The Enlightenment has widely been regarded as a watershed moment in the history of British historiography. It is to this period and place that scholars have traced the origins of what Herbert Butterfield once termed the “Whig” interpretation of history: the tendency to situate past events within a teleological narrative of social progress.¹ The Enlightenment has also been identified as a period in which history became more “objective” or “scientific,” as writers utilized empirical models and methods to transform history from an ancient branch of rhetoric into a modern form of science. It was in this period that Adam Ferguson, John Millar, and Dugald Stewart developed the genre of conjectural or philosophical history, “addressing the problem of how we can conjecture historical change for which no evidence exists by examining the same stage in development for a society where the evidence does exist.”² And it was in this period that the great Scottish Enlightenment historians William Robertson and David Hume published their best-known works, including Robertson’s accounts of Scotland and America, and Hume’s six-volume *History of England* (1754–62).

Within the narrative of British historiographical history, Hume’s work has often been singled out for particular scholarly regard, admired both for its successful adaptation of classical models of historical writing, and for its eminently readable narrative.³ The *History’s* six volumes tracked

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² Pittock, p. 263.

social and cultural as well as political and military developments, demonstrating how alterations in morals and manners could prove to be as useful a gauge of historical change as wars and revolutions. *The History of England* also managed to strike a careful balance between scholarly credibility and popular interest, providing a narrative that, while based on research, was not so swallowed up in footnotes as to prove impenetrable to a non-specialist audience. By revising the conventional political argument that England possessed an ancient constitution, Hume’s text managed to transcend the deeply-entrenched divisions between Whig and Tory historiography. And by drawing on a range of different literary techniques, including ironic humour and sentimentality, the *History* managed to appeal to women as well as men, leisure readers as well as students of politics or rhetoric.

What prompted these important historiographical achievements? Was Hume simply an extraordinary thinker, possessed of a genius ahead of his time? Or were there other historians, working alongside or prior to Hume, whose texts helped to pave the way for his and other Enlightenment narratives? Perhaps the best-known English historian of the seventeenth century was Clarendon, whose *History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars* was completed in the 1670s and published between 1702 and 1704. But what of the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the period between Clarendon’s account and Hume’s? While many different writers published histories of England or Britain during these decades, the vast majority of these texts were judged as “failures” by the elite critical standards of their time; as a result, the Restoration and early eighteenth century has itself come to be regarded as a period of “weakness in English historical writing,” and the works that populate the landscape of English historiography in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries have slipped from view. The result has been to magnify Clarendon’s, and more particularly Hume’s, achievements—but to do so at the expense of a number

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4 See Forbes, p. 263.
