My purpose in this book is to try to explain how the rebellion that broke out in Ireland in 1641 began. This rebellion, viewed from a long-term perspective, is one incident in a process which started with the creation of the early modern English nation-state. As the English crown withdrew from the continent, a sense of English identity developed which found one of its strongest expressions in the creation of a distinctly English form of Christianity. The crystallization of the English nation coincided with a period of technical changes in ships and sails that enhanced communication, which, in turn, necessarily extended the importance of sea power. Thus, at precisely the moment that England was becoming culturally more isolated from the continent, it became physically more susceptible to attack by continental forces. If it was to maintain its independence, the security of its western flank, and thus its control over Ireland, became imperative. Once before Ireland had become a strategic liability to a government in England. The nature of the threat during the twelfth century differed from that in the sixteenth in that Henry II feared, not that Ireland would become a base for a continental invasion, but that it would furnish one of his own nobles with an opportunity to create a separate and rival kingdom. Significantly, he and his immediate successors dealt with the problem by invasion, conquest, and settlement.

Similarly, if Henry VIII at one stage in his reign could declare that Ireland was best governed by “sober ways, politic drifts and amiable persuasions,” by the end of his life he had abandoned a policy of non-interference. Under his successors, whether Catholic or Protestant, England intruded into Irish affairs to an increasing degree, and this intrusion led to a repetition of Henry II’s tactics of conquest and colonization. The major difference between the two
waves of settlers was that the sixteenth-century incursion brought not a continental form of Christianity but one identified with the English state, and it was the adherents of this doctrine which, step by step, took over Irish and Old English institutions of government.

If we believe the shape that Anglo-Irish relations have taken over the last four centuries to have been inevitable, the rebellion of 1641 has little significance as it simply got in the way of the prevailing trend for a moment until inevitability restored itself as a tide flows over a sand bar. Such a sweeping interpretation suggests a historical process which ignores the cumulative effect of numerous decisions taken within a short period of time, sometimes without Ireland in mind, and often with results that were not intended by those who made them but which had a profound effect on what happened. Conditions in Ireland that had developed since the sixteenth century undoubtedly contributed to the outbreak of the rebellion and to the course that it took once it had started, but it is my view that the rebellion was primarily the consequence of a series of decisions made by a relatively small number of men in England, Ireland, and Scotland during the years immediately preceding it. Therefore these decisions command considerable significance because they have left an indelible mark upon Irish and, to a lesser extent, English and British history. The broad outline of these events has long been known, but less attention has been given to how they came to be. I have tried, therefore, to trace in detail the formation of these decisions and their intended and unintended interactions.

It may be asked if we need another monograph on the period of the late 1630s and early 1640s after the substantial contributions made by Conrad Russell, Anthony Fletcher, David Stevenson, and others. Russell, in particular, in *The Fall of the British Monarchies*, has devoted considerable attention to Ireland. I would respond that, while my own work is heavily indebted to that of others, particularly to those I have mentioned, and I am convinced that we can only understand the outbreak of the rebellion in the context of the three kingdoms, there is no other recent book which looks at this overall picture from a primarily Irish perspective. I have, moreover, given considerable space to the sessions of the Irish parliament held during 1640–41, which, by comparison with English parliaments of the period, has been neglected. This is not to diminish the contributions of Aidan Clarke and H.F. Kearney, whose works remain the foundation for understanding Irish history during this period. However, here, in contrast to such historians, I have adopted a more “British” orientation. In short, I have placed more emphasis on Ireland than is common among historians of England and Scotland, and more
emphasis upon England and Scotland than is usually found among historians of Ireland.

My use of the term "rebellion" to describe the conflict does not, however, reflect a particular point of view so much as a reluctance to split hairs over words. The term "rebellion" has been used in most of the literature about the war, and one alternative, "commotion," sometimes used at the time, sounds quaint. Most of those in early modern Europe who fought their monarchs claimed to be doing so as loyal subjects, and this applied to the Irish as much as to the Scots and English. I have also used other terms such as "Old English," "Puritan," and "constitutionalist" which could breed endless (and fruitless) dispute over meaning. I use such terms, often with a brief explanation, as a concise way of identifying a particular group, but most such groups have fuzzy edges, and it is my hope that the context as well as the explanations make my meaning clear.

Anyone who has written a book of this kind is well aware of what a joint effort it becomes as assistance is given from all quarters. In thanking those who have helped me, I would like to begin by expressing particular appreciation to three scholars. Conrad Russell, quite apart from the influence of his writing, which has been considerable, has read and commented on one chapter in draft and has directed me to valuable sources which I would not have found without his assistance. His generosity in this respect, particularly as he was writing his *British Monarchies* at the time, has been an inspiration. Similarly, Raymond Gillespie has given me frequent guidance, often while I have been staying with him and his wife, Bernadette Cunningham, as I searched the Dublin archives. He has been a source of many ideas, and I have learned as much from our discussions as from the particular items to which he has directed me. To John Morrill I also owe a major intellectual debt, as do so many other scholars in the field. From his reading of the entire typescript I gained not only invaluable advice, which I have tried to follow, but also great encouragement.

I should also thank two scholars whose identities I do not know: namely, the readers for McGill-Queen's University Press and the Social Science Federation of Canada, the latter having generously provided a subsidy to assist publication. The revisions which have been made in response to their comments have, I know, substantially improved the text, but I should make clear that what failings remain are mine and mine alone. It is impossible to relate in each case how assistance has been given, but Toby Barnard, Nicholas Canny, Aidan Clarke, Donal Cregan, Stephen Ellis, Anthony Fletcher, John Guy,
Robert Hunter, Rolf Loeber, Michael MacCarthy-Morrogh, Lee Matthews, Jane Ohlmeyer, Vera Rutledge, and Kevin Sharpe have all provided help of one sort or another for which I am deeply grateful.

I thank the staff of all the libraries and archives listed in the bibliography, but the librarians in one library, which is not listed because I did not use manuscript material in its keeping, deserve special mention. The staff of McGill's McLennan Library has provided continuous and essential support over many years. In this context I thank Kendall Wallis particularly for his patience, diligence, and learning as I prepared the bibliography.

Before venturing into book form, I tested two aspects of this work as articles. I have incorporated substantial, though modified, portions of these articles into this text, and I thank the editors of the Canadian Journal of History and The Historical Journal, as well as the Syndics of Cambridge University Press, for permission to re-publish those portions of these articles which I have used. I also thank His Royal Highness, the duke of Cornwall, His Grace, the duke of Devonshire, His Grace, the duke of Northumberland, the earl of Rosse, and Viscount De Lisle, v.c. k.g., for permitting me to consult their muniments.

Perhaps the most precious commodity to the historian is time, and I thank McGill University for granting me two leaves during which I could visit the necessary archives and work on the text. Travel money and other research funds are, however, also necessary, and here I thank not only McGill, but the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, which gave me a research grant in 1987, and the Huntington Library of San Marino, California. This financial support has been essential, but its effectiveness has been much enhanced by the long suffering hospitality of Susan Horsman, Pat Perceval-Maxwell, Polly Hughes, and Selina Gun-Cuninghame as I moved about Charles's three kingdoms searching for evidence. I cannot adequately express thanks to Carol LeDain, secretary to the dean of arts at McGill, who has faced more drafts of this text on her word processor than I am sure she cares to remember, and has helped in innumerable other ways. To Marion Magee, who has edited the manuscript and guided me through the last labour of preparing it for publication, I owe a special word of gratitude. Her skill and thoroughness in commenting on the text have been matched only by her sensitivity to its contents. Joan McGilvray, coordinating editor of McGill-Queen's University Press, has also been most helpful as the book has gone to press, and to her too I express my appreciation.
Finally, I thank my wife, Maria, to whom this book is dedicated, who has both borne the excitements and disappointments of this project with me and borne with me during the frustration occasioned by their interruption.

Montreal, 1993

M.P.M.
Map 1  The Three Kingdoms of Charles I
Map 2  Ireland – Counties and Principal Places