

Ship of Fools - How Stupidity and Corruption Sank the Celtic Tiger by Fintan O'Toole.  
faber and faber 2009

The Celtic Tiger was one hell of a ride, but when it came to an end the fall was hard and painful.

Ship of Fools is a masterly, witty, highly entertaining and devastating analysis of the ways in which the success of the 'Tiger years' was squandered, and of the endemic corruption in the Irish establishment in almost every area and on almost every level.

O'Toole skewers businessmen and politicians, flabby journalists and inept regulators and tries to understand why sustained, disgraceful behaviour on the part of many individuals was not only tolerated by the populace at large but in some cases actually rewarded at the ballot box.

To anyone who visits Ireland regularly, and especially those who saw the country at the height of its period of optimism and now share with some of its citizens their travails and fears, it seems incredible that a significant European country can operate such inappropriate systems in good and bad times, and that those shown to be guilty of corruption or other malfeasance can continue to get away with it.

This is a salutary read which in most other countries would have caused seismic upheaval but in Ireland seems to have created barely a ripple in the national consciousness. Anyone who cares for the country may well despair for the future on reading it, but equally will feel a sense of gratitude to the author for exposing the repeated but eradicable stains on the Irish escutcheon.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh