



Annual Review

for the year ended 31 December 2025

BLACK COUNTRY
LIVING
MUSEUM



Chair's Review

I always feel we are restless at the Museum to make things better. So, whilst it is important, valuable and enjoyable to report on the prior year, as I write this review of 2025 it is difficult for our attention not to be firmly focussed on how we are doing now, mid-way through 2026, as we see visitors streaming in for the February, Easter and May school holidays. For the Board of Trustees, we are anxious to deploy our strengths and value to the leadership of the Museum as beneficially as possible, and that means looking ahead, sometimes years ahead, and fixing a restless gaze on progress, impact and growth.

Our Trading Results

Success for the Museum is measured in two ways. Firstly, the achievements of our charitable objects, and secondly by our long-term sustainability without recourse to high levels of public sector funding to meet our everyday costs. Notwithstanding the enormously important annual investment from Arts Council England of £760,000, as part of ACE's National Portfolio. The Museum is proud to be an independent heritage business. In this context, our most significant business risk is maintaining a strong and resilient trading performance. We continue to adopt a triple helix approach, with the simultaneous and mutually dependent aim of being an outstanding museum, charity and visitor attraction.



The financial review set out elsewhere in this report reconciles our net operating surplus of £191,815 (2024: Deficit £91,563) with net income before taxation of £158,001 (2024: Deficit £723,675), shown in the Statement of Financial Activities. This represents a significant and welcome shift in the financial results of the Museum. It has come about because of the staff cost savings amounting to c£600k implemented during the first quarter of 2025, tight control of all other costs, strong results from our varied 20+ trading outlets on-site, including higher levels of spending per visitor compared to 2024 (£9.13 vs. £8.61), maintaining gross margins, and the solid performance of venue hire, hospitality and business sponsorship-partners.

These financial results are despite visitor attendance being 2.8% lower than the prior year, at 366,840 (2024: 377,024). This was the second year (outside the pandemic) that attendance has shrunk since 2013, with attendance in 2023 reaching 385,140. Admission yields were helped by an increase of 3% in paying visitors to 265,886 (2024: 257,556), or 72% of all attendance, with the majority of the remaining 28% taking advantage of the Museum's UnChained Annual Pass, which provides unlimited free repeat access to the Museum, linked to Gift Aid declarations.

Within total attendance we saw some ups and downs in visitor categories: over 65yrs increased by 8%, as did adults, but attendance at later-night opening during the summer holidays fell by 15%, and family visits were static. However, we were pleased to see school attendance – always an important audience for museums – grow by 6% to 58,881 (2024: 55,342).

Trading at the Museum is subject to significant seasonal variations, with the summer school holidays being especially important to the annual results. In this context, the mixed and unreliable weather of the summer impacted the financial performance of the Museum. In this regard we continued to see the entirely reasonable behaviour of visitors choosing to book later ahead of a visit. This is now commonly seen across hospitality, theatres and other performance venues. We also implore weather forecasters not to be so slapdash with their use of rain icons which all too often indicate widespread poor conditions, when in fact it is highly localised!





The Museum continues to keep its marketing strategies under review and is introducing a new ticketing system and website during the first quarter of 2026, thanks to significant investment from Bloomberg Philanthropies and administered by Arts Council England. This is designed to ease the online buying experience, increase advance bookings, and provide greater and more useful data.

Award-winning Storytelling

In last year's Christmas message, filmed at the Museum, to Patrons, Members, Stakeholders and Corporate Partners we welcomed these supporters to No. 112 Brewery Fields Estate, Dudley. The house was all decorated for Christmas. The year, 1968, and uniquely it's a house built of cast iron. Yes, that's right, cast iron. Semi-detached council houses originally built in 1925 as an experiment between the wars when building materials were at a premium. But at £1,000 it proved an expensive experiment, costing double what a brick-built house would have cost at the time. And we imagined jolly cold in the winter and perhaps a bit warm in the summer? In this house we explained that we tell the story of the Aston family. While next door, at No. 114, it's the 1940s story of the Vernon's; Beatrice and her Police Sergeant husband, Sidney Vernon.

And whilst it may have been tempting, in that lovely Christmassy setting, to believe we are a museum of buildings and objects (hugely important as they are), the real stars of our show are the people, the characters of the Black Country. It is through these characters that we do the thing which is a byword for our approach – storytelling. So next time you're at the Museum seek out Harold Emile Doo in his Chemist Shop from 1929, or Harry Morrall in his Menswear Shop from 1935, or Cynthia Burgin in her Newsagents from 1959, or Cicilyn Miller, a midwife from Jamaica going about her duties in 1961. And many more besides.

Walk our streets, smell the coal fires, hear hot metal being forged, touch the beautiful tiles of the Elephant & Castle Public House, see the unexpected, and of course, taste our famous fish and chips.

We ask people not to be shy - to say yes to a visit the next time they think about the Museum. To become part of our storytelling and see how we have reimagined what it means to be a museum. We believe that our approach engages people in history with warmth, entertainment and meaning, to create lasting memories.







I would like to think our reimagining had an influence on the judges at this year's Visit England Awards for Excellence, when, on behalf of the Museum, Andrew Lovett, our Chief Executive, travelled to Brighton to collect the national award for Large Visitor Attraction of the Year for 2025. It was a proud moment and reflected our compelling vision, fabulous customer service and how our storytelling connects so powerfully with visitors of all ages and backgrounds.

With Grateful Thanks & Admiration

I want to finish by acknowledging the support of all our many donors, volunteers and funders and to express my very grateful thanks for their commitment and generosity to the Museum. Without them the Museum could not reach as many people as it does or achieve all the things that it wants to achieve. Our local authority, Dudley Council, continues to be very supportive, recognising the importance of the Museum to the Borough. Special thanks go to public-sector investors, National Lottery Heritage Fund, Arts Council England, Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership (closed in 2023), The Mayor & West Midlands Combined Authority, and the Department of Culture, Media & Sport.

But also, to our Business Partners. A special shout out for their support to Black Country Ales; Quanex; Higgs Solicitors; Thomas Dudley Ltd; West Bromwich Building Society; Walsall Football Club; and Central Co-op. And frankly a wonderful register which is too long for me to list here. But I thank you all.

I would also like to thank and acknowledge legacies received during the year from Ronald Davies and Pauline Wheeler. Both tremendously generous and unexpected.

And here's a first. We ourselves entered into a sponsorship. With support for Wednesfield Football Club, a proud community club founded in 1961, and made possible by Jonathan Badyal, a former player at the club between the ages of 8 and 16, and now a Trustee at the Museum.



I am extremely grateful to my fellow Trustees on the Board, and the independent members of our subsidiary trading company and Audit Committee, and including new Museum Trustees in 2025: Hasan Afzal, Janet Chapman, Dr Nicola Guy, Dileep Singh Marway, Emma Norris, and Caroline Southall, who at our first meeting in January 2026 was appointed as our second Deputy Chair.

Very sadly there were staff and volunteers who died during 2025, Amongst these were long-standing and wonderful volunteers Les Millington (May 2025) and Alan Allcock (November 2025), former volunteer Margaret Carrington (February 2025), and former members of staff Linda Larner (December 2025) and Pam Ryan (December 2025). My condolences to their family and friends, and deep thanks for everything they did in support of the Museum they loved so dearly.

I am proud of our achievements at the Museum and inspired by the thoughts of what we can yet achieve, including the final phase of Forging Ahead and new storytelling this will reveal in 2026. A particular focus, with our major expansion project, Forging Ahead, concluding, will be to Master Plan the site to confirm which new stories we want to tell, which objects we should collect, what new features should be shown, how the historic landscape developed and how we can improve our back-of-house resources.

I conclude my review of 2025, with the final two lines from Sonnet 2022, by John Homer, member of staff here at the Museum, and in his own description, a Black Country bloke, having been asked to write about the Black Country and love.

*“In what we had to do to live and breathe I see no dark disgrace
But the pride I take from the struggles of our past is why I love
this wounded place.”*



Duncan Bedhall Chair



The Year in Numbers



58,881

Schools visitors



9,302

New sweet bakery items
sold from Veal's Bakery



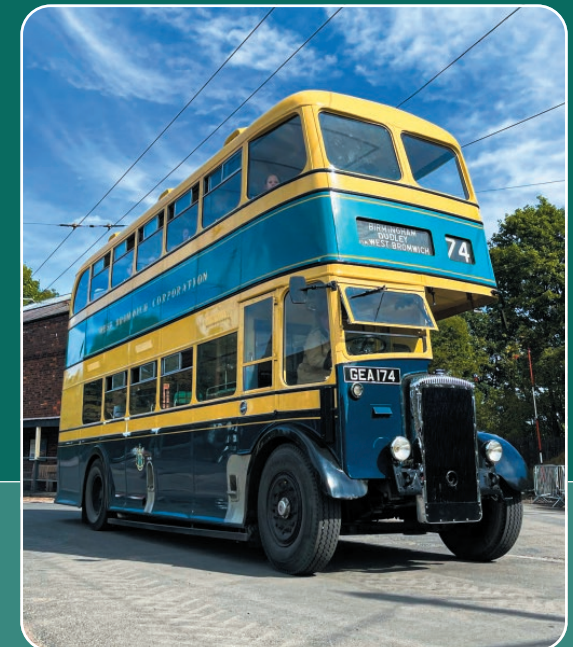
17,949

Visitors enjoyed a ride
on the historic Steam
Gallopers



382

Number of mothercraft
classes in Lea Road Infant
Welfare Centre



197,039

Historic transport passengers



366,840

Visitors



16,716

Volunteer hours



129

Corporate events



1,528,854

Followers on social media



11

Filming Projects

Support

Significant Grants & Donations

The Museum wishes to acknowledge and thank all the organisations and individuals which have pledged or given generous financial and in-kind support during the period of this review, in particular:

Arts Council England

National Lottery Heritage Fund

John Sutton, USA (formerly Blackheath)

Black Country Living Museum Transport Group

Braunston Marina, Daventry

Sue Russell (in memory of John “Jack” Russell)

Bloomberg Philanthropies, London

The late Pauline Wheeler, Tividale, Oldbury

The late Ronald Davies, Halesowen

The late Mike Hessey, West Midlands

Enhancing the Museum’s Collections

The Museum’s entire collections are Designated by Arts Council England, recognising their quality and national significance. The Museum holds a resource of considerable value for authenticating the sense of regional identity and for placing the full historical and cultural significance of the Black Country in a national context. Buildings, machines and other objects hold stories which attest to the national and international significance of the Black Country, chiefly spanning the years 1800-1968.

This year, we’ve also taken several opportunities to collect significant items which fall outside of our usual timespan, demonstrating a commitment to a dynamic approach to collecting.

The Museum develops its collections through purchases, gifts, bequests, or occasionally with time limited loans, and when doing so considers several criteria, including an item’s provenance, subject matter and date. In 2025, over 500 objects were collected. Throughout the year, the Museum continued to develop its collection by acquiring several significant objects, including:

- > A DKR Capella scooter, made in Wolverhampton, which joins our other recently collected DKR scooter in our transport collection.
- > Glass fish and a bus conductor time-keeping key. These belonged to Sebert Williams who began his career in the 1960s as one of the youngest bus conductors in West Bromwich and served for over 30 years.
- > Items from the Merry Hill Centre’s infamous Monorail, including a turnstile and signage, from the early 1990s.



Strategic directions

The museum developed six strategic themes as part of its latest Strategic Directions 2024-28:

(1) History, (2) Community, (3) Learning, (4) Stage, (5) Business, and (6) Future.

There are complex inter-relationships between these themes.

We have also developed what we have called “Our Thinking”. It amounts to a guiding philosophy:

- a)** We are lively and hands-on, powering your curiosity to create memorable and happy times.
- b)** We are welcoming and reflect the diversity of life in the Black Country so that everyone knows this is a place for them.
- c)** We celebrate the Black Country’s industrial might while reducing our own impact on the environment.
- d)** We are cooperative and value people, their thoughts, ideas and experiences to make strong emotional human connections.
- e)** We are an organisation of the long-term and consequence.
- f)** We are forward looking and ingenious, shaping and challenging the way museums are imagined.
- g)** We create common cause.



