

List III Michaelmas Term

**HIU33121 The Life and Times of Oliver Cromwell (Micheál Ó Siochrú)**



Robert Walker, *Portrait of Oliver Cromwell* c. 1649,  
National Portrait Gallery, London

Oliver Cromwell (1599–1658) remains one of the most controversial figures in English and Irish history, a leader who played a central role in the English Civil Wars, the execution of King Charles I, and the establishment of the Commonwealth – the first and only English Republic to date. This module offers an in-depth exploration of Cromwell’s life, beliefs, and leadership through his own words—his letters and papers. By examining these primary sources, recently published by Oxford University press in three volumes, students will gain insights into Cromwell’s evolving political and religious ideology, his military strategies, and his governance of England, Scotland, and Ireland.

The course will analyse Cromwell's personal correspondence, speeches, and state documents, revealing his motivations, his struggles with power, and his views on providence and kingship. Particular attention will be paid to his letters to Parliament, his battlefield orders, and his justifications for controversial decisions, such as the conquest of Ireland and the dissolution of the Rump Parliament.

Key themes include Cromwell's Puritan faith, his vision for England's republican experiment, and his transformation from a country gentleman to Lord Protector. Students will critically engage with contemporary reactions to Cromwell's rule and assess his legacy using his own writings alongside later historiographical interpretations.

By the end of the module, students will have developed a nuanced understanding of Cromwell's complex character and his impact on 17th-century England and Ireland. This module will be particularly useful for those interested in early modern history, political thought, and the use of primary sources in historical study.