



Examples of enamelled trays dating from 1900 to the 1930s (see chart).



Round tin trays from the Forties and Fifties.



Round tin trays from the Fifties and Sixties.



Square tin trays from the Fifties and Sixties.



Small round tin trays from the Fifties and Sixties.

# TRAYMANIA!

## Richard Percival reports on a collection which weighs half a ton

You may wonder how anybody could have such an unusual hobby as collecting brewery trays – items which not only are hard to display and take up precious space, but also weigh half a ton as a collection. Well it's hard to believe but it all started while following my football team (Notts County) all over the country about 10 years ago.

I used to travel with a brewery tray collector (yes, there is another one!) whose collection I admired and was keen to help him improve. I started to ask publicans for examples on his behalf and soon started to amass a number of excellent trays. I eventually discovered a fine 1950s Hunt Edmund's tray in perfect condition which I found hard to part with. It was then I realised that I would like to build a collection of my own – and so it started.

At first I would simply ask landlords for a tray while out drinking numerous 'real ales'. Most would oblige; 50p in the charity box being sufficient. Some found it rather amusing – "Why don't you collect beer mats or beer towels?" – being their usual response. On explaining my hobby to one landlord, the reply was an abrupt, "What do you want a \*\*\* Blue Peter Badge?"

Undeterred, my next move was to attend local car boot sales and antique fairs from where I acquired a 1930s copper Atkinson's tray (this brewery being taken over by Mitchells & Butler in 1959). This spurred me on still further and I soon found myself turning up at 6am at local and national bottle fairs. Does this sound familiar? From this contacts around the country soon developed and, 10 years on, my collection stands at around 800 trays spanning almost a century.

### Intimate

Rather than bore you with the intimate details of brewery trays, the table accompanying this article (and the supporting photographs) roughly sums up the history of these wonderful pictorial objects up to the end of the 1960s.

I have not, as yet, encountered any square, brass, copper or enamel trays and would be interested to hear of any.

My collection ranges from all parts of Britain although I have had particular difficulty in locating trays from Greater London and Norfolk. I have been unable to find any tray whatsoever from Cumbria and can see no reason for this. On the other hand, from one brewery alone, namely Bass, I have obtained over 50 trays. They can turn up in the most unusual places – farmer's barn, a hedgerow

and a bank manager's filing cabinet being three such examples. Alertness is needed at all times!

### Delivered

Trays were used more extensively in the early/mid part of this century when drinks were delivered to your table in public houses by waiters – hence their proper title 'waiter trays'. Due to the nature of such waiter trays they are easy to stack for practical purposes; although this advantage is outweighed by the difficulty of displaying them, particularly when you have over 800 and only a small house. It would be ideal to have an outlet such as a museum or inn to display them in order that



More striking examples from the Percival collection. These rectangular tin trays date from the 1940s and 1950s. Each one could carry up to 12 pints at a time.

others can appreciate their character.

A British brewery tray is a classic example of an item which demonstrates changing social values/beliefs during the decades. You can see the changes in areas such as attitudes towards women, fashion, health and drink. How would a slogan such as 'Go Gay with Gaymers' be viewed by the public in the 1990s?

Unlike other breweriana items, collecting brewery trays specifically is uncommon. I know of only about three collectors in the country. If there are any other tray collectors, I would enