

Preface

The genesis of this book can be traced to the summer of 2001, when I came across the biography of the Elizabethan presbyterian ideologue Walter Travers. Although still an undergraduate at the time with no intention of investigating the institutional remains of puritanism, I soon became intrigued by the later life of Travers. There seemed to be a story to tell about him and about Elizabethan presbyterianism following its official suppression in the early 1590s. English presbyterianism, which posed a threat to the hierarchy of the Church of England, was supposed to have been effectively wiped out after that time, only to reappear during the 1640s at the onset of the English Civil War. Travers remained a shadowy figure until his death in 1635, and his biographer believed that not much could be learned about his later life, since his papers seemed to be untraceable. Following leads by William O'Sullivan and Lactitia Yeandle, however, I was able to confirm attributions of Travers's papers in Trinity College Dublin and to recover additional manuscripts by him and other presbyterian spokesmen that span the half-century of apparent English presbyterian silence. These do not simply reveal the individual thoughts of Walter Travers and the continued activity of English presbyterianism, but modify traditional accounts of the religious, political, and social climate of pre-Civil War England.

A central contention of this book is that English presbyterianism, however covert, was far from being a self-contained and marginalized clerical community. Following their prosecution, and the deaths of key patrons in the 1590s, presbyterians made a concerted effort to prove the compatibility of their ecclesiology with the monarchy and to develop an alliance with lawyers against episcopal authority. They were also at the heart of some of the fiercest religious controversies of pre-Civil War England, giving rise to new puritan ideology. In addition, they placed pressure on

the very nerves of society. With the help of the laity, English presbyterians established networks through centers of power and commerce in England that extended across the North Sea and the Atlantic. They also adapted to varying circumstances and incorporated diverse social groups, men as well as women.