

PRESS RELEASE

Monday 11th March 2019
For immediate use

Fourth Retford Religious Tolerance Forum

“A most thought-provoking and fascinating series of lectures, and we are so glad we came”

This was just one of the positive comments made about the speakers at the fourth Retford Religious Tolerance Forum held on Saturday 9th March 2019.

The event opened with a welcome from **Adrian Gray**, who introduced **Cllr Helen Richards** as the co-ordinator of the day’s event.

Professor Larry Kreitzer provided new insights into the life of Thomas Helwys, Nottinghamshire’s champion of religious liberty. He discussed whether Helwys died in prison; whether the dates of documents were estimated by Victorian researchers and outlined the Helwys family tree. Larry is from Regent’s Park College at the University of Oxford and holds a Research Lectureship within the Faculty of Theology.

Dr Martin Parsons outlined the progress of religious liberty in Britain since 1700, including the Test Acts (a series of English penal laws that served as a religious test for public office) and the progress of discrimination against non-conformists and other minorities over time. Martin also gave an insight into the persecution of Christians in other countries and warned against the erosion of liberty. Martin comes from the Barnabas Fund.

Special Advisor Knox Thames at the US Department of State in Washington, DC, appeared in a video talking about US efforts to promote religious freedom and interfaith tolerance. He referred to a common approach to this subject with the U.S. and the UK having similar objectives.

Cllr Helen Richards then interviewed **Andrew K of Open Doors** about its work around the world in helping persecuted Christians.

Dr Calum Miller addressed the question of whether free speech was really under threat. He gave a reasoned evaluation of the question of whether unpopular views should be heard and whether universities and student unions should act to protect their students from views that may not be generally acceptable. This opened the debate about whether morality is an absolute concept or something that is negotiated within societies and cultures. Calum currently teaches Ethics and Philosophy of Religion at the University of Oxford.

Adrian Gray then outlined a potential trail of locations connected with men and women linked to the Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire area with significant connections to the history of persecution and freedom. Adrian is a local historian and author.

The conclusions of the event could be summarised in the words of George Washington, First President of the United States: “If the freedom of speech is taken away then dumb and silent, we may be led like sheep to the slaughter”.

Bassetlaw Christian Heritage (BCH)

Focuses on the people and their stories based on faith heritage, with their roots established in and around Bassetlaw, North Nottinghamshire. The region covered is centred on Retford, with a radius of around 30 miles, including parts of Lincolnshire and South Yorkshire.

BCH is keen to work collaboratively with groups and individuals, and if anyone would like to help in any way, they can reach BCH at contact@bassetlawchristianheritage.com . Website at: www.bassetlawchristianheritage.com

Note to Editors

The fourth Retford Religious Tolerance Forum was held on Saturday 9th March 2019 to commemorate the death, in 1616, of Thomas Helwys, the first Baptist martyr and original advocate of religious tolerance between Christians, Jews, Muslims, and those with no faith.

Previous speakers at earlier events have included Baroness Elizabeth Berridge (member of the International Panel of Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion or Belief), John Mann MP, Professor John Coffey (University of Leicester), Rev Tony Peck (General Secretary of the European Baptist Federation), Imam Bakhtyar Pirzada (Eaton Hall), Dr David Appleby (University of Nottingham), and Mr Phil Lyons (CEO National Holocaust Centre).

Photographs of speakers at the event are attached

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