

Did Norwich stop being great in 1750?

Poser is put to city sixth-formers

Did Norwich stop being a great city after 1750?

That is the unusual poser which has been put to more than a hundred city sixth-formers.

The question has been asked in a competition marking the 700th anniversary of the Freeman of Norwich.

The Great Norwich History Competition is part of a programme of events to celebrate the landmark anniversary.

It saw history students from Norwich School, Hewett Academy, Norwich High School for Girls and Notre Dame High meet at the Theatre Royal to tackle the question of whether Norwich stopped being a great city after 1750.

Norwich historian Frank Meeres, academic Dr Elizabeth Griffiths and Simon Floyd, from the Common Lot Theatre Company and history teachers

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from each of the schools presented workshops and mini-lectures at the launch event.

Simon Everett, history teacher at Notre Dame, said although Norwich was once England's second city, built on textile manufacturing, it began to be overtaken from around 1750.

By 1800, it had dropped to the 10th largest city, as industrial cities such as Manchester and Birmingham began to take over.

Mr Everett said: "One could perhaps argue that although it may be a 'fine' city after 1750, I am not sure it counts as being a 'great' city. In recent centuries, does Norwich stand comparison with other English cities?"

But Alexandra Atherton, head of history at The Hewett

Academy, said: "1750 does not spell the beginning of the end, but rather the continuation of Norwich's greatness."

She pointed out Norwich had many industries that had become world brands, such as Colman's Mustard, as well as two universities and a research park that puts the city on the global scientific stage.

The students will reconvene in May for a gala evening when they will debate the arguments for and against as well as compete for £500 in cash prizes.

The Freeman were once the governing body of the city and were granted special rights.

What do you think? Did Norwich stop being great in 1750 or is it still one of the best cities in Britain? Write, giving full contact details, to Letters Editor, Prospect House, Rouen Road, Norwich NR1 1RE or email EDPletters@archant.co.uk



Students taking part in a workshop with Simon Everett, head of history at Notre Dame High School, Norwich.

Picture: MARK BENFIE