

## **Bristol University to confront its links with the slave trade**

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The University of Bristol is to become the latest top education institution to order a new examination of its historical links to slavery, amid wider attempts by the city to get to grips with its ties to the trade.

The city was one of three key ports for British slave traders, along with London and Liverpool. Now, as the city's political leaders draw up plans for a "permanent memorial" to its historical role, the university is to advertise for a permanent academic post examining the history of slavery. Whoever gets the job will oversee efforts by staff and community groups to "explore, investigate and determine the university's historical links to slavery", a university spokesperson said.



"As an institution founded in 1909, we are not a direct beneficiary of the slave trade, but we fully understand and acknowledge that we financially benefited indirectly," they added.

Last week, Cambridge University announced that it was launching a two-year study into its own historical links with slavery. Trevor Philips, the former chair of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, has criticised Cambridge for appointing a white professor to oversee the study. Some staff at Bristol would like to see a similar investigation. "While Bristol is taking tentative steps in this direction, I think as a university it needs to look seriously," said Mark Horton, professor of archaeology. "It is a different situation from that of Cambridge as Bristol has been in existence for just over 100 years, but it is a leading institution funded from city families, and lives in 18th-century buildings put up with proceeds from the slave trade."

In 2017, the university rejected a petition to change the name of its Wills Memorial Building, which was built in honour of Henry Overton Wills III, the first chancellor of the university, whose family made its money from the tobacco industry, which used slave labour.

Some also want the university to change its crest, which features Edward Colston, a slave trader. Last year, it was estimated that 85% of the wealth used to found the university had depended on slave labour.

This week Asher Craig, one of the city's deputy mayors, will hold a public meeting in an attempt to decide what form a permanent memorial to its slave trade links should take.

Firmer plans are expected to be drawn up by the end of the year.

"Identifying and exploring Bristol's slave trade legacy isn't something for one organisation or one group of people or one individual to do," Craig said. "Previous efforts to memorialise and capture the legacy of the trade have been done in isolation and although they retain a value today the entire story must be brought together and told by a diverse range of voices for a diverse audience."