



YOUR ROUND Circular beer trays dominate Richard's hoard
Picture: DAVID BANNISTER

“My family cringed if I asked the landlord for a tray”
RICHARD PERCIVAL
ON HIS WACKY HOBBY

50 SHADES OF TRAY Richard's packed display room

I'm tray interesting

EXCLUSIVE BY PHIL CARDY

REAL ale nut Richard Percival has something brewing in his spare room - Britain's biggest beer tray collection.

The retired business consultant has masses of round ones. But there are also square ones, oval ones and expensive ones picked up on his travels.

The designs tell a story of beer-making through the decades. Some rare finds are from as far afield as the US, New Zealand and Australia.

Richard, 58, has spent almost 40 years hoarding more than 1,500 of the pub mementos.

And he has no plans to call “time please, gents” on his unusual interest.

He says: “At first my family thought I was stark raving mad and were embarrassed when I used to ask publicans for spare trays.

“I’d start with the words ‘I have an unusual hobby’. You could

Ale fan has biggest collection of brewery trays

feel them cringe. But my collection is British history and that’s why people want to see it.

“It is unique. Many of the breweries no longer exist.”

Richard got hooked while on a footie trip with a beer mat-collecting pal back in 1981. He recalls: “I didn’t pay anything for my first tray. I’m a Notts County supporter and in 1981 I was on an away trip to Brighton.

“A fellow fan collected beer mats and asked a landlord for a specific mat.

“The landlord only had a tray

so I took it and that’s where it all started.”

It took wife Susan, a 64-year-old retired solicitor, time to accept his unusual interest.

PASSION

Richard adds: “These days my family accepts my passion is preserving brewery history and my wife even encouraged a few items to be displayed in the kitchen. Susan does appreciate it represents brewing history.

“She’s happy about my display room and lets me have items in

my office. But beyond that I’m banned from discussing it.”

Son Tim, 30, is on board too – “he thinks I’m nuts but he always keeps an eye out for me when he’s out drinking”.

Richard has two pints of ale most nights and loves Fullers ESB, Bathams and Elgood’s Black Dog Mild. He’ll open a fresh cask when pals visit.

“My friends continue to take the mickey but deep down they’re impressed,” he says.

Richard, from Rutland, spends up to £100 a time on

trays, many sourced from the internet. But, just like his first, landlords often give them away.

His oldest example, a small oval copper item from the Lyde Green Brewery in Cradley, West Mids, dates from the 1870s.

And his favourite is an oval tray from Warwicks & Richardsons brewery in Newark, Notts.

It has 10 labels and a picture of the brewery.

Richard hopes to add another 80 pieces to his collection. And there is still one tray he is desperate to find.

He says: “The Holy Grail of trays is simple. I am passionate about Thomas Salt & Co Ltd brewery, once of Burton-on-Trent. It closed in 1927.

I have mirrors, match strikers, ashtrays, jugs, show cards, ceramic coasters and more.

“Yet I still haven’t turned up a tray from Salt’s brewery.”

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ALL HAIL THE ALE Soulbys, Baddow, Anglo and Farmer are just a few of the trays in Richard's mighty brewery collection