

BRITAIN, POLAND AND THE
EASTERN FRONT, 1939

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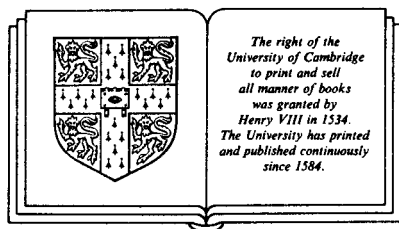
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Preface

When I was an undergraduate student at the School of History at the University of Birmingham I took a course, run by Professor J.A.S. Grenville, on British foreign policy in 1938–9. I was then struck by the one-sided interpretation which prevailed in British historical works on the effect of British policy on Europe prior to the outbreak of the war. The heated debate which surrounded the question of appeasement tended to confine the discussion on the British role in the years preceding the war to the analysis of Anglo-German relations. Subsequently during my research on Anglo-Polish relations in 1938–9 that impression was confirmed. I felt that the complexity of Britain's continental policy had not been fully analysed and where an effort had been made it still lacked an understanding of the reciprocal nature of foreign policy.

This book has been the result of the above considerations. In it I have tried to show how, far from setting the pace in Europe's response to German aggression, Britain like other states, was herself a victim of an inability to mount a major change of policy towards Germany. As I have been able to draw upon my knowledge of Polish sources to show the reciprocal nature of Anglo-Polish relations during 1939 I was thus able to exhibit the full extent of Britain's inability to build an eastern front based on Poland. The Anglo-Polish understanding of March 1939, which traditionally has been seen as the beginning of a new policy, on closer inspection is shown to be an attempt to respond to the German continental initiative. A close study of Polish sources shows the tenuous nature of British influence upon Poland during the period March–September 1939. It leads to a refutation of the suggestion that the British espousal of the Polish cause led directly to Poland rejecting German demands in Danzig and thus drew upon Poland the full wrath of a German attack.

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During my research I have had access to British archives at the Public Records Office, Polish archives in the Archiwum Akt Nowych in Warsaw, state archives in Gdańsk and finally the collection of documents at the Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum in London. Many a debt of gratitude remains undischarged. Mention must be made of those to Mr R. Knecht, Professor J.A.S. Grenville at the University of Birmingham, Professor R.F. Leslie at Queen Mary College, and Professor A. Garlicki at the University of Warsaw. Colleagues and personal friends encouraged me and have been unstinting in their willingness to read, comment and correct my drafts. Of those, I remain profoundly grateful to Margaret Morris and Brian Hamnett. But my deepest and most enduring debt of gratitude is to Jan Toporowski for his constant help and emotional support. Finally, Irene Scouller, who patiently typed and re-typed drafts, deserves credit for her part in this book.