The award-winning Black Country Living Museum invites you to discover the rich heritage of one of the UK’s most exciting yet hidden stories. It is a national story, with international significance, told through the endeavour of its people - the ordinary craftsmen and women whose skill, energy and entrepreneurial spirit created the Black Country - the world's first industrial landscape.

An abundance of coal, iron ore and limestone in the region heralded an explosion of industry and by Victorian times the Black Country was one of the most heavily industrialised areas in Britain. Thousands of furnaces, foundries and forges worked around the clock, chimneys filling the air with smoke, transforming the skyline black by day and red by night.

Elihu Burritt, the American Consul in Birmingham in 1868 said: “The Black Country, black by day and red by night, cannot be matched for vast and varied production, by any other space of equal radius on the surface of the globe”.

The smoking wastelands of the Black Country inspired authors from Dickens to Shenstone and J. R. R. Tolkien based the grim region of Mordor, in his novel The Lord of the Rings, on the region.

The Black Country was mining country and the world’s first successful steam engine for pumping water out of mines was made in Dudley by Thomas Newcomen. Canals were the lifeline of industry in the 19th and 20th century and opened up the region, which boasted more canals than Venice, to worldwide markets. The Black Country became known as ‘the workshop of the world’.

The industrial might of the Black Country was known throughout the world. Famed for its production of vast quantities of iron and steel goods including chain, nails, tube manufacturing and forgings, Black Country wares can still be found in all four corners of the globe. Almost every industry in the Empire depended on Black Country products from firebricks to post boxes to bridges.
A Living Museum Telling the Story of the Black Country

Black Country Living Museum was awarded Designated status by the Arts Council England in February 2012. The accolade recognises collections of national and international importance held in non-national museums in England.

Black Country Living Museum was recognised for its documentation of industrial and social history in the Black Country.

Black Country Living Museum tells the story of the industrial revolution through the everyday lives of the people whose skills shaped the modern world.

A recreated ‘living’ village lies at the heart of the Museum and gives visitors an atmospheric glimpse into the lives of the ordinary men and women who made the Black Country what it was.

Historic buildings from across the Black Country have been moved, brick by brick and rebuilt at the Museum to create a typically tightly-knit Black Country community in the early 20th Century.

Sights, sounds, smells and tastes recall 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 chainmaker plies his trade; the sweet scent of tobacco drifts from the tobacconist shop as glamorous advertisements peer out from the windows; colourful potion bottles catch the light in the chemist shop whilst eye-catching pills promise miracle cures; moving speeches stir the heart as voices echo from vintage radios in the repair shop and childhood is remembered with the dip of a finger into a bag of lemon sherbet from the sweetshop.

Costumed guides and demonstrators live the history of the Black Country and visitors step into their world as they enter the Museum village. Traditional crafts are revived and nail making, chain making, baking and sweet making are all demonstrated. History has never been so fascinating as costumed guides captivate all with living stories from within the pages of history.

Black Country Living Museum covers 26 acres and encompasses modern exhibition halls, a vintage vehicle showroom, cast iron houses, an early 20th century historic village, coal mine, school, fairground and boat dock.

Moving from the 1850s through to the 1950s visitors interact with the past through exhibitions, narrated interpretation, demonstrations of skilled crafts, storytelling and street theatre.

Black Country Living Museum is the third most visited open-air museum in the United Kingdom and attracts more than 307,000 visitors annually.

Black Country Living Museum vividly illustrates life in the Black Country in the early 20th Century. Costumed guides and demonstrators, passionate about history, breathe life into the Black Country story and create a living 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 demonstrators who depict the living and working conditions of times past. Role play characters and demonstrators along with craftsmen and women revive long-forgotten skills including nail-making, chain-making, sweet-making and bread-making. Characters include a policeman, a chainmaker, a pub landlady and shopkeepers. Each character represents a different element of Black Country life, each narrating their own story and acting as a guide and point of information for visitors.

Black Country people are known as “yam, yams” because of their distinct dialect. One of its identifying features is the “yam yam” sound of phrases such as “ya’ami?” (are you?). Often maligned for this melodious dialects, Black Country folk may well possess one the purest forms of English in the United Kingdom. Derived from 12th Century Middle English (Chaucer’s English) with it’s roots dating back to the original Germanic language upon which all European languages were founded, the Black Country dialect is in itself living heritage.

The Museum’s guides are all experts in their field and before they take up their duties undergo an extensive induction period.
Black Country Living Museum was awarded Designated status by the Arts Council England in February 2012 in recognition of the Museum’s documentation of industrial and social history in the Black Country. It is the only collection in the world which relates to the story of the Black Country – the world’s first industrial landscape.

Black Country Living Museum has a collection of over 67,000 records for objects ranging from buildings and engineering structures to books and ephemera. These items help to tell the story of life in the region as well as the impact of the industrial revolution and the emergence of transport and the canal waterways upon the lives of its people.

Unique to Black Country Living Museum are its buildings which form the foundation of the collection. They have been saved from various locations in the Black Country and carefully rebuilt, brick by brick, to retain their originality and authenticity. Meticulous historical research and skilful collection of associated objects paint a portrait of life, layer by layer, until an authentic picture of the working and living conditions of the past emerges.

The Museum also has about 500 items on loan within its collections, the majority of which form part of the Rolfe St. exhibition. Loans also include the collections of the Sedgley Local History Society, the Thomas Trevis Smith cooperage collection, and the David Kenrick collection of domestic ironmongery.

Evolution is a big part of the Museum and the collection is constantly enhanced as items are donated and collected.

Few places can offer such a wealth of history.

The Collection

Black Country Living Museum

site map

map key

You arrived here

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