Beginning by mapping out an overview of the expansion of elementary education in Britain across the nineteenth century, Andrew Murphy explores, for the first time, the manner in which Shakespeare acquired a working-class readership. He traces developments in publishing which meant that editions of Shakespeare became ever cheaper as the century progressed. Drawing on more than a hundred published and manuscript autobiographical texts, the book examines the experiences of a wide range of working-class readers. Particular attention is focused on a set of radical readers for whom Shakespeare’s work had a special political resonance. Murphy explores the reasons why the playwright’s working-class readership began to fall away from the turn of the century, noting the competition he faced from professional sports, the cinema, radio and television. The book concludes by asking whether it matters that, in our own time, Shakespeare no longer commands a general popular audience.

Andrew Murphy is Professor of English at the University of St Andrews. His books include Shakespeare in Print: A History and Chronology of Shakespeare Publishing (Cambridge, 2003) and But the Irish Sea Betwixt Us: Ireland, Colonialism, and Renaissance Literature (1999), and he is the editor of A Concise Companion to Shakespeare and the Text (2007) and The Renaissance Text: Theory, Editing, Textuality (2000).
SHAKESPEARE FOR
THE PEOPLE

Working-class Readers, 1800–1900

ANDREW MURPHY

University of St Andrews
For Frank
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*Shakespeare for the People* is dedicated to Frank Hayes, in gratitude for more years of friendship than either of us might wish to count.
Abbreviations

BLA  Bent’s Literary Advertiser
BS  The Bookseller
EUL  Edinburgh University Library
LMG  Lemuel Matthews Griffiths archive, Birmingham Central Library
NS  The Northern Star
PC  The Publishers’ Circular
PMG  The Poor Man’s Guardian
SRO  Stratford-on-Avon Records Office