Future plans

Key areas of focus include:

- Undertaking a Master Plan for the entire site to inform future developments and their timescale.
- Consolidating the capital development Forging Ahead.
- Being the best place for living interpretation.
- Continuing to increase the scale, breadth and profitability of our commercial activity.
- Fundraising for major developments.
- Continuing to respond to our Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) ambitions and commitments.
- Retaining current levels of investment from Arts Council England.
- Providing a deeper level of support for all staff and Trustees.
- Building stronger community connections.
- Additionally, the Museum has ambitions to develop its national presence and impact.



OUR VISION

“We are the Black Country”

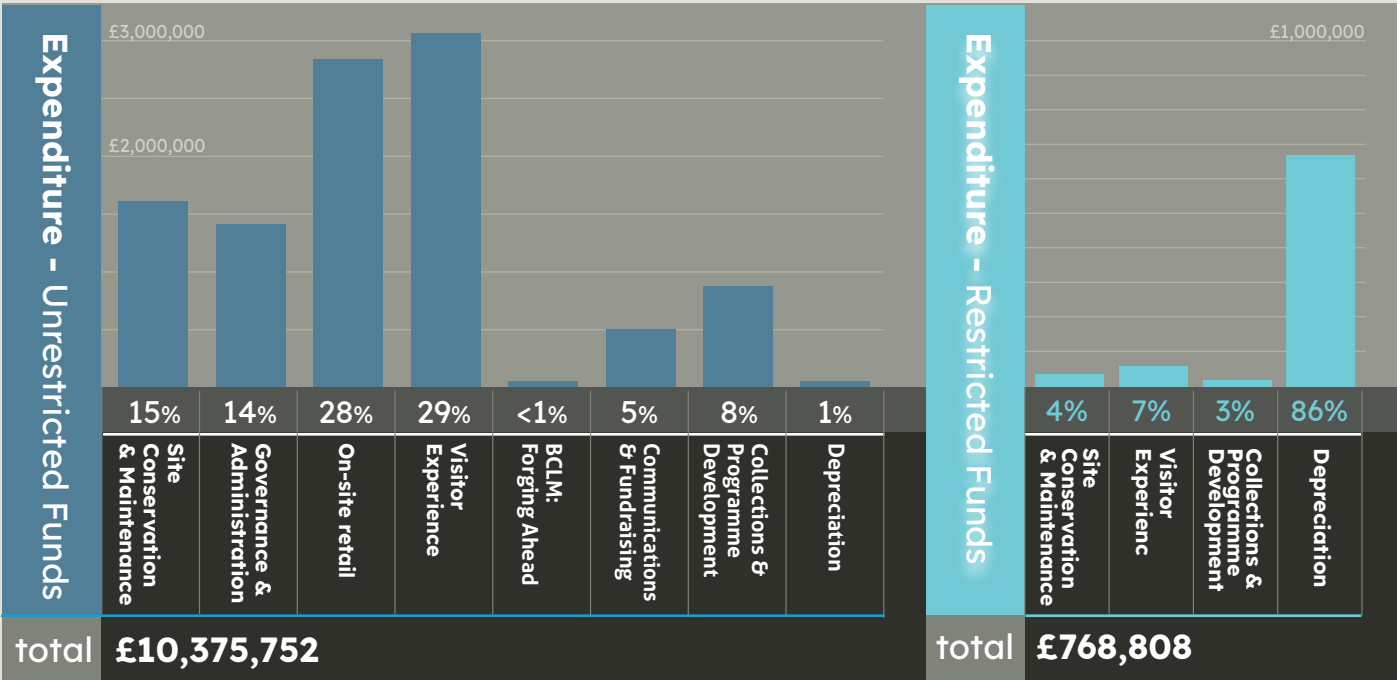
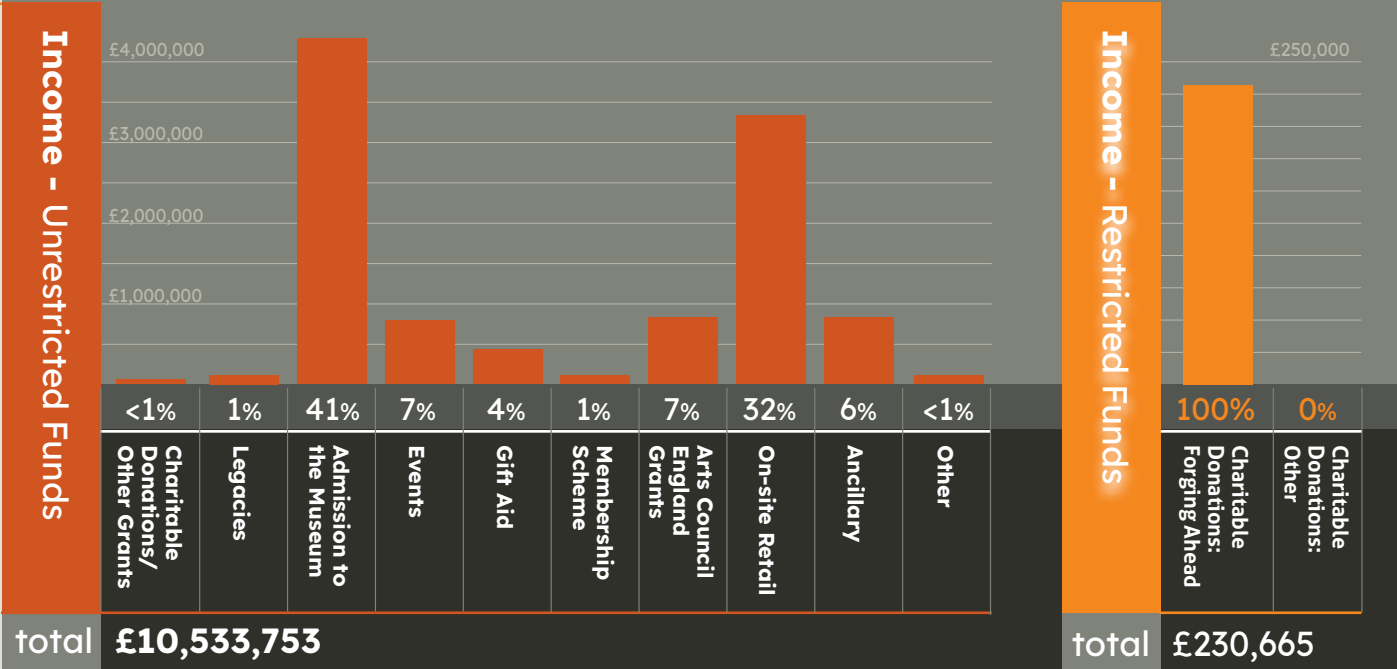
OUR MISSION

