This pioneering exploration of Georgian men and women’s experiences as readers explores their use of commonplace books for recording favourite passages and reflecting upon what they had read, revealing forgotten aspects of their complicated relationship with the printed word. It shows how indebted English readers often remained to techniques for handling, absorbing and thinking about texts that were rooted in classical antiquity, in Renaissance humanism and in a substantially oral culture. It also reveals how a series of related assumptions about the nature and purpose of reading influenced the roles that literature played in English society in the ages of Addison, Johnson and Byron: how the habits and procedures required by commonplacing affected readers’ tastes and so helped shape literary fashions; and how the experience of reading and responding to texts increasingly encouraged literate men and women to imagine themselves as members of a polite, responsible and critically aware public.

David Allan is Reader in History at the University of St Andrews, Scotland. His recent publications include A Nation of Readers: The Lending Library in Georgian England (2008) and Making British Culture: English Readers and the Scottish Enlightenment, 1740–1830 (2008).
COMMONPLACE BOOKS
AND READING IN
GEORGIAN ENGLAND

BY
DAVID ALLAN
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Abbreviations

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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AS</td>
<td>Archive Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beinecke</td>
<td>Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BL</td>
<td>British Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chester</td>
<td>Cheshire and Chester Archives and Local Studies, Chester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chetham’s</td>
<td>Chetham’s Library, Manchester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comp. Bar.</td>
<td>The Complete Baronetage, 1603–1800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comp. Peer.</td>
<td>The Complete Peerage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CR</td>
<td>Critical Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CUL</td>
<td>Cambridge University Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ER</td>
<td>Edinburgh Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GM</td>
<td>The Gentleman’s Magazine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Houghton</td>
<td>The Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huntington</td>
<td>The Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, California</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LJ</td>
<td>James Boswell, The Life of Samuel Johnson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maidstone</td>
<td>Centre for Kentish Studies, Maidstone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MR</td>
<td>Monthly Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NYPL</td>
<td>New York Public Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ODNB</td>
<td>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PL</td>
<td>Public Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RO</td>
<td>Record Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shrewsbury</td>
<td>Shropshire Records and Research Centre, Shrewsbury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stafford</td>
<td>Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Archive Service, Stafford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUL</td>
<td>Department of Special Collections, Stanford University Library, Palo Alto, California</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of abbreviations

UCLA  Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles
Walpole  W.S. Lewis Walpole Library, Farmington, Connecticut

Except where otherwise stated, translations of Greek and Roman works are taken from the Loeb editions in English. The citations given, however, refer to book, chapter and other traditional subdivisions, rather than to page number, in order to facilitate cross-reference to any available edition of the text.

Similar universal citation systems have also been exploited when referencing certain English texts, such as the works of Shakespeare and the King James Bible.
It is a pleasure to say a few words about the background to this project and in particular to thank those who have contributed to it in so many different ways.

Some people provided comments either on integral drafts or on related essays; others afforded opportunities to discuss commonplacing and its complicated relationship with reading; and a few simply fielded my increasingly arcane questions about some of the dimmer recesses of English literature and culture. All, however, will be relieved to see me confirm in print that they are not complicit in the interpretations that I offer hereafter or, for that matter, in any errors that I perpetrate. I am particularly indebted to Mark Towsey, Ann Blair, Earle Havens, Stephen Parks, Roger Emerson, Nicholas Phillipson, Mark Spencer, Marion McClintock, Rab Houston, David Spadafora, John Robertson, Susan Halpert, Peter Jackson, Tom Horrocks, Bernhard Struck and Richard Sher, as well as the members of the Enlightenment Studies Workshop at Oxford, who heard and debated with me an earlier version of what they will now find are Chapters 3 and 4. For generous assistance in getting me around some unexpected linguistic obstacles thrown up by Georgian manuscript culture, I also want to thank John Thorley (Latin and Greek), Christopher Smith (Greek) and Alex Woolf (Welsh).

