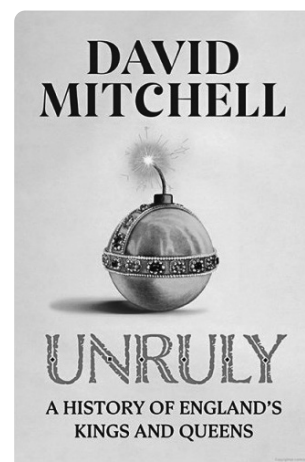


from *Unruly, A History of England's Kings and Queens*, by David Mitchell, first published in 2023

(1) [In Anglo-Saxon times¹⁾] there were several stable kingdoms broadly covering the area soon to be known as England, one of which was, at any given time, in the ascendancy. The Britons²⁾ had been pushed back into the west – parts of what is now Devon and Cornwall and pretty much all of what is now Wales.

(2) In fact, the words Wales and Welsh are derived from the words the Germanic-speaking tribes all over Europe gave to the retreating and cowed citizens of the collapsing Roman Empire: *walas*, which meant foreigners or strangers, from which we get Walloon (the French-speaking Belgians) and Gaul, of Asterix the Gaul (somehow the 'w' turned into a 'g'), as well as the Old English *wealh* which became Wales and Welsh. (Hence the modern French for Wales is 'Pays de Galles', country of the Gauls, which is massively confusing. France, Gaul, is the actual country of the Gauls, you'd think. It's almost like the French are calling Wales France, as if, to the French, the Welsh seem more French than the French. And, having been to both France and Wales many times, that strikes me as an eccentric opinion.)

(3) Meanwhile the Welsh word for Wales, Cymru, derives from a Brittonic word meaning 'fellow-countrymen'. Strangers or fellow-countrymen. The Welsh for Wales basically means 'us' and the English for it means 'them'.



noot 1 Anglo-Saxon times = periode dat Germaanse stammen voornamelijk afkomstig uit Duitsland, het grootste deel van het Britse eiland hadden overgenomen

noot 2 Britons = benaming van de oorspronkelijke bewoners van het Britse eiland

- (4) Us and them. That sums up the relations between the Britons and the Anglo-Saxons at this point. Sharing a religion only seemed to divide them further and there were persistent differences over how to calculate the date of Easter despite the extreme disinclination of people on both sides to send one another festive eggs. (My strong advice is not to worry about the specifics of this difference because it is complicated and unimportant. Basically, the Celtic church calculated the date of Easter Sunday on an eighty-four-year cycle, while the Roman church that the Anglo-Saxons had largely adopted did it on a nineteen-year cycle. If that information is not enough to put you off further enquiry, then I think you should seriously consider putting this book down and developing a drug habit.)
- (5) Northern Europe enjoyed 35-1 in the late seventh and eighth centuries that enriched the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms but didn't much benefit the Britons who had too many Anglo-Saxons between them and all that trade. This further boosted the Anglo-Saxons' increasing feelings of communality, of a racial and linguistic bond from which Britons were explicitly excluded. The two sides defined themselves against one another and the Anglo-Saxon world was buoyed up by 35-2.
- (6) This unifying enmity finds its physical embodiment in Offa's Dyke. [...36...]