

# Black Country Living Museum

## Key information

- We proudly share why our small region made a big impact on the world and bring Black Country folk back to life, from metalworkers and miners to nurses and schoolteachers – and even a pub landlord or two.
- Our storytelling spans 300 years, from the 1700s through to the 1960s.
- Our historic characters are based on people who lived in the Black Country. Some were born here while others migrated and made it their home.
- Our visitors experience sights, sounds, smells, and tastes of the Black Country as they explore rebuilt, recreated or replica shops, houses and industrial workshops.
- We had a record-breaking year in 2023, welcoming over 385,000 visitors.
- We have welcomed over 11 million people since we opened in 1978.
- We are an independent organisation – and have been since we opened.
- We employ over 300 people and have an annual trading turnover of £9.5 million.
- Our single largest development in our history is nearly finished. The £30 million project, called 'Forging Ahead', has taken our story into living memory with a new 'stage' being built from the 1940s to 1960s.
- We are innovating to secure our future and position ourselves as a world-class heritage attraction in the heart of the Black Country.
- Our entire collection of over 100,000 objects was Designated in 2012 by Arts Council England, recognising its quality and national significance.
- The Museum has been an Arts Council England-funded National Portfolio Organisation since 2018. It successfully sought additional investment through the 'Levelling Up for Culture Places' scheme.



*The Museum's Anchor Forge, Boat Dock & Boat collection.*

## Background

Black Country Living Museum, which was inspired by the local community and opened in 1978, is a 26-acre open air museum that tells the story of the industrial revolution in the 1700s up to 1968 through the everyday lives of the people whose skills shaped the modern world.

The first land for the museum was purchased in 1973 to ensure that the culture and traditions of the Black Country might be preserved. The first structures, centred on a small canal arm and original limekilns, were brought to the site in 1976, and rebuilt brick-by-brick.

Fast-forward to 2024 and we have accumulated a wide range of material – from entire buildings (now numbering over 80), street furniture and transport infrastructure, down to pots and pans – which records and exemplifies the particular contribution of the Black Country to the origins of the Industrial Revolution and also the impact of industrialisation on the regional landscape and society.

A 'living' village and town centre lie at the heart of the Museum and give our visitors an atmospheric glimpse into the lives of ordinary folk who made the Black Country a thriving



industrial community. Historic buildings from across the Black Country have been moved brick-by-brick, replicated or recreated to create a typically tightly knit Black Country community across different decades.

Sights, sounds, smells and tastes generate images of the past as visitors immerse themselves in history, experiencing it first-hand.

The sound of metal striking metal reverberates around the village as the chain-maker plies his trade; the scent of motor oil drifts from Bradburn & Wedge Motor Garage as glamorous advertisements peer out from the windows; colourful potion bottles catch the light in the chemist while eye-catching pillboxes promise miracle cures; and childhood is remembered with a dip of a finger into a bag of kali from the sweetshop.

Moving from the 1850s through to the 1960s, visitors interact with the past through narrated interpretation, demonstrations of skilled crafts, storytelling and street theatre.

From humble beginnings, we now see an annual turnover of £9.5 million with around 400,000 visitors a year exploring life in the Black Country.

## **The Black Country**

While no one quite agrees on the exact boundaries of the region known as 'the Black Country' – named due to the scale of innovation and industry in the area – there is one thing known for certain: Black Country folk changed the world.

They built the world's first successful steam engine; put the first steam train (the Stourbridge Lion) on US soil; fuelled the introduction of the first minimum wage; produced the anchor for the Titanic; practically built the Crystal Palace; and so much more.

From the early 20th century onwards, the Black Country region became one of the most industrialised parts of the UK with coal mines, iron foundries, glass factories, brick works and more dominating the landscape.

The sheer intensity of industry earned the Black Country a worldwide reputation and its goods were shipped around the globe. But industry at such scale came at a huge cost, and the landscape was turned inside out for its resources. In 1862 the American Consul to Birmingham, Elihu Burritt, famously described the region as "black by day and red by night" because of the abundant black smog by day and the fiery glow of the furnaces by night.

Up until the 1950s and 1960s, the Black Country preserved the physical, economic and social landscape of the earlier part of the century, but eventually the pace of change began to erode the essential character of the region. Following two major waves of industrial development, the last mine in the Black Country closed in 1968, bringing about the end of a unique area, one that is preserved at Black Country Living Museum for you to explore.



*A historic character delivers a school lesson in our 1912 school.*

## Visitor favourites

We bring history to life in multiple ways.

**Historic characters and demonstrators** breathe life into the Black Country story and create a living, breathing snapshot of life in the region. A visit to Black Country Living Museum offers a unique learning experience that cannot be replicated in a classroom.



Throughout the Museum, buildings are occupied by costumed historic characters who depict the living and working conditions of times past. Characters revive long-forgotten skills, including nail-making and chain-making, and have insightful stories to tell.

The **drift mine experience** was reopened in January 2023 following renovation work. Visitors are invited to descend 'into the thick' and enter the Museum's drift mine to hear what 'Elija Wedge' has to say about the world of an 1850s Black Country coal miner.

Visitors learn how the mines were run, how timber props were used to support the roofs and face the harsh reality of a coal miner's life in the mid-19th century, especially for 'little Billy', who started working down the mine at just 10 years old.

Our **food and drink** outlets bring old-fashioned flavours to modern palates, from our traditionally-cooked beef dripping chips to brightly-coloured kali.

And if you have a thirst, our two pubs – the Bottle & Glass Inn and Elephant & Castle Pub – have a range of refreshments on offer, including nostalgic favourite Babycham.