The most quotable of all eighteenth-century commentators, dining with Boswell and others on 6 April 1775, apparently claimed that ‘a man will turn over half a library to make one book’. On this occasion, though, optimism had got the better of Samuel Johnson. For in first identifying and then consulting a fragmented and often extremely obscure body of evidence, I eventually became reliant upon literally dozens of separate archives and libraries not only in the United Kingdom but also on both coasts of the United States. Each institution I visited also kindly granted me permission to quote from the materials in its care.
Their employees offered gracious help to a researcher with an unusual list of requirements. I want therefore to thank the many people who assisted me at Bedfordshire and Luton Records Service in Bedford; Birmingham City Archives; Bristol Record Office; the British Library; the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies in Aylesbury; Cambridge University Library; Carlisle Public Library; Cheshire and Chester Archives and Local Studies Service in Chester; Chetham’s Library in Manchester; Cumbria Archive Service in Carlisle, Kendal and Whitehaven; Derbyshire Record Office in Matlock; Dorset Record Office in Dorchester; Durham County Record Office in Durham; Durham University Library; East Riding of Yorkshire Archive Office in Beverley; East Sussex Record Office in Lewes; Edinburgh University Library; Essex Record Office in Chelmsford; Gloucestershire Record Office in Gloucester; Hampshire Record Office in Winchester; the Houghton Library and Harry E. Widener Library at Harvard University; Herefordshire Record Office in Hereford; Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies in Hertford; the Henry E. Huntington Library in San Marino, California; the Centre for Kentish Studies in Maidstone; Lancashire Record Office in Preston; Lancaster Public Library; the Brotherton Library at the University of Leeds; the Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland, in Leicester; Lincolnshire Archives in Lincoln; Sydney Jones Library at the University of Liverpool; the Senate House Library, University of London; New York Public Library; Norfolk Record Office in Norwich; Northamptonshire Record Office in Northampton; Northumberland Record Office in North Gosforth; Nottinghamshire Archives in Nottingham; the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York; the Bodleian Library at the University of Oxford; St Andrews University Library; Shropshire Records and Research Centre in Shrewsbury; Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Archive Service in Stafford; the Department of Special Collections at Stanford University; Suffolk Record Office in Bury St Edmunds, Ipswich and Lowestoft; Surrey History Centre in Woking; the Charles E. Young Research Library at the University of California, Los Angeles; the W.S. Lewis Walpole Library in Farmington, Connecticut; Warwickshire County Record Office in Warwick; West Sussex Record Office in Chichester; West Yorkshire Archive Service in Bradford, Halifax and Leeds; Wiltshire and Swindon Record Office in Trowbridge; Worcestershire Record Office in Worcester; the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, the Divinity Library and the Sterling Memorial Library at Yale University; and York Reference Library.

This is not the first study – nor will it be the last – to have evolved out of something different, in the process taking even its author, let alone...
Acknowledgements

his curious friends and colleagues, rather by surprise. For my interest in the commonplace book in particular, and in the relationship between note-taking and the experience of reading, arose because I was already embarked upon a project concerned with the reception of Scottish thought and literature among the English public. The published outcome of this associated but ultimately distinct line of inquiry – best thought of, perhaps, as enjoying a paternal relationship with the present book – has since seen the light of day as Making British Culture: English Readers and the Scottish Enlightenment, 1740–1830 (New York, 2008). Another unexpected strand of research suggested initially by methodological questions thrown up by the same investigation also led in the direction of a discrete monograph on some of the institutional conditions shaping contemporary encounters with books. The resulting volume, again unplanned and more of a surprise sibling to the present one, has already appeared under the title A Nation of Readers: The Lending Library in Georgian England (London, 2008).

Several organisations assisted in an unusually complicated gestation. The School of History at the University of St Andrews contributed two vital sabbatical leaves at appropriate moments as well as the financial backing without which a punishing round of archival visits, almost entirely outside Scotland, would have been impossible. Other academic bodies, however, also lent substantial support. Yale University was doubly helpful, awarding me a Visiting Fellowship at the W.S. Lewis Walpole Library and then subsequently the James M. Osborn Fellowship in English Literature and History at the Beinecke Library. The first of these opportunities proved absolutely critical, since it coincided with Earle Havens’ innovative and quite magnificent Yale exhibition on the evolution of the Western commonplace book. Though I confess I did not actually realise this at the time, Earle’s work and the startling insights that it offered significantly altered my whole approach to studying how Georgian people experienced reading.

The Henry E. Huntington Library in San Marino, California, should also be thanked for a Fletcher Jones Foundation Fellowship that allowed me to immerse myself in one important group of early nineteenth-century commonplace books. The Houghton Library at Harvard University, which granted me the Donald and Mary Hyde Fellowship for the Study of Dr Samuel Johnson and His Circle, made possible a similar exercise in connection with a fascinating network of contemporary female readers.

The time to think about and to write this book was increased very substantially by two major grants. Each bought respite from normal teaching
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and administrative duties, including, in one case, relieving me of the quotidian frustrations of departmental chairmanship. The Leverhulme Trust gave me a year’s Research Fellowship in 2004/5, during which time, although I had intended only to write about the Scottish Enlightenment’s reception, I also rapidly became absorbed in the broader role of commonplacing in Georgian culture. The Arts and Humanities Research Council then funded a longer period of study leave in 2007 that eventually allowed me to bring this particular project to fruition. Both bodies were therefore supporting the present study – albeit unwittingly in the first case – and so for what they have made possible I can only express my heartfelt gratitude.

I was exceptionally fortunate in having Linda Bree, Jodie Barnes and Maartje Scheltens as my editors at Cambridge University Press. Linda’s involvement, from first contact and commissioning through to final printing, was vital, and I am deeply grateful for her support, encouragement and knowledgeable interventions throughout. Maartje and Jodie coped splendidly with the task of helping bring this work to press. I should also thank the two anonymous referees for their useful advice and suggestions.

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D.A.
ST ANDREWS