

Black Country Living Museum

Press Pack 2023

For more information, please email the Audiences & Communications Team: marketing@bclm.com or call 0121 521 5690.

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Background

Black Country Living Museum is a 26-acre open air museum that tells the story of the industrial revolution in the 1700s up to the late 1960s through the everyday lives of the people whose skills shaped the modern world.

A recreated 'living' village and town centre lie at the heart of the Museum and give 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 in the early 20th century.

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.

The Black Country

The Black Country is often seen as a collection of 20 or so towns falling within the four Metropolitan Boroughs of Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton. While no one quite agrees on the exact boundaries of the region, there is one thing we know 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 ubiquitous black smog by day and the fiery glow of the furnaces by night.

Up until the 1950s and 60s, 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.

Visitor favourites

Black Country Living Museum brings 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 **underground 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.

Audio-visual techniques bring to life the sounds and feelings that would have accompanied a miner's day, from the tapping of pickaxes to the rumble of a nearby collapse.

Education

The Museum offers 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, the Museum enhances 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+. The Museum has picked up multiple awards, including at The National Group Travel Awards and UK Coach Awards, for its group offer.

Filming location

The Museum has served as the backdrop for many productions, including the popular drama *Peaky Blinders* from the BBC, the feature film *The Colour Room* starring Phoebe Dynevor, and ITV Studio's *Stonehouse*. Advertisements and music videos have also been filmed at the Museum, and multiple photo shoots have taken place on the Museum site.

[Find out more about filming and photography at the Museum.](#)

Eating and drinking at the Museum

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

Hobbs & Sons Fish & Chip Shop

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

The building housing Hobbs & 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 made by Pilkington's Tile & Pottery Company, Manchester, that have been carefully restored.

Fish and chips are available to eat-in (in the reconstructed saloon set in 1935) or takeaway.

Bottle & Glass Inn

The Bottle & Glass Inn stood originally at the junction of Moor Street and Leys Road on Brierley Hill Road, Buckpool. The exact date of construction is unknown, but it was probably built shortly after the canal was cut between 1776 and 1779.

Instances of drunkenness and disreputable behaviour punctuate the history of the pub. In 1857, Henry Wiggin, the landlord, was fined five shillings for selling alcohol on a Sunday – 'during the hours of divine service'.

The Hereford and Tredegar Brewery was taken over by Ansells in 1937. They presented the building to the Museum following closure in 1979. Today, it is set in 1915, serving traditional cask-conditioned beers.

Elephant & Castle Public House

The Elephant & Castle Public House 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.

The Museum's recreation is set in 1960. The Museum used a mixture of archived plans, family photographs and bricks salvaged from the site to design the building. Objects that the Museum has collected to populate its recreation include Banks's branded dominoes, trays, glasses, mugs and cards. The fireplace in the smoking room is from a house in Lower Gornal and the Minton tiles in the Cannock Road entrance were collected from a house in Stourbridge. The upstairs bar is from the Gypsy's Tent in Dudley. Much of the furniture has been donated by Marston's, current owners of Banks's.

Events

Christmas at Black Country Living Museum transports 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. The Museum's ever-popular Santa Hunts take visitors on an exclusive tour of the Museum's 26 acres as they try to find the Man in the Red Suit.

Red by Night is an atmospheric evening of live entertainment, industrial demonstrations, steam action and living history. Visitors can see the Museum's mighty Anchor Forge in full steam, with its one-ton hammer smashing into metal with a thunderous roar. When they see it, they won't be surprised to learn that it produced some of the largest metalwork the world has ever known.

The Museum's **Peaky Blinders Nights** invites 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.

The Museum also hosts a number of specialist **Access Tours** throughout the year. 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 number of **Members-only events** are also held, offering the Museum's Members an exclusive look behind-the-scenes. Events include a traditional pub quiz in the Elephant & Castle Public

House, a tour of the Museum's Collections, and going 'behind the camera' to follow in the footsteps of big and small screen stars.

Investors

Black Country Living Museum is a registered educational charity and an independent, not-for-profit organisation. While income streams from ticket sales and secondary spend maintain the Museum's running, the Museum also engages with supporters and investors to undertake exciting projects such as heritage restorations, learning programmes, and activities that enable the Museum to reach new audiences.

More phases from BCLM: Forging Ahead, the Museum's largest ever capital build, will be opened in 2023. This has been made possible not only by the Museum's visitors and Members, but also due to National Lottery Heritage Fund, Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership, West Midlands Combined Authority, Department of Culture Media & Sport, and Arts Council England, as well as many other trusts, foundations and patrons.

The new historic development will allow the Museum to fulfil its potential and maximise its impact, as the Museum's story will now span from the 1700s to the 1960s, giving the Museum 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.

[Find out more about the Museum's investors.](#)

To find out more about Black Country Living Museum, including tickets prices, opening times and more, visit www.bclm.com