“Champion the Black Country by celebrating people and communities and sharing their history and heritage to create pride in place and desire for a better future.”

Financial Review

The summary financial statements set out in this review may not contain sufficient information to allow for a full understanding of the financial affairs of the Museum. The financial statements are a consolidation of the financial statements of the Museum and its subsidiary trading company. For further information, the full annual accounts, the auditors’ report on those accounts, and the Trustees’ report should be consulted; copies of these can be obtained from the Museum or downloaded from www.bclm.com or the Charity Commission. The full financial statements, together with the report of the Trustees of the Museum, for the year ended 31 December 2025, were approved by the Board of Trustees and signed on its behalf by the Chair on 25 June 2026.

Statutory accounts for the year ended 31 December 2025 have been delivered to the Register of Companies and the Charity Commission. The Museum’s auditor, Crowe UK LLP, has reported on those accounts and their report was unqualified.



Annual Accounts

Consolidated Statement of Financial Activities	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	Total 2025 £	Total 2024 £
Income				
Donations and Legacies:				
Charitable Donations	93,551	230,665	324,216	452,913
Charitable Activities:				
Admission to the Museum	5,643,208	-	5,643,208	5,385,238
Grants (Arts Council England)	758,799	-	758,799	760,120
Other Trading Activities:				
Retail income (Subsidiary trading company)	3,352,918	-	3,352,918	3,251,043
Ancillary enterprises	672,280	-	672,280	727,256
Investment Income	9,410	-	9,410	25,199
Other Income	3,587	-	3,587	57,453
Total Income	10,533,753	230,665	10,764,418	10,659,222
Expenditure				
Raising Funds:				
Retail (Subsidiary trading company)	3,191,308	-	3,191,308	3,382,236
Development and fundraising costs	106,515	-	106,515	147,531
Charitable Activities:				
Opening and operating the Museum	7,038,785	715,349	7,754,134	7,697,957
Developing the Museum	39,144	53,460	92,604	417,839
Total Expenditure	10,375,752	768,808	11,144,561	11,645,563
Net Income/(Expenditure) before taxation	158,001	(538,144)	(380,143)	986,341
Tax receivable	-	-	-	-
Net Income/(Expenditure) after taxation	158,001	(538,144)	(380,143)	(986,341)
Transfers	-	-	-	-
Net Income/(Expenditure) after transfers	158,001	(538,144)	(380,143)	(986,341)
Other recognised gains and losses:				
Actuarial gain / (loss) on defined benefit pension	(26,000)		-(26,000)	(22,000)
Net Movement in Funds	132,001	(538,144)	(406,143)	(1,008,341)
Reconciliation of Funds:				
Total Funds brought forward 1 January 2024	4,439,225	32,168,514	36,607,739	37,616,080
Total Funds carried forward at 31 December 2024	4,571,226	31,630,370	36,201,596	36,607,739

Group (Consolidated) Balance Sheet	2025 £	2024 £
Fixed Assets		
Tangible assets	28,325,385	28,267,571
Heritage assets	6,622,652	6,779,286
Total Fixed Assets	34,948,037	35,046,857
Current Assets		
Stocks of goods for resale	133,714	149,503
Debtors	651,331	721,659
Cash at bank and in hand	1,834,418	1,881,018
Total Current Assets	2,619,463	2,752,180
Creditors: amounts falling due within 1 year	(1,365,904)	(1,191,298)
Net Current Assets	1,253,559	1,560,882
Total assets less Current Liabilities	36,201,596	36,607,739
Creditors: amounts falling due after more than 1 year	-	-
Net Assets (excluding pension liability)	36,201,596	36,607,739
Defined benefit pension asset/ liability	-	-
Total Net Assets	36,201,596	36,607,739
The funds of the charity:		
Restricted funds	31,630,370	32,168,516
Unrestricted funds:		
Designated funds	1,600,925	2,328,990
General funds	2,970,301	2,110,233
Pension reserve	-	-
	4,571,226	4,439,223
	36,201,596	36,607,739



Accounts (continued)

	Year ended December 2025	Year ended December 2024
	£	£
Consolidated Cash Flow Statement		
Cash flows from operating activities:		
Net cash inflow from operating activities	590,278	(452,253)
Cash flows from investing activities:		
Interest from investments	9,410	25,199
Proceeds from the sale of tangible fixed assets	-	-
Purchase of tangible fixed assets	(646,288)	(651,380)
Net cash used in investing activities	(636,878)	(626,181)
Cash flows from financing activities:		
Repayment of borrowing	-	(54,231)
Net cash used in financing activities	-	(54,231)
Change in cash and cash equivalents in the year	(46,600)	(1,132,667)
Cash and cash equivalents at the beginning of the year	1,881,018	3,013,683
Total cash and cash equivalents at the end of the year	1,834,418	1,881,018



Reference & Administrative Information

Museum Trust Established	15 September 1975
Honorary Royal Patron	HRH The Duke of Gloucester KG GCMG
Trustees (Directors)	Hasan Azfal Jonathan Badyal (Deputy Chair) Katy Baker Duncan Bedhall (Chair) Sally Bourner Janet Chapman Dr Nicola Guy Louise Jones Ruth Levesley Tarlok Singh Mander Dileep Singh Marway Emma Norris Caroline Southall (Deputy Chair)



