

PRESS RELEASE

23rd November 2021

Immediate Use

Thanksgiving/Illuminate 2021 – ‘Can-dles of hope’

St Swithun’s Church, Retford, 18th November 2021

We set a target of gathering 4800 cans for Bassetlaw Foodbank on Thursday 18th November 2021 – that is one can for every month since the first Thanksgiving in America, 400 years ago. From a standing start this year we achieved over 1600 cans – over a third of the target! This was due to the magnificent support from organisations and individuals in and around Retford – and a special mention to the Co-op store in Kilton - thank you all!

If you want us to come back next year to see if we **can** do it then, we will – the target will be 4812 then – just send an email to info@pilgrimroots.org and let us know. Bassetlaw Foodbank does a great job and deserves our support. Foodbank Manager, Robert Garland said “This sort of event, and the amazing way the people of Bassetlaw pull together to make things happen, makes me really proud to be a resident, and as a charity, we could not operate without this sort of support”

There was a programme of performances and talks on the day and the local talent – all of whom gave their time and genius for free – were absolutely brilliant. The event started with John Coates and the St Swithun’s bellringers who announced the start of the event. Then local organist Stephen Carey played five organ pieces specially composed for the Mayflower Pilgrims commemorations, with an introduction and supporting narratives by Isabelle Richards, Heritage Engagement Officer, at the Pilgrims Gallery, Bassetlaw Museum. This worked so well bringing alive the stories of the people in the music.

Then, The Elizabethan Academy Choir, assisted by various soloists, and conducted by Claire Cowan performed with great enthusiasm and skill. Doncaster Waites then astounded the audience with both their superb outfits and their virtuoso playing of the popular street music and instruments at the time of the Pilgrims. The well-known U3A Recorder Consort delighted everyone with their music before the Doncaster Waites returned for a final set.

Then the pace changed and the audience was treated to a series of films about the plight of the Native Americans and what Thanksgiving represents to them – the National Day of Mourning; plus tours on screen around the local Pilgrim Churches Pilgrim Churches with descriptions of the people who became the Separatists and Puritans in the 17th Century. There was then an interval and a chance to eat the amazing cupcakes purchased from an excellent cake shop not far from the church.

At 6.30pm the evening session began with the ever-popular local historian and author, Adrian Gray who gave a fascinating talk on *Thanksgiving and Other Meals*. This was followed by outstanding performances from local singers, Emma Spencer & David Warren, who sang songs from musical theatre. It was a privilege to hear, and see, them and if you ever get the chance to hear them, take it, they are amazing! The evening was completed by Retford’s own Jessica Mary Brett who gave a brilliant climax to the day with songs about thanksgiving and friendship.

BCH Chair, Rick Brand, closed the event and thanked everyone who had contributed to the day, especially the team at St Swithun’s and Isabelle Richards, Pilgrim Roots, Bassetlaw District Council, and the Lottery Heritage Fund, without whom the day would not have taken place.

Donors of cans were given an LED tealight, which they can display in their windows on Thursday 25th November (Thanksgiving Day) to remind them, and others, about giving thanks. We are inviting people to take photographs of these tealights to reflect the theme of Illuminate and share them on social media with the hashtag #OneSmallCandle, or send by email to info@pilgrimroots.org.

The Illuminate activity is inspired by a quote from William Bradford, one of the Mayflower Pilgrim leaders who became the second and long-serving Governor of Plymouth Colony:

‘As one small candle may light a thousand, so the light here kindled hath shone unto many.’

Chair of BCH, Rick Brand said: ‘This is a wonderful opportunity for us to make a real difference to people locally by supporting Bassetlaw Foodbank, and to be able to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the first Thanksgiving.’

Notes for Editors

Background

November 25th 2021 will be the 400th anniversary of the first Thanksgiving meal which was shared between the newly arrived settlers to North America – the Mayflower Pilgrims - and the local population who had formed an alliance with them – the Mashpee Wampanoag.

In the first year, half of the passengers from the Mayflower had died, having arrived at the start of winter, ill-prepared for what was to come. Members of the native population showed them which crops to grow, and how to go about it. A year on from their arrival a celebration meal took place with the settlers and the leader of the local Wampanoag people and one hundred of his warriors.

However the anniversary is not celebrated by the Wampanoag people today. The successful establishment of the Separatists was followed by large scale incursion by Europeans across the continent. Thanksgiving has been marked, since 1970, among many Native Americans as a National Day of Mourning.

Millions of Americans today mark Thanksgiving as a celebration of family and an opportunity to give thanks for what they have. People travel across the country to enjoy a meal together, usually featuring turkey. The original meal would probably have consisted of venison, shellfish and cereals.

For further information please contact:

Isabelle Richards at info@pilgrimroots.org or 01777 713749

Rick Brand at rickbrand@hotmail.com or 01427 891376

Or see websites:

www.pilgrimroots.co.uk

www.bassetlawchristianheritage.com

The Thanksgiving/Illuminate activity in Bassetlaw, North Nottinghamshire has been organised by Bassetlaw District Council Pilgrims Gallery at Bassetlaw Museum, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and BCH (Bassetlaw Christian Heritage).

Pilgrim Roots is a regional partnership including Bassetlaw District Council, West Lindsey District Council, Bassetlaw Christian Heritage and other organisations in the Lincolnshire, Bassetlaw, North Nottinghamshire and South Yorkshire area.

Photograph – attached are photographs taken during the event on 18th and 19th November