

# NEWS

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# Bottle oven club will help preserve icons

## Owners are exploring solutions for conservation and maintenance

HERITAGE: In 2021, just 50 ovens, muffle kilns and calcining kilns remain.



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A GROUP of bottle oven owners have teamed up to help preserve the historic landmarks for the future.

There were once around 2,000 of these huge brick structures dotting the Stoke-on-Trent landscape and they played an essential role in pottery manufacturing.

But environmental legislation, starting with the Clean Air Act of 1956, and the introduction of new technologies sealed the fate of traditional coal-fired ovens and kilns.



In 2021, just 50 ovens, muffle kilns and calcining kilns remain on 29 separate sites across the city.

Now the Potteries Bottle Oven Owners' Club is exploring solutions for their ongoing conservation and maintenance.

It has been developed over the past 18 months through the Stoke-on-Trent Ceramic Heritage Action Zone (HAZ) and its partner organisation, Potteries Heritage Society.

The club already has the backing of nearly every owner of a bottle oven in the city. Its aims include:

■ To promote the heritage of Stoke-on-Trent through stimulating interest in the city's bottle ovens;

■ To support the conservation and preservation of bottle ovens and their historic environments;

■ To co-ordinate and collaborate on projects, campaigns and events;

■ To share best practice in maintaining and conserving bottle ovens of all types;

■ To build our understanding of bottle ovens and to educate local people, workers and visitors.

Moorland Pottery's Jon Plant, left, who was elected as the club's first chairman, said "Caring for a bottle oven is a massive responsibility, and one best shared with other owners.

"Some of the owners have taken care of the ovens for generations and have learned how best to care for them, while others have recently taken on some very

challenging sites. Together, they bring an unparalleled level of experience and knowledge to the club."

Membership includes Gladstone Pottery Museum's collection of up-draught hovel ovens in Longton; Moorland Pottery's unusual four-chambered muffle kiln in Burslem; and calcining kilns spread across the city.

The club's activities were subdued due to Covid-19 restrictions, but members hope to collaborate to tackle maintenance and vegetation growth issues early in the New Year.

Councillor James Smith, heritage champion at Stoke-on-Trent City Council, said: "These iconic structures have not only

been a symbol of the Potteries for many years, but also a great source of inspiration to many artists in Stoke-on-Trent and beyond.

"We're very proud of our city's unique heritage, and that is why we have invested into our historic town halls, for example, to give them modern-day purposes and safeguard their future.

"The club is a fantastic idea and I look forward to working with all the owners in the city with the shared goal of preserving these unique structures."

The club was formed as part of the HAZ's five-year programme of heritage-led regeneration initiatives. The zone is being delivered by the city council and Historic England, with the support of local partners.