

Local amateur historian and Axminster Heritage Centre volunteer, David Knapman has been awarded the prestigious W.G Hoskins Prize for his book,

Unsteady Progress – A History of Axminster from 1701 to 2000.’

The W.G Hoskins Prize, which is open to new or emerging authors in any category of Devon history, is named after the English professor and local historian, William George Hoskins. Hoskins, born in Exeter, Devon on 22 May 1908 is known for being instrumental in establishing local history as an academic subject both through his own writings (including his definitive ‘History of Devon’), and through his work as the first head of the Department of English Local History at the University of Leicester.

Speaking about receiving the award, David Knapman said: “

I am extremely pleased and proud to have won this prestigious award from the Devon History Society which, as far as I was concerned, came completely out of the blue. Since launching the book during lockdown last year I have been very happy with the positive response which it has received from local readers. However, countrywide recognition like this is really gratifying, particularly when you look at the list of previous winners.”

Although the prize is awarded annually, it was not awarded last year due to the pandemic and so the 2021 prize covers all books published during 2019 and 2020. Previous recipients of the prize have included Salcombe Maritime Museum Curator, Roger Barrett’s 2019 book, ‘Salcombe: Schooner Port: A Maritime History of Salcombe and its Merchant Sailing Vessels in the Nineteenth Century,’ and joint winners Martin Graebe and Robert Waterhouse in 2018 with ‘As I walked Out: Sabine Baring-Gould and the Search for the Folk Songs of Devon and Cornwall,’ and ‘The Tavistock Canal: Its History and Archaeology’ respectively.

‘Unsteady Progress – A History of Axminster from 1701 to 2000’ covers over 300 years of local history in ten 30-year chapters (and 480 pages), including many stories which have never made it into earlier histories of the town. Throughout the book, David shows how what was happening in Axminster during the time period has shaped the town into what it is today.