

THE LOCKSMITH'S HOUSE

Helen Taylor

The Locksmith's House is representative of a small family-run lock-making business, located in the Black Country town of Willenhall, which was once the lock-making capital of Britain.

The Locksmith's House illustrates a complete picture of what life would have been like for the Hodson family in the early 1900s. Having been in the lock-making business since 1874, Sarah and Richard Hodson and their four children – Edgar, Ida, Edith and Flora – moved to New Road, Willenhall in 1904. Flora remained at New Road until 1984, when the house was given to a trust and opened as the Lock Museum, eventually to be re-named The Locksmith's House.

The impressive Victorian house features a front-room draper's shop set up in the 1920s by Edith and Flora. There is also a richly furnished parlour, a kitchen complete with an original cast-iron range, an office once used by Edgar, and the bedroom of Sarah and Richard. What is unique about the house is that much of the furniture is original to the Hodson family, such as the Parisian-style bed, desk, and chaise longue.

Lock-making

The Locksmith's House, with its backyard two-storey workshop, presents the complete story of small-scale lock-making industry in the Black Country. Richard and later Edgar Hodson produced simple bar padlocks and lighter locks, used to protect valuables on barges. Hodson locks were exported worldwide and their focus was on quantity rather than quality. The workshops today retain their original hand bellows, hearth, floor press and belt-driven machinery, which when demonstrated provides an



The Locksmith's House, 54 New Road, Willenhall, WV13 2DA.

atmospheric and noisy throwback to the time of small-scale industrial working.

Displays

The house also has a lock gallery where a wide range of locks and keys are on display, just a small proportion of the 4,000 in the Museum's nationally significant collection. They represent the major British lock and key makers: Robert Barron and Joseph Bramah, Chubb, Yale and Josiah Parkes, maker of Union Locks.

The locks represent the main developments in the lock-making industry and range from a simple wooden Egyptian lock to the complex 'Albert Lock' made by

Carpenter & Tildesley for the Great Exhibition in 1851. The Museum also holds archives relating to the Hodson family business, as well as the files kept by Josiah Parkes & Sons Ltd. which provide an invaluable record of their rival companies worldwide.

The Locksmith's House is open for pre-booked groups and school parties and is open intermittently throughout the year. Please check www.bclm.com for opening dates.

For research enquires please email info@bclm.com or call 0121 557 9643. ●

Helen Taylor is Assistant Curator (Collections Access), Black Country Living Museum.

Courtesy of Black Country Living Museum