

Review after museum numbers fall

Opening hours at a museum dedicated to Willenhall's lock making heritage will be reviewed – as the attraction reports a dip in visitor figures.

The number of people touring the Grade II listed Locksmith's House fell overall last year, despite sell-out crowds for one-off events held there, it has been revealed.

Around 700 visitors called into the centre, in New Road last year.

Operated by the Black Country Living Museum, based in Dudley, the lock museum is open for pre-booked visits only and pulled

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in about 800 visitors in 2013. The majority come from schools in Wolverhampton and Willenhall.

Now bosses are considering whether to hold extra events at holiday times to attract more families to the venue.

Abby Bird, of the Black Country Living Museum, said: "The Locksmith's House is a wonderful and unique place. To improve access, we are reviewing opening hours

and analysing the visitor pattern. We may change opening days a little this year to focus opening times when people are most likely to be on holiday.

"We will always open this much-loved museum as often as we can manage. Of course, we are always glad to hear from anyone who would like to become involved as a supporter, a volunteer or even a sponsor.

"We can also open at any time for group visits by arrangement. And we warmly encourage local clubs, societies or youth groups to book a visit," she added.

She said the museum will continue to run activities this year involving a series of seasonal events. For the first time, Locksmith's House was opened on one Saturday every month, last summer. Other public events included an event to mark National Heritage Open Days last September and Edwardian Christmas evenings.

The house was known as Willenhall Lock Museum when it first opened to the public in 1987. It was once the home of the Hodson family of lock makers who also ran a general goods shop at the premises.

Greater scrutiny of 'unwell' defendants

Report by Rob Golledge
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THE law and court system needs to be reformed so defendants are unable to avoid prosecution indefinitely by feigning illness, a leading Black Country MP has said.

West Bromwich East MP Tom Watson wants a greater level of scrutiny applied to court cases which never get off the ground because the defendant is deemed too ill to stand trial.

He is concerned that decisions are taken in closed court rooms between legal counsel and judges, and that defendants could be feigning poor health or later recover and face no further action.

Mr Watson, who has been a leading campaigner on historical child exploitation cases, has been meeting with lawyers to discuss how the law and court process could be changed to prevent abuses of the system.

He said: "At the moment it is the victims who have to fight against the system to get justice. I am concerned there have been cases where the court has been misled and the case has not proceeded when defendants seem to have recovered."

It comes as the Crown Prosecution Service reviews secretly recorded video footage that shows a former Wolverhampton headteacher joking and reciting poetry at a public talk just months after his trial was halted on health grounds. He is also seen driving his car, carrying a table and climbing steep stairs.

Offences

Former Tettenhall College headteacher Colin Cope was charged with 11 sexual offences against children aged 11 to 13.

But a jury at Shrewsbury Crown Court never got to hear any of the evidence because Judge Robin Onions stayed the case on Cope's health grounds and ruled the long passage of time – more than 35 years – since the offences were said to have taken place, created difficulties for the defendant to challenge the prosecution case. Cope denied any wrongdoing.

Tettenhall College paid £129,000 to settle civil action by five former pupils, including Andrew Wood and Mark Shelton – who have waived their right to anonymity to speak out.

They are calling for a local inquiry to be held investigating historical child sex abuse at Tettenhall College dating back to the 60s and 70s.

Mr Watson said: "I have a great deal of sympathy with them in that they are having to fight the system in order to get the justice they deserve. I have met with lawyers who have represented other survivors to see if we can get the law or the system changed."

The school stresses the allegations date back over 40 years. In a statement the school said: "We would like to add that the College would fully cooperate with any further inquiries."

Council leaders in running for achievement awards

Two councillors have been nominated for awards in recognition of their work for local residents.

Wolverhampton's leisure and communities boss Councillor Elias Mattu and children and families chief Val Gibson are in the running at the Local Government Information Unit (LGIU) and CCLA Councillor Achievement Awards, which take place next month.

Councillor Mattu has been shortlisted in the community champion category for his work supporting the development of a network of community hubs around Wolverhampton.

Meanwhile, Councillor Gibson has been nominated in the innovation category for her work around children in care in Wol-

verhampton. The nomination highlights the way she has led the council's Families in Focus programme, designed to help troubled families turn their lives around.

The LGIU and CCLA Councillor Achievement Awards aim to recognise councillors who show dedication to their communities and make positive changes to the lives of people. The ceremony will be held on March 2.

Both councillors were nominated by council leader Roger Lawrence, who said: "I congratulate councillors Gibson and Mattu on being shortlisted for these prestigious awards. To receive national recognition of this kind at a time when the council is facing unprecedented government budget cuts is a reflection of their hard work and that of council officers."

Photos star in space exhibition



Assistant Rose Adams with one of the pictures from the European Space Agency Exhibition at Wolverhampton Art Gallery

Pictures of satellites and astronauts

An exhibition offering a fascinating artistic insight into the world of space travel has landed in Wolverhampton.

In 2012, award winning Portuguese photographer Edgar Martins approached the European Space Agency with an ambitious proposal.

He requested permission to produce the most comprehensive artistic survey on a leading scientific and space exploration organisation ever assembled.

Unlike NASA or CERN, the ESA did not have an artist residency programme, but it had been looking to establish a more coherent dialogue with the wider public and the arts.

