The period between c.1750 and c.1840 is popularly known for the rise of the novel, yet historical works by Enlightenment writers, including David Hume, Edward Gibbon and William Robertson, were some of its most commercially successful books. Moving beyond the range of previous studies that have sought to explain this success by focussing on publishers, writers and their ideas, Mark Towsey’s study is the first to focus on the reading audiences themselves. Drawing on a variety of sources including marginalia, letters, diaries and commonplace books, this lively book reveals why histories were so widely read, and shows how they were used by readers across the English-speaking world to make sense of social upheaval at home and revolution abroad. In doing so, it marks a major addition to the history of reading, shedding fascinating new light on how readers interpreted books in the past.

Mark Towsey is Professor of the History of the Book and Director of the Eighteenth-Century Worlds Research Centre at the University of Liverpool. His previous publications include Reading the Scottish Enlightenment: Books and Their Readers in Provincial Scotland, 1750–1835 (2010) and Before the Public Library: Reading, Community and Identity in the Atlantic World, 1650–1850 (2017).
READING HISTORY IN BRITAIN AND AMERICA, c.1750–c.1840

MARK TOWSEY

University of Liverpool
For Alastair and Siobhan
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Abbreviations

AAS American Antiquarian Society
ANBO American National Biography Online www.anb.org
BARS Bedfordshire Archive and Record Service
Beinecke Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University
BL British Library
Borough Derbyshire Record Office, D5369/11/88–126, Thomas Borough, Notes on Books Read
DWB Dictionary of Welsh Biography, Online edition published by the National Library of Wales http://yba.llgc.org.uk
HL Huntington Library
Houghton Houghton Library, Harvard University
HP The History of Parliament Online www.historyofparliamentonline.org
HSP Historical Society of Pennsylvania
Hume David Hume, The History of England, from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688, ed. by William B. Todd, 6 vols (Indianapolis, IN, 1983)
KHLC Kent History and Library Centre
LCP Library Company of Philadelphia
Leland Library of Trinity College Dublin, MS10972-77, Thomas Leland, MS notes on Hume’s History of England
Lister West Yorkshire Archive Service, SH:/7/ML/EX1-4, Anne Lister, Exercise Books
LTCD Library of Trinity College Dublin
List of Abbreviations

LWL Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University
MHS Massachusetts Historical Society
NA Northumberland Archives
NLI National Library of Ireland
NLS National Library of Scotland
NLW National Library of Wales
NRAS National Register of Archives for Scotland
NRS National Records of Scotland
ODNB Oxford Dictionary of National Biography
Parker Shropshire Archives, 7634/2/1–3, T. N. Parker (Sweeney Hall Miscellany), Commonplace Books
Philips Warwickshire County Record Office, CR456/in Box 35, Lady Philips, Notebooks on History
SALS Somerset Archives and Local Studies
SCHS South Carolina Historical Society
Smith Norfolk Record Office, MS4379 T138 C, James Smith, List of Books Read, 1762–86
WCRO Warwickshire County Record Office