God's Executioner – Oliver Cromwell and the Conquest of Ireland
by Micheal O Siochru.
faber and faber 2008.

Irish, like Jewish memories are acute and long, and in this brilliant analysis of Oliver Cromwell's vicious depredations in Ireland in the 17th century the author, an historian from Trinity College Dublin, details why they also have every right to be extremely bitter.

In God's Executioner, Michael O Siochru presents in a highly readable way the events of Cromwell's bloody nine months on the island of Ireland, between August 1649 and May 1650 during which time, amid much general destruction, many thousands of Irish men, women and children were massacred by the New Model Army. For his overall responsibility for these events Cromwell's name is a dirty word in Ireland to this day, and reading the book one cannot avoid feeling that this is no less than he deserves.

O Siochru also details the highly fissiparous nature of Irish life at the time, with its warring tribal chieftains and aristocrats divided by religious affiliation and political allegiance.

God's Executioner goes a long way to explaining the depth of feeling that divided Catholics from Protestants in the north of Ireland into modern times, as well as revealing the depth of loathing for Catholicism that justified, in English hearts, their brutal treatment of the Irish on every level and at every opportunity.

In his introduction O Siochru describes Bertie Ahearne, the Taoiseach, storming out of a meeting with the British Foreign Secretary because he had a large portrait of Oliver Cromwell hanging on the wall of his capacious office; commenting on the incident, Stephen Fry equated this to having a portrait of Eichmann on the wall for a visit by the Israeli Prime Minister. The starkness of the juxtaposition will not surprise anyone who reads – and enjoys – this excellent book.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh