



If you've been inspired to uncover your own history, explore historic newspapers, access Ancestry, and more free local and family resources in our Archive and Local History Centre, Libraries, and online.

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BETTER

In partnership with

Dudley
Metropolitan Borough Council

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**FREE TO
ATTEND**

RESERVE YOUR
SEAT TODAY



Step into the past

FESTIVAL GUIDE

28TH SEPTEMBER - 24TH OCTOBER 2026

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Round Oak Steelworks

Monday
28th
September



David Whyley



Brierley Hill Library



11am

Through David's photography and historical research, he has recorded significant changes to the Black Country landscape. In his talk, he draws on this professional expertise in keynote presentations that bring the Black Country's landscape and industrial heritage to life through his substantial collection of archive and contemporary images.



History of the Black Country Bugle

Tuesday
29th
September



John Butterworth MBE



Dudley Archives and
Local History Centre



2pm

Star
Event

John will talk about how the paper started, the local characters and some of the amazing stories of the Bugle. John was editor of the Bugle, the only paid for nostalgia paper in the country, for three years. This talk is about how it started, the characters who appeared in the paper plus some of the amazing stories that were covered.



Walter Bassano of Old Hill

Tuesday
29th
September



John Billingham



Halesowen Library



7pm

Patriarch, civic leader and descendant of illustrious ancestors. The story of Walter Bassano goes from Venice to Texas to Old Hill.

John Billingham went to school at Chartwell Grange which was Haden Hill School at the time. It was built by Walter Bassano in 1861 when he got married. Walter lived there for 20 years.



Myths of the Titanic

Friday
23rd
October



Colin Cooksey



Netherton Library



2pm

Common knowledge is not always the full story...



Bostin' Brierley Hill

Saturday
24th
October



Gary James



Brierley Hill Library



11am

A trip down memory lane, to the times of opencast mining, glowing steel furnaces, brick dust, ruddy faced glassblowers, blaring factory bullhorns...and pork pies.



Looking at Shops

Saturday
24th
October



Ned Williams



Wordsley Library



11.30am

Looking at the development of shop fronts and shop interiors provides an insight into the ever-changing world of retailing. Come and see if your favourite shop front is included in this survey.

Star
Event



Talks are free to attend but spaces are limited and booking is essential. To reserve a seat, scan the QR code to visit our website better.org.uk/dudley-history-fest



The Black Country in the 1930's

Wednesday
21st
October



Ned Williams



Long Lane Library



11am



When Long Lane Library opened, there was plenty going on locally and nationally. This illustrated talk looks at the events of 1936, putting the opening of this library in its historical context.



Richard III - The Monster, The Myth and The Man

Wednesday
30th
September



Mary Bodfish



Long Lane Library



11am



For centuries the byword for murder and treachery - but was Richard III really the wicked tyrant depicted by Shakespeare? Since the remarkable discovery of his remains in 2012, we can see a clearer picture of the real man caught up in the struggles of the Yorkists and Lancastrians for the throne of England.



The Anvil Yard

Thursday
22nd
October



Jill Guest



Cradley Library



11am

The talk on the Anvil Yard started with some family history research when Jill realised that some of her ancestors had lived there.



The Coseley Tragedy

Thursday
1st
October



Anne Clarke



Coseley Library



2pm

What led Hannah Johnson Cox to drown her 2 daughters in the Coseley Canal? What became of her and her family after that tragic day in 1901? How did the local community respond to these events? A story from my family which made the news headlines over 100 years ago, but still relevant to people today.



Murder Most Foul

Thursday
22nd
October



Vanessa Morgan



Lye Library



2pm

Giving a reading of true murder cases from the Victorian period, writer Vanessa Morgan utilises descriptive pieces from the newspapers of the times as well as her own words. She will tell stories, some gruesome, of murders specific to Dudley and the surrounding districts. Perhaps one of your ancestors was involved?