The exhibition 'The Poetic Impossibility to Manage the Infinite' is the result of the ESA granting the artist, who currently lives in the UK, exclusive access to all of their facilities, staff, programmes,

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technology and partners for the first time ever. It will now run at the Wolverhampton Art Gallery, Lichfield Street, until May 2.

Neus Miro, curator at Wolverhampton Art Gallery, said: "This exhibition has gone on display across the world, so it is great to have it here now.

"This is something which has taken Edgar Martins a good few years to produce and you can clearly see how hard he has worked to get these unique shots.

"Being granted such access to the ESA is unprecedented and Martins was the perfect person to take on that opportunity. As an artist, he has always been interested in landscapes and nature's empty spaces, so looking at how outer space is

discovered would be the ultimate job for him."

The exhibition consists of photographs collected by Martins on his travels to 15 countries, including the UK, Holland, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Russia, Kazakhstan and French Guiana.

His subjects range from test centres, robotics departments, jet propulsion laboratories, space simulators, launch sites, astronaut training centres and satellites.

The result is a mix of extraordinary snapshots of the high-tech world where the exploration of space begins and more personal pieces, highlighting how much human work goes in to conquering perhaps our greatest challenge.

In a summary of the project on his website, Martins said: "I feel fortunate that ESA has recognised that artists should be entitled to access and engage with space."



School Street in Wolverhampton

Historic signs would be lost to make way for businesses

Historic 'ghost signs' could make way for future developments in Wolverhampton, a council boss has said.

The old W Evans ironmongers sign in School Street is still preserved in brickwork, despite the shop itself being long gone.

But regeneration chief Councillor Peter Bilson said it was an example of a site that could lose some of its historic features if there were plans for a new development.

And he argued there would still be records of the old companies in the city's archives to be seen by future generations.

He said: "We want to respect the heritage of the city but we don't want these features to stand in the way of progress. We would hope that in the records of the city there would be some recognition of these companies."

Leaders speak out over Europe

Business leaders say the UK is in danger of 'being in a club where all the decisions are made by Europe'.

Cannock Chase Chamber of Commerce has backed David Cameron's calls for a reform of the Eurozone, arguing it is vital for the economy to keep growing.

The Prime Minister this week said business bosses were also increasingly backing his plans for an EU referendum.

Chris Plant, director of Cannock Chase Chamber of Commerce, said: "Chamber members fundamentally support the Prime Minister's objective for Britain in a reformed Europe.

"The next government must set out what it will do to protect the United Kingdom against the prospect of being in a club where all the decisions are made

by, and for, the Eurozone. "More than any repatriation of powers, businesses want to know that the UK has safeguards against being drawn closer to the Eurozone – especially as history tells us that currency unions inevitably fall apart unless there is real political, economic and social integration.

"Without true reform, business support for the European project is far from guaranteed. A new settlement for Britain in Europe is essential to achieving our economic ambitions," he added.

Chip check on dead pets plea

A campaign to ensure that dead pets found on the road are checked for identity chips is to be considered for debate in Parliament. The checks have been axed by the Highways Agency in a number of regions including the West Midlands in a bid to cut costs.

Campaigners have criticised the decision saying it will make it harder for owners to find out if their pet has been killed on the roads. An official e-petition calling for identity checks to be reinstated has gathered 108,000 signatures, so the issue will be considered for debate in the House of Commons.

Dudley North MP Ian Austin has added his name to the application for a debate and has raised local campaigners' concerns with the Transport Secretary Patrick McLoughlin. He said: "It's unfair that checks are carried out in some areas but the West Midlands loses out, so I'm calling on the government to answer concerns."



Mr McLoughlin

Students in battle for business title

Students in the Black Country have pitted their wits against 4,000 others in a national business competition.

The youngsters from Grace Academy Darlaston took part in the Mosaic Enterprise Challenge.

During the competition, the students were challenged to take a product to market and maximise their profits over a virtual three years of trading, with specialist advice from business mentors. Regional finalists will be announced in mid-February, and Becky Mitchell, West Midlands Regional Manager, Mosaic UK, said: "Matching the schools to over 400 inspirational business mentors who can advise students during the challenge is a great idea.

"The mentors' real business advice and expertise gives the students a good idea of what they can achieve and which sectors and businesses they might like to go in to. Some students learn that while they may not excel academically, they can shine when using their entrepreneurial skills."

Becky Mitchell

Popular fiction awards due to be announced

The six most popular books among teenagers in the Black Country will be announced later this month.

Nominations are being counted in the 10th annual Young Teen Fiction Awards, run by Staffordshire county council. County Councillor Mike Lawrence, said: "It's up to the young people themselves to nominate the books for the shortlist, this is their choice and their award."

Last year's winner was *White the Others Sleep* by Tom Becker. Nominated books must be a fiction novel aimed at children 11-14 years, written in English and published for the first time in the UK during 2014.

The announcement will be made on February 23.

BIRTHDAYS

TODAY: Carl Bernstein, Watergate journalist, 71; Kevin Keegan, former footballer and ex-England manager, 64; Simon Pegg, actor/comedian, 45; Dean Gaffney, actor, 37; Rhydian Roberts, singer, 32; **TOMORROW:** Gerald Harper, actor, 86; Clare Short, Labour politician, 69; Jane Seymour, actress, 64; Matt Groening, The Simpsons creator, 61; Ali Campbell, singer (UB40), 56; Ronnie Vannucci Jr, drummer (The Killers), 39.