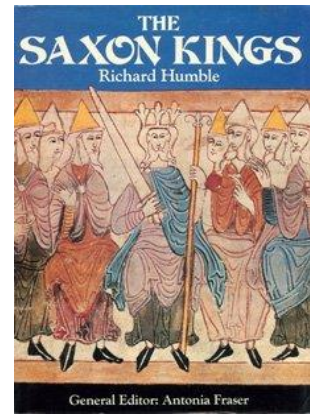


## Book Review

### The Saxon Kings by Richard Humble

At school, history was my worst subject, but over the years I have become more and more interested in the past. I have read books and watched movies and TV dramas and documentaries about the Plantagenets, the Tudors, The Stuarts, and on up to modern times, but for some reason popular history ignores the Saxon Kings. All I knew was that Alfred burned the cakes, Canute failed to turn the tide, Ethelred was unready, Edward confessed and Harold was shot in the eye at the Battle of Hastings. Not much for 200 years of dynastic struggles, with epic battles against ruthless invaders; good and bad kings, weak and strong kings.



I had always assumed that I knew so little because there was so little to know, but characters were described and events were recorded in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles and Humble pulls together the threads for our benefit. Not that he is an impartial historian, he praises and criticises in equal measure, although I was never sure whether he was simply following judgements made in the Chronicles or whether he has his own personal agenda.

Our corner of West Sussex doesn't figure but this is when people began to settle this awkward piece of land, and the book is a window into the life of ordinary folk as well as kings. It is a magnificent period of our history, not just about battles for power but about the forging of England as a nation. If your knowledge of the ninth, tenth and eleventh centuries is as hazy as was mine, then I thoroughly recommend this book.

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