

The Last English King by Julian Rathbone

This is a historical novel set around the battle of Hastings in 1066. It revolves around Walt, a housecarl of Harold Godwinson the last Anglo Saxon king of England.

The story starts with Walt returning to his home in Irwene in Dorset, 4 years after the battle. He had fled England after Harold's defeat and had spent time travelling across Europe and Asia Minor. Struggling with the aftermath of war, the loss of his King and the end of Anglo Saxon England, he recounts his tale to his travelling companion Quint.

It is a fascinating insight to what life may have been like before the Norman Conquest, both entertaining and educational. It is a complex book that can be both explicit and brutal in parts with some beautiful descriptive phrases, some tongue in cheek humour and a bit of philosophy thrown in for good measure.

The reading group found this book an interesting but at times a difficult read with lots of characters and facts to get your head around. It's a book that needs to be read seriously in chunks as there is a lot to take in, but well worth the effort.