

5 July 2026

URGENT — an appeal to save Dysart Castle, forced to auction this Wednesday

I'm writing this as the son of Ramie Leahy, who has been fighting for 50 years as a passionate advocate of the importance of George Berkeley — not just to Ireland, not just as the founding donor of the libraries at Yale and Harvard and indeed of American higher education itself, but to the world. I wish my father were healthy enough to fight this campaign himself, but he's not. I was just a child when he had me out in the dirt with a toothbrush on archaeological digs with Berkeley students all the way back in 1989. This matters to a lot of people, and it matters to me. We could have solved this with more time, but we're not being given it. So I'm asking, not just for me but for my father and for anyone interested in his work and Berkeley's legacy, for help.

Dysart Castle in County Kilkenny — where George Berkeley grew up — is being forced to a distressed-debt auction this coming Wednesday, 8 July 2026, at 2pm Irish time. A distressed-debt investment fund resurrected an old debt the family had understood to be closed, appointed a receiver, and has refused every attempt to negotiate. We are scrambling to raise the funds to discharge the debt within the accelerated timeframe the receiver has imposed — but without urgent help, we cannot guarantee that we will succeed in stopping Wednesday's sale. This is a genuine emergency.

The facts

- **Ramie Leahy has been the custodian of Dysart Castle since 1977** — acquired as a young art teacher, kept standing over five decades of self-funded conservation.
- **Ramie has been seriously ill with cancer for the past two years** and has not been able to fight this personally.
- **The debt at the centre of this is old.** It relates to two businesses associated with Ramie that ceased trading almost twenty years ago and were subsequently liquidated. Ramie had understood the matter to be closed long ago.
- **A distressed-debt investment fund — Everyday Finance DAC — acquired the old debt and appointed a receiver.** Correspondence connected to the matter had been going to an old address. Ramie, who has been ill with cancer for the past two years, was not in a position to notice, and his family were unaware of any of it.
- **Ramie's children only learned of the receiver's appointment very recently**, when the receiver moved to sell.
- **Since finding out, we have contacted the receiver repeatedly to negotiate a settlement.** The receiver has refused to engage. A request for a short postponement — to allow the family to raise funds and discharge the debt in full — was also refused.
- **The family intends to bid at auction ourselves.** But we cannot guarantee raising the funds in the receiver's accelerated timeframe on our own. We are urgently seeking a partner willing to bid alongside us — and welcome any suggestion on the appropriate financial vehicle, safeguards, or ownership structure. This is a genuine emergency.
- **The property is being marketed as agricultural land.** The castle appears in the sale particulars only in passing, as "the remains of an old round castle in ruin," with no acknowledgement of Berkeley's connection or the site's national and international significance.
- **The advertisement conceals two facts that are material to any bidder:** (a) that there is no practical access to the greater part of the land — some seventy-two per cent of it, including the castle itself — without the family's cooperation; and (b) that the family remains ready and willing to work with the receiver, and to discharge the debt in full given a reasonable timeframe.
- **The entire property sits within an EU-designated Special Area of Conservation**, materially limiting any purchaser's ability to develop, farm intensively, or extract commercial value from the land. Even to go through a hedge requires ministerial consent.

- **Auction — Wilsons Auctions, Wednesday 8 July 2026, 2pm Irish time.** Guide price €600,000 for approximately 103 acres (41.69 hectares) of Folio KK11532, being sold as "agricultural land."
- **Third-party registration deadline is Tuesday 7 July 2026 at 2pm Irish time — 24 hours before the auction.** A refundable €5,000 deposit and two forms of ID are required to register. That is the effective deadline for any external party wanting to bid.

What we are asking

Please contact me at the earliest opportunity — before the registration deadline (Tuesday 7 July, 2pm IST) if at all possible. Any of the following would be transformative:

- **A public commitment of support.** A university, a foundation, or a heritage body publicly aligning with the campaign this week — the fact of that alignment alone will change the terms of what is possible.
- **An introduction.** To a foundation, alumni network, or major donor with a Berkeley-legacy interest, and the standing to move quickly.
- **A partnership on the bid.** The family intends to register and bid at Wednesday's auction and are seeking a partner willing to bid alongside us. We welcome any suggestion on the right financial vehicle, safeguards, or ownership structure. What matters most is that Dysart's next chapter is a shared one — not a fire-sale to a purchaser with no interest in Berkeley.
- **A co-owner partnership, longer term.** We are open to any form of co-ownership with a shared-vision partner — trust, foundation, joint venture, endowment-backed — to help realise Dysart as an international Berkeley study centre, sister to Berkeley College at Yale and UC Berkeley itself. What form the arrangement takes is exactly the conversation we would gladly have.

I will happily share the full background to this situation, including the title and access position, and have included some of the professional structural and archaeological reports, and the shape of the cultural project envisaged, on my father's website.

The campaign is documented and has run for nearly a century

- **1930s.** Éamon de Valera flagged the need for state assistance to save Dysart. It has never happened.
- **May 1988.** Prof. R.W. Houghton of the International Berkeley Society at Trinity College Dublin wrote to An Taoiseach on the campaign's behalf, requesting £105,000 in Lottery funding. The letter named Yale, Harvard, Pennsylvania, William and Mary, and "particularly the University of California, Berkeley" as institutions interested in developing Dysart as an international study centre. A copy is on ramieleahy.com.
- **1992.** A four-week archaeological excavation was carried out at Dysart in association with the University of California, Berkeley — team leader Mark Hall, working with Ben Murtagh of the Irish team.
- **April 2003.** The Irish Times reported the castle's imminent structural collapse; an emergency appeal from Ramie was delivered to the Taoiseach by John McGuinness TD; Kilkenny County Council grant-assisted the propping of openings in 2008.
- **Ongoing.** Conservation direction by Ben Murtagh — Ireland's leading Berkeley archaeologist, whose credits include the restoration of Kilkenny Castle and dozens of other historic Irish buildings saved through his work — with structural engineering by Ivor MacElveen. Earlier reports by Phelim Manning (1999) and David Kelly (2000).

Thank you for taking the time to read this. An extraordinary part of the Berkeley story is at risk of being lost this week. With help, it need not be.

Yours sincerely,



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