

Displaying brewery trays

Richard Percival continues his story about the fascinating hobby of collecting brewery trays

How do I display and keep them?

My top 200 are displayed in a mini museum which I've had converted from a spare room, using pine shelving and plate stands. Four hundred are kept in trunks in the hope that I can convert the loft into a bigger display area.

The remainder are wrapped in newspaper awaiting sale. These represent all the post 1970 trays and are at present kept in the loft.

What type of trays do I collect?

Quite simply I collect pre-1970 British brewery trays: my collection doesn't include any foreign trays, whisky items, or trays depicting mineral waters. The collection is also limited to 'real ale' trays.

Why don't I collect beer mats?

I suppose the answer to this question is that it is all a matter of personal taste. I am sure beer mat collectors could give me a whole host of reasons why their hobby is better than mine but I'll give you a few from my standpoint.

It is not as expensive at the top level as mat collecting. The most I'll ever pay for a tray is £40 compared to some rare mats going for well over £100.

Because there are so many mat collectors it is

difficult to snap up a bargain. Collecting trays is relatively new compared to collecting mats and rare trays keep appearing regularly.

Trays date back to the 1890s and were therefore produced much earlier than mats, giving a greater chance of turning something up from an older more obscure brewery. I have many examples of trays from breweries that could never have produced mats.

Trays are much more colourful and detailed objects and can complement other breweriana collections better than mats.

Nevertheless, I am a member of the Brewery Mat Society and they are proving very helpful in adding to my collection.

Where do I get most of my trays?

At first my collection was built up through the kindness of publicans and attending many car boot sales. From this I went to antique shops and antique fairs, but now my main additions to my collection are through the contacts I have built up over the last 12 years.

I also write articles for any local newspaper and this often turns up an unusual item. Other than that I now only target the bigger national bottle/advertising fairs and turn up very early!

What happened to the breweries?			
County	Brewery	Town/City	taken over/closed
Avon	Bristol Utd Breweries	Bristol	1956
Beds	Wells & Winch	Biggleswade	1961
Cumbria	R.F. Case Ltd	Barrow	1959
Derbys.	Brampton Brewery Co. Ltd	Chesterfield	1955
Dorset	Matthews & Co.	Gillingham	1963
Durham	J. Nimmo & Son Ltd.	Castle Eden	1963
Gloucs.	Cheltenham Original Bry Co Ltd	Cheltenham	1945
Hants	Scraces Brewery Ltd	Southampton	1927
Humber-side	Hartleys Brewery Ltd	W. Cowick	1957
Kent	Russells Gravesend Brewery	Gravesend	1930
	Tomson & Watton Ltd	Ramsgate	1968
Lancs.	Blackburn Brewery Ltd	Blackburn	1928
	John Baxter Ltd	Waterfoot	1952
Lincs.	Mowbray & Co. Ltd	Grantham	1952
London	Charles Beasley Ltd	Plumstead	1963
	Harmans Brewery Ltd	Uxbridge	1962
Manchester	James Cronshaw	Hulme	1932
	Yates Castle Brewery	Ardwick	1961
	John Heginbotham Ltd	Stalybridge	1915
	Howcrofts Brewery Ltd	Bolton	1969
	Gartsides (Brookside) Bry Ltd	Ashton-u-Lyme	1924
Norfolk	Morgans Brewery Co Ltd	Norwich	1961
	Steward & Pattensons Ltd	Norwich	1961
Northants	Hopcraft & Norris	Brackley	1946
Notts	T Losco Bradley	Nottingham	1954
	Hansons Ltd	Kimberley	1930
Northumb.	Alnwick Brewery Co Ltd	Alnwick	1963
Shropshire	Potters & Cockburn	Wellington	1912
E. Sussex	Tamplin & Sons Brewery	Brighton	1953
Tyne & Wear	R Fenwick & Co Ltd	Sunderland	1952
Warwicks	H E Thornley Ltd	Leamington	1933
W. Midlands	Dares Brewery Ltd	Birmingham	1961
	Holt Brewery Co Ltd	Birmingham	1934
	Benjamin Kelsey Ltd	Birmingham	1933
	Phillips & Marriott Ltd	Coventry	1924
	Holdens Brewery Ltd	Dudley	Still
	North Worcs Brewery Ltd	Stourbridge	brewing
	Walsall & District Clubs Bry	Walsall	
	Wordsley Bry Co Ltd	Wordsley	1940
N. Yorks.	Warwicks Brewery Ltd	Boroughbridge	1960
S. Yorks	Clarks Old Brewery Ltd	Barnsley	1966
	Duncan Gilmour & Co Ltd	Sheffield	1964
	Sheffield Free Brewery Co Ltd	Sheffield	1966
	Henry Tomlinson Ltd	Sheffield	1964
	Trusswells Brewery Co Ltd	Sheffield	1964
W. Yorks	Leeds City Brewery Ltd	Leeds	1964
Clwyd	Soames & Co Ltd	Wrexham	1940
Gwent	Webbs (Aberbeeg) Ltd	Aberbeeg	1961
Mid Glam	Fernvale Brewery Co Ltd	Pontyvaith	1961
S Glam	Ely Brewery Ltd	Cardiff	1960
Grampian	Thomson, Marshall & Co Ltd	Aberdeen	1949
Lothian	Thomas & James Bernard Ltd	Edinburgh	1968
	Gordan & Blair (1923) Ltd	Edinburgh	1962
	Wm Murray & Co Ltd	Edinburgh	1960
	Steel Coulson & Co Ltd	Edinburgh	1962

How do you know how old a tray is?

The first simple answer to this question is 'through experience'. However, other tell-tale signs are as follows:

- The material the tray is made of: brass, copper, enamel, steel/heavy tin, light alloy, tin, even wood, plastic and bakelite
- Makers' marks - Art Metal, Hancor Mitcham, Bat Co. Ltd, Reg Corfield, Hancock, Corfield Waller, etc.

- Brewery closure dates
- Actual dates on trays

Taking any one of these four criteria can usually narrow a tray to within five years.

How many trays are there?

It is impossible to say. Although current breweries are producing fewer and fewer trays due to costs, I am still astounded by the number of different trays that keep turning up. Although I have Britain's leading collection of trays, my 1,000 pales into insignificance when I guess how many trays could have

been produced from the 1890s onwards - 10,000? A likely figure.

Which trays am I still looking for?

In the box on the left hand page are the known breweries, 55 in all, that produced trays. If any reader knows of any other unusual brewery trays perhaps they could contact me on (0524) 68979 or write to 15 Holker Close, Westbourne Park, Lancaster LA1 5UW. Failing that are there any other tray collectors I don't know about?



What condition are they in?

All my top 400 trays are in near mint condition and this is what makes the collection so appealing, bearing in mind the age. At first I would collect trays in any condition, but now I buy only top quality items.



Richard Percival with part of his tray collection



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