The Heirs of Squire Knight: Curious Chemists in Nineteenth-Century Dudley

Saturday
3rd
October



Judith Davies



Dudley Library



2pm

Squire Knight was an important pharmacist in eighteenth-century Dudley when chemists made their own lotions and potions. Squire Knight medicines became so well known that continuing the use of his name became a valuable asset. This talk identifies several Dudley chemists who were, in different ways, 'heirs of Squire Knight', particularly concentrating on Elliott Hollier and C F G Clark.



Halesowen Abbey Trust

Monday
5th
October

Carole and Mike Freer
 Halesowen Library 11am

Carole Freer, Mike Freer and Roy Burgess established the Halesowen Abbey Trust, a non-profit charitable trust, in 1986 for the conservation and improvement of the local environment. This talk covers Information about the good work of the Halesowen Abbey Trust.



Shadows, Secrets and Strange Tales - The Dark History of Himley Hall

Wednesday
7th
October

Damian Carter
 Gornal Library 7pm

From aristocratic gossip to unexplained footsteps in empty corridors, Shadows, Secrets & Strange Tales explores the folklore, mysteries and odd happenings that have shaped Himley's reputation as one of the Black Country's most eerie estates. It's a journey through history's darker corners, where fact blurs with legend, and every shadow hints at a story waiting to be told.

Star
Event



Bletchley Park

Thursday
8th
October

Rob Broadbent
 Stourbridge Library 2pm

Most people know Bletchley Park for Alan Turing and the breaking of Enigma, but that is only part of the story. This talk reveals how two largely forgotten men, supported by Bletchley Park's finest minds, broke a far more secret Nazi code. Presented by local historian Rob, it explores lesser-known Second World War achievements that significantly influenced the war's outcome.



Monarch's Way

Monday
19th
October

John Price
 Stourbridge Library 2pm

After the defeat of the Royalists at the Battle of Worcester in 1651, Charles Stuart, the man who would become Charles II, was on the run. For the next 43 days, he evaded capture before finally escaping to France. This talk looks at his travels over that period and the walking route based on his journey, known as The Monarch's Way.



Tales from the Coroner's Casebook - Life and Death in Georgian South Staffordshire and the Black Country. Part One: 1801-1826

Tuesday
20th
October

Quintin Watt
 Brierley Hill Library 2pm

This presentation examines the cases of unexplained death, presided over by Henry Smith Esq. - Coroner of the County of Stafford - between 1801 and 1842. These include; accidents, manslaughter, murder, suicides and "visitations of God". Join Coroner Smith's Jury and re-consider some of the cases he dealt with during the first part of his long career.

Star
Event



One Hotel and Two Theatres

Tuesday
20th
October

Craig Denston
 Dudley Library 7pm

Centred at the bottom of Dudley Castle Hill, this includes the racecourse that was swept away to build the railway station, the building of the Station Hotel, the Dudley Opera House and finishing at the opening of the Dudley Hippodrome.



More Precious Than Pearls

Saturday
17th
October

Colin Reid
 Dudley Library **2.15pm**

As a museum curator Colin Reid has always been fascinated by objects, and why we value them. 'Just like people, objects have lives in which they can be cherished or discarded' he says. 'What is priceless to one person can be worthless to someone else.' Colin will illustrate his point by looking at two objects he curated at Dudley Museum: a celebrated 'Dudley Bug' trilobite fossil, and a bullet-pierced WW1 diary found on a local rubbish tip. The diary is the subject of the book he is launching this week at the festival: 'The Digger's Diary.'



The Great Train Robbery

Thursday
8th
October

Steve Geale
 Dudley Library **7pm**

The Great Train Robbery occurred in August 1963. This presentation tells of the planning and engagement of the robbery. It names the miscreants, their apprehensions, confinements; together with some escapes and unusual happenings. What happened to the stolen £2.6 million?



Geology: in the Black Country

Saturday
17th
October

Graham Worton
 Dudley Archives and Local History Centre **10.30am**

A fascinating talk about the geology in the Black Country.

