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*Grant Allen*

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## Anglo Saxon Britain Details

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## Philip says

Anglo-Saxon Britain by Grant Allen is a book that now comes free via Amazon Kindle, so there is absolutely no excuse for not reading it, especially when such editions can be downloaded to and read from an ordinary personal computer, at zero cost and complete convenience. This is not an advertisement, except, of course, for the book.

Anglo-Saxon Britain ought to be compulsory reading for all narrow-minded nationalists, Little Englanders, British national types, English leaguers and any other set of racial purity head-bangers, plus absolutely anyone who might even suggest that isolationism is either beneficial for or a natural state of the English. Anglo-Saxon Britain is not a new book, and hence does not cover any aspects of ethnology that have been developed since the arrival of DNA analysis. Anglo-Saxon Britain is thus an old-fashioned review and analysis of available historical documents and sources. But, in a succinct and wonderfully readable form, it succeeds in summarising the issue's complexity and communicating a beautifully rounded picture of a thoroughly complicated reality.

The English - and their Saxon and Jutish cousins - were, of course, invaders, originating in what we now call Germany, Denmark and Holland. What they brought to a Romanised, at least in part already Christian and largely unified land was barbarism, paganism and continual warfare. What they also brought with them - or at least the Angels did - was their language, a form of low German with gendered nouns that had case endings and verbs that declined into multiple forms. But the general structure of that language endured, endured as its complexities of form gradually disappeared whilst its complexity of potential nuance grew. Its vocabulary welcomed successive waves of foreign invaders and its aesthetic adopted the more civilised ways of other foreigners from southern Europe.

The Danes also deserve a mention, of course, since they ruled most of what we now call England for much of the Anglo-Saxon period. And the Welsh and Celts, indigenous people, but only in a relative sense, were not only subjugated but contributed in their own way to the wholly complicated and, frankly mixed up, gene pool through inter-marriage. The point is made repeatedly that perhaps the most English - as far as the original form and sound of the language is concerned - is still spoken by the Lothians of modern-day Scotland, since the Angel settlers there were the least affected by subsequent waves of invasion.

What we do know about the English - very little, it has to be said, since they wrote down almost nothing about themselves - is that they rarely cooperated, except at the tribal or clan level, constantly bickered and argued, regularly fought one another and spent very little time on more civilised pursuits. At least some things have endured.

Anglo-Saxon Britain by Grant Allen does not trade any myths. It presents a learned, well researched and referenced account of the politics, the conflicts, the culture and language of the early English. It reminds us that the last English person to occupy the English throne was Harold in 1066 and he succumbed to an immigrant from continental Europe who moved in and made the place his own, perhaps improving it along the way. The book is superbly entertaining as well as informative, erudite and learned, but also lean, stimulating and succinct. Its sections on the language, alone, render it essential reading for anyone who is the least bit interested in English or the English.

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### **Julia Ibbotson says**

Easy to read overview of the period focusing on the social aspects of the time and demonstrating the mix of peoples we now call the English and the British. Again, as in Green's *England During the Dark Ages*, it is a product of the thinking of the time, and discoveries and new research have made some of this book erroneous.

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### **Monica says**

I really enjoyed this free book for the Kindle (also available for money in a dead-tree edition). Written in the late 19th century, this was part of a series of short histories on Early Britain for popular readers of the time. It suffers, of course, from the prejudices of its times, but really does give a good introduction to the Anglo-Saxons and their history in Britain. The writing style is surprisingly readable. Well worth the time for anyone interested in the subject. This was especially valuable for me, as I'm also reading Bernard Cornwell's novels about Alfred the Great and the Danish invasions in the ninth century. They dovetail nicely.

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### **Haythem Bastawy says**

I enjoyed reading this book and learning something new at almost every page. This England's history from a whole new perspective tracing the origins of every invader who has come to be part of the whole composition of British identity; the natives who were Iberian in Origin, the Celtic who were low Germanic, the Romans: a miscellany of miditerranean races, the Anglo-Saxons who were low Germanic tribes like the celtics who had come to the island much earlier, the vikings who were high Germanic Scandinavians, and the Normans who were Germanic people also but settled in the South-west of France. Each of which contributed something to the character and characteristics of the British national identity.

There are only two points I hold against the author of *Anglo-Saxon Britains*. In many ways the book reads like the history of the spread of Christianity into Britain rather than the history of the British Anglo-Saxon era. I don't know whether this is just because civilisation in Britain is intertwined with Christianity of the author has got more subjective reasons. The second point I hold against Allen is that he completely ignored the influence of what was called back then Moorish texts on British civilisation during the Renaissance. He mentioned Roman and Greek influences and went as far back as ancient Egypt, but never once did he remember to mention the Islamic civilisation which delivered the Renaissance to Europe through its manuscripts, translations and innovations.

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### **Lindsay Allison says**

I understand that a lot of history books can be dry, but holy shit that was bad. It was so hard to follow despite the fact that Allen was trying to keep a conversational tone. The sentences were long and often run-on. I will never understand why so many academics think it's cool to squish three sentences into one. I also didn't feel any heart or emotion in this - there was nothing to connect me to the information.

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**Christopher says**

This is a fairly easy read, though it does wrap up drily and slowly as the history stops and the language description begins.

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**Monte Lamb says**

I am confident that there are later books on this subject that are better. It was OK and I thought the author did a good job of telling a story, but the end of the book going through all the roots and derivations of English words from their origin was tough to get through.

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