## Learning

We offer educational packages to visiting schools tailored to each Key Stage and can cover a broad subject area, including history, the arts, science, technology, geography, literacy, mathematics and citizenship.

As well as immersing students in the authentic sights, sounds, smells and tastes of the past, we enhance school visits by offering an exciting range of award-winning learning activities. For example, students can investigate similarities and differences between toys from the past and toys from today with 'Terrific Toys'.

## Group travel

Group visits are welcomed at the Museum, with discounted rates available to groups of 15+. We have picked up multiple awards, including at The National Group Travel Awards and UK Coach Awards, for our group offer.

## Filming location

The Museum has served as the location for many productions, including crime drama 'Peaky Blinders' (BBC), Sir Lenny Henry's semi biographical series 'Three Little Birds' (ITV), and feature films 'Stan & Ollie' (2018) and 'The Colour Room' (2021).

Advertisements and music videos have also been filmed at the Museum, including rock band Sabaton's cover of '1916', plus multiple photoshoots, from Gucci to American football.



*An episode of the BBC's 'Operation Ouch!' filmed in 2023.*

## Venue hire

At Black Country Living Museum, history isn't just a backdrop; it's part of the experience.

With a range of meeting spaces, excellent in-house catering and access to 300 years of history, our dedicated Corporate Hospitality Team work with organisations to build an unforgettable package for their guests.



## **Eating and drinking at the Museum**

There are a variety of cafés, pubs and shops around the Museum for our visitors to pick up something to eat or drink while they enjoy their visit.

### **Hobbs & Sons Fish & Chip Shop**

Hobbs' and Sons Fish & Chip Shop serves the finest fish and chips, cooked in beef dripping (a vegetarian alternative is also available).

The building housing Hobbs' and Sons Fish & Chip Shop comes from Hall Street, Dudley. It dates to the late 1700s but was refaced with bright red pressed brickwork in 1889. In the early 1900s, the shop served as a commercial laundry with Joseph Hobbs establishing his chip shop around 1916. The impressive, tiled interior of the chip shop features hand-painted tiled wall panels that have been carefully restored.

### **Elephant & Castle Pub**

The Elephant & Castle Pub was built in 1905 on the corner of Stafford Street and Cannock Road, Wolverhampton. In 1910, it was sold to Wolverhampton & Dudley Breweries, the largest brewery in the Black Country, and became part of Banks's pub estate. It was sold off in the 1990s, closed in 2000, and was knocked down in 2001.

The pub was a friendly meeting place for people from all walks of life. The Black Country was booming and drawing workers in from all over the world to address the labour shortage. Irish workers found work in construction by talking to the right people. Men from India working in nearby foundries met here to reminisce. Caribbean men working at the nearby bus garage met to play dominoes.

Our recreation is set in 1960 and serves a range of alcoholic and soft drinks. We used a mixture of archived plans, family photographs and bricks salvaged from the site to design the building.

### **Marsh & Baxter**

The Marsh & Baxter company began with Alfred Marsh purchasing a butcher's shop in Brierley Hill in 1867. Marsh's products proved very popular, and he soon expanded by first mechanizing his production process, introducing machinery and refrigeration to the factory to enable production of bacon, sausages, hams and pork pies on an industrial scale, all year round.

In 1912, Marsh took over A.R. Baxter's meat processing factory in Dale End, Birmingham and another five shops, gained a royal warrant, and rapidly grew into probably the biggest firm of its type in the country – even bigger than its local competitor, Dudley Port's Palethorpes.

Our shop is set in 1953 and is a replica of the premise in High Street, Brierley Hill. Visitors can enjoy locally made pork pies, sausage and bacon cobs, and faggots with mushy peas.



*Traditional faggots and peas from Marsh & Baxter.*

## Events

Our **Christmas** events transport visitors back in time to explore Christmases of the past, from Victorian festive greenery to the more extravagant 1930s decorations and the lavish 1960s colour, sparkle and shine. Our ever-popular Santa Hunts take visitors on an exclusive tour of our 30 acres as they try to find the 'Man in the Red Suit'.

Our **Peaky Blinders Nights** invite visitors to walk in the footsteps of the show's biggest stars as they explore one of the key sets of the global smash hit drama. Blue Plaques highlight

key locations from the show and visitors can enjoy the raucous nightlife of the interwar years with atmospheric live music, dancing and roaring braziers.

We also host specialist **Access Tours**. Audio Descriptive tours reveal Black Country history through touch and handling experiences, while the Museum's Deaf Friendly tours are facilitated by a qualified British Sign Language interpreter for deaf and hard of hearing visitors.



*A band performs at 1950s Evening.*

## Investors

We are a charity and are finally independent for our everyday needs.

While income streams from ticket sales and secondary spend maintain our running, we engage with supporters and investors to undertake exciting projects such as heritage restorations, learning programmes, and activities that enable us to reach new audiences.

More phases from Forging Ahead, our single largest ever capital build, will be opened in 2024. This has been made possible not only by our visitors and Members, but also due to National Lottery Heritage Fund, Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership, West Midlands Combined Authority, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, and Arts Council England, as well as many other trusts, foundations and patrons.

The new development, which includes our new Visitor Centre, allows us to fulfil our potential and maximise our impact, as our storytelling continues until the 1960s, giving us the opportunity to share stories previously unexplored, including the foundation of the NHS, the prosperity of the post-war era and the opportunity it gave with new technologies and the arrival of new communities, and the exciting changes in social attitudes, fashion and music.

To find out more about Black Country Living Museum, including tickets prices, opening times and more, visit [www.bclm.com](http://www.bclm.com)

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