Chief Executive	Andrew Lovett OBE
Charity Number	504481 (England and Wales)
Museum Accreditation	761 (Museum)
Reference Numbers:	and 829 (Locksmith's House)
Company Number	1226321
VAT Registration Number (Group):	765321138
Principal Address & Registered Office	The Black Country Living Museum Trust Tipton Road, Dudley West Midlands DY1 4SQ
Independent Auditors:	Crowe U.K. LLP Black Country House Oldbury, West Midlands B69 2DG

Principal Bankers	Barclays Bank plc (Barclays Corporate) 1st Floor Queen Square Wolverhampton West Midlands WV1 1DS
Principal Solicitors	Gowling WLG (UK) LLP Two Snowhill Birmingham West Midlands B4 6WR
Other Advisors	Anthony Collins Solicitors LLP 134 Edmund Street Birmingham West Midlands B3 2ES
Company Secretary:	Diane Harvey FCCA

Black Country Living Museum

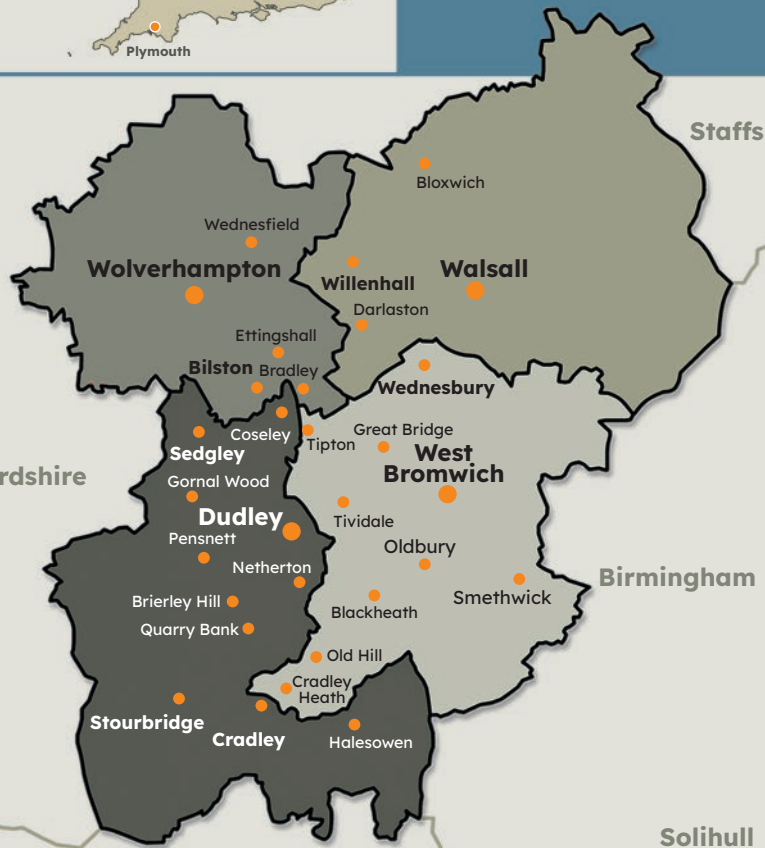
Telephone	+44 (0)121 557 9643
Email	info@bclm.com
Website	www.bclm.com

All information is correct at time of publication.
For more information please visit our website: www.bclm.com



Where is the Black Country?

The map below depicts the current boundaries of the four boroughs that make up the Black Country – Dudley, Wolverhampton, Walsall and Sandwell.



The nation's best visitor attraction 2025

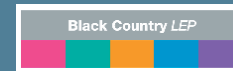
The Museum is proud to be recognised and supported by



Made possible with
Heritage Fund



Supporting public life by
ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND



Funded by
UK Government



West Midlands
Combined Authority



Thank you to our Brass business partners for their support



BLACK COUNTRY LIVING MUSEUM

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www.bclm.com



Black Country Living Museum Trust is registered as an educational charity.
Charity No. 504481. Company Registration No. 1226321 (England & Wales)

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