

East Anglian Book Awards

In partnership with **Eastern Daily Press** **JARROLD** **N** National Centre
for Writing

Supported by the University of East Anglia Faculty of Arts & Humanities

Friday 15 November 2019

Best of regional writing and publishing celebrated at the East Anglian Book Awards

The winners of the coveted East Anglian Book Awards 2019 were revealed this afternoon (Friday 15 November) at a literary lunch and celebration of regional writing and publishing held at Norwich City Football Club.

The overall Book of the Year Award went to acclaimed author and journalist Mark Cocker for *A Claxton Diary: Further Field Notes from a Small Planet* (Jonathan Cape). He received £1,000, generously supported by the PACCAR Foundation.

In *A Claxton Diary: Further Field Notes*, Mark gathers some of his finest short essays (many of which are taken from his long-running Country Diary column for the *Guardian*) on the wildlife he has encountered when taking the two-mile walk down to the river from his cottage on the edge of the Norfolk Broads National Park. They range over almost everything he can see, touch or smell; from the minute to the cosmic, from a strange micromoth called yellow-barred longhorn to that fiercest of winter storms the 'Beast from the East'.

Peggy Hughes, one of the judges and Programme Director at the National Centre for Writing based in Norwich, said:

'Combining boundless knowledge with huge passion and clarity of observation, Mark's short essays pay exquisite attention to this patch of East Anglia, to the cycle

of the seasons, and to the butterflies, birds, flowers and bees that also call it home. In doing so, he also calls our urgent attention to the impact of the present climate emergency, making this book both timely and timeless at once. From the minute to the cosmic, no leaf goes unturned and we are the richer for it.'

Fellow judge and author Christine Webber described the book as 'sublime – dazzling, rhythmic, evocative, energising and a welcome antidote to the political madness of our time.'

The Exceptional Contribution Award 2019 was presented to Christopher Bigsby, Emeritus Professor at the School of Art, Media and American Studies at the University of East Anglia and Founding Director of the Arthur Miller Institute Autumn Literary Festival. At the end of 2019 Chris will retire from his Literary Festival. The judging panel said:

'For 27 years, as Founding Director of the Arthur Miller Institute Autumn Literary Festival, Christopher Bigsby has been bringing the world's finest writers and thinkers to Norwich. With enormous knowledge and spirit he has personally interviewed over 250 of them, including Arthur Miller, Salman Rushdie, Toni Morrison, Margaret Atwood, and Zadie Smith, to name but a few. His commitment, vision and dedication, to the art of conversation as well as to the pleasure of the written word, has made a seismic contribution to Norwich and to the UEA as home to the finest creative writing programme in the world, helping pave the way to the UNESCO City of Literature designation that enriches our city today.'

It was also an afternoon of celebration for the 2019 category winners:

- **History & Tradition:** *A Very Dangerous Locality* by Robert Liddiard & David Sims (University of Hertfordshire Press)
- **Biography & Memoir:** *The Photographer at Sixteen* by George Szirtes (MacLehose Press)
- **The Mal Peet Children's Award:** *Between Worlds: Folktales of Britain and Ireland* by Kevin Crossley-Holland (Walker Books)

- **General Non-Fiction:** *A Claxton Diary: Further Field Notes from a Small Planet* by Mark Cocker (Jonathan Cape)
- **Poetry:** *The Built Moment* by Lavinia Greenlaw (Faber)
- **Fiction:** *I Thought I Knew You* by Penny Hancock (Mantle)

The 'Book by the Cover' Award, sponsored by East Anglian Writers, for the best-designed cover of the shortlisted titles, went to Helen Ivory for *The Anatomical Venus* (Bloodaxe Books).

12 out of 18 category nominees were independent publishers, six of which were based in the East Anglian region.

The ceremony also featured speeches from special guests Edward Parnell, author of *Ghostland: In Search of a Haunted Country* (William Collins); Sarah Passingham, author of *Push: My Father, Polio, and Me* (Gatehouse Press); and Rachel Hore, author of *Last Letter Home* (Simon & Schuster).

The East Anglian Book Awards are organised by the Eastern Daily Press, Jarrold and the National Centre for Writing based in Norwich UNESCO City of Literature, with support from UEA's Faculty of Arts & Humanities.

Since the East Anglian Book Awards began in 2008 they have showcased the work of well over 160 authors, over 200 titles, and more than 100 publishers.

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Notes to Editors:

1. Press enquiries and photography contact Steph McKenna, Communications Manager at steph@nationalcentreforwriting.org.uk 01603 877177
2. The **National Centre for Writing** (NCW) is a place of discovery, exchange, ideas and learning for writers, literary translators and readers. Based in the restored and extended 15th century Dragon Hall in the heart of England's first UNESCO City of Literature, it explores how writing can inspire and change the world we live in. Its year round programme of events, festivals and courses reaches over 14,000 people a year with an additional 110,000 engaged online. Through its learning and participation programme it supports

20,000 young people a year and has a commitment to working with those in the most disadvantaged areas. NCW's patrons include Margaret Atwood, JM Coetzee, Kei Miller and Elif Shafak.

www.nationalcentreforwriting.org.uk

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<https://nationalcentreforwriting.org.uk/east-anglian-book-awards/>