Archive Day



Aaron Geismar: Prince of Swindlers, Fraud of Frauds: Rise and Falls of an Electric Quack Doctor

Saturday
17th
October

Kevin Goodman
 Dudley Archives and Local History Centre **12.15am**

He was known by many names: Alberto Geismardo, Professor LeBlanc, Edward Moross, Professor Richard. A quack doctor, medical electrician, conman, swindler, fraudster, bigamist and worse, he conducted his dubious trade across the world at the turn of the nineteenth century. But his career of deception began to unravel when he made the mistake of coming to the Black Country...

Star
Event



Rogues, Villains and Thieves

Friday
9th
October

Vanessa Morgan
 Netherton Library **2pm**

Hear about various characters from the Dudley and surrounding district who committed crimes in the Victorian age. Writer Vanessa Morgan will relate stories of robbery, theft and assault. There may be one or two from Birmingham because, a couple which took place there, are her absolute favourites so she can't resist telling you about them.



The Last Chainmakers

Saturday
10th
October

David Whyley
 Cradley Library **11am**

The story of wrought iron hand-made chain making and of the last 4 professional chain makers of the Black Country and the preservation of Mushroom Green Chain Shop.



The Role of Everyday Objects in Family History

Sunday
11th
October



Dominika Nala



Stourbridge Library ⌚ 11am

In this talk based on her unique Master's study, Dominika explores how modern families use – or don't – inherited objects in their everyday family history practices. Drawing on examples from oral history interviews and a community survey conducted predominantly in Wollaston, she analyses what our relationships with objects reveal about us and our history.



Lock Makers of Wolverhampton

Wednesday
14th
October



Mark R. Cooper



Sedgley Library ⌚ 11am

While Willenhall, Darlaston and Wednesbury are generally associated with the trades of lock-making, Wolverhampton became world famous in making precision safety locks that claimed to save many lives in the sporting fraternity. Mark has a book recently published that runs alongside this talk.



The Dunsley Murder

Wednesday
14th
October



David Cox



Kingswinford Library ⌚ 2pm

The Dunsley Murder of 1812 is a grisly tale of murder and retribution involving the Bow Street Runners (the world's first professional detectives) and their efforts to bring the murderer to swift and severe judicial punishment. It details the murder of Benjamin Robins a gentleman farmer of Dunsley near Kinver, the detection of the murderer and his subsequent fate.



The West Midlands, Slavery, the Black Presence and Anti-Slavery c. 1700-1838

Thursday
15th
October



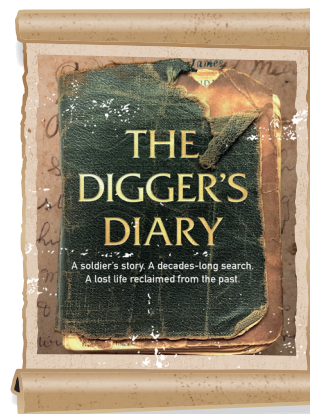
Malcolm Dick OBE



Halesowen Library ⌚ 2pm



This will explore the relationship between the West Midlands and the Slave trade in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the first black migrants to the area and the beginnings of a campaign to abolish slavery.



The Digger's Diary

Thursday
15th
October



Colin Reid



Stourbridge Library ⌚ 6.30pm

In 1965, 12-year-old Alan Southall found a bullet-pierced pocket diary on a Stourbridge rubbish tip. 30 years later he offered it to Dudley Museum for an exhibition on the Great War, launching curator Colin Reid on a mission to discover the fate of its owner, Australian infantryman Claude Nuttall MM. In this presentation Colin will relate that remarkable 22 year quest. What he discovered was a forgotten war hero with a heart-rending tale to tell. Colin's talk coincides with the UK launch of his book 'The Digger's Diary'.



The Diggum Uppers: Body Snatching and Grave Robbing in the Black Country

Thursday
15th
October



Kevin Goodman



Gornal Library ⌚ 7pm



The grave robbers trade was to keep the ever-demanding medical schools supplied with the bodies of the recently deceased. Discover the identities of the most infamous resurrectionists of the West Midlands: the medical men who supported them: the methods used to stop them, and the terrible truth of what happened when body snatching and grave robbing were outlawed.