watts and Co. Limited, 1932). [First published by Methuen in 1901]
[26] Journal kept by Haddon on the Torres Straits, Haddon Papers, Cambridge University Library, MS Haddon/1029M, pp.4-6; Quiggin, *Haddon the Head Hunter*, p.83.
[27] Aoife O'Brien, 'Crime and Retribution in the Western Solomon Islands: Punitive raids, material culture, and the Arthur Mahaffy collection, 1898–1904,' *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* (2017) 18(1).
[28] On UPenn see https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/aug/07/us-university-plans-repatriation-black-american-remains?CMP=Share; On the Smithsonian see https://www.washingtonpost.com/arts-entertainment/2022/07/27/smithsonian-collection-policy-update/

returned to their community and, in August 2019, the Swedish government repatriated 25 skulls. The skulls in question had been excavated during the 1950s as part of archaeological dig and sent to the Historical Museum in Stockholm. There has also been other repatriations to Sami ground including in Norway in 1997 and in Sweden in 2002.[29]

Finally, as noted earlier, there has been a paradigm shift in museum practice in this area in the United Kingdom.[30] One peer institution - the University of Edinburgh – has had a very clear policy with regard to Human Remains since 1990: 'The University's policy is to return human remains, when so requested, to appropriate representatives of cultures in which such had particular significance, subject to appropriate safeguards,' and it now benchmarks all of its collections management with the 'Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Scottish Museums' issued by Museums Galleries Scotland in 2011.[31]

Public Consultation Phase on the Inishbofin Remains, December 2022

Between November and December 2022 the Trinity Legacies Review Working Group welcomed submissions from the public on the issue of the Inishbofin Remains. A total of 16 submissions were received.[32] 15 of the submissions argued for returning the remains. Several valuable submissions were received from colleagues involved in academic research projects on Inishbofin, and from colleagues working in relevant fields such as Archaeology etc. Professor Christine Morris of the Department of Classics in Trinity College in her submission to the Working Group 'that the appropriate and ethical next step is to create a dialogue on how best to return these stolen individuals to their home location and community, with careful consideration to their safe curation or reburial (as appropriate) and as part of an important healing process.' A submission from the Cultural Landscapes of the Irish Coast project at the University of Notre Dame notes that the provenance of the crania is 'unequivocal' and further notes that the 'islanders today represent the most recent generation of a community of care that has venerated and safe-guarded the site of Saint Colman's Abbey over more than 1,300 years.'

[29] https://www.sametinget.se/99423. For more on the issue of Finnish remains in the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm see Eva Åhrén, Olof Ljungström, Ann Gustavsson, Maria Josephson, *Kvarlevor från Finland i Karolinska Institutets historiska anatomiska samling* (KI, 2020)

[30] Anna Wessman, 'Displaying Archaeological Human Remains in Finnish Museums', in Nina Robbins, Suzie Thomas, Minna Tuominen, and Anna Wessman, *Museum Studies – Bridging Theory and Practice* (2021): 507-31; Hole, 'Playthings for the Foe'; and Coralie O'Hara 'Repatriation in practice: A critical analysis of the repatriation of human remains in New Zealand museums', (MA Thesis Victoria University of Wellington, 2012).

[31] For the Scottish policy see https://www.ed.ac.uk/information-services/library-museum-gallery/crc/about/collections-policies/collections-management-policy . For the Irish equivalent see https://www.museum.ie/getmedia/80bd1b97-7ffb-4bac-adf9-c45f71041611/NMI-Human-Remains-Policy-2019-2023-FINAL.pdf

[32] Submissions can be accessed in full at www.tcd.ie/seniordean/legacies

This point is reiterated in a submission from the American Anthropological Association, and another form the European Association of Social Anthropologists.

The most significant submission, arguably, is that of the physical petition signed by residents of Inishbofin. 165 people signed this petition, with 160 giving an Inishbofin address. The official population of the island is 175 (2016).[33] This, in addition to an online submission signed by 948 people (as of March 2023), at least 35 of whom identify as descendants of Inishbofin. Taken together these petitions can be said to represent the view of the community of origin for the Inishbofin remains, and it is significant that there is a total consensus on the issue.

Of the total submissions received only one argued for retention of the remains: that of the Old Anatomy Steering Group. This document does not contest that the manner in which the remains were taken from Inishbofin and recognises 'the immense value of the crania to the island community.' The document was prepared by Associate Professor of Medical Education and Pharmacology, Martina Hennessy, and the Curator of the Old Anatomy Museum, Evi Numen. There is a clear implication in this document that Trinity had no hand in the taking of crania from Inishbofin in 1890, but asserts that they were gifted to the university by a non-employee, Alfred Cort Haddon. That is certainly incorrect.[34] Two people took these remains from Inishbofin, and the other person was Andrew Francis Dixon, then a graduate student at Trinity and later appointed Professor of Anatomy in TCD. The Old Anatomy Steering Group requested additional time 'to engage with relevant authorities and the Inishbofin community to consider mechanisms to memorialise the human remains and share their history.'

[33] https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/31da3-populated-off-shore-islands/

[34] Old Anatomy Steering Group, **PERSPECTIVES ON THE INISHBOFIN CRANIA RETURN REQUEST:** Examining Limitations & Potential (2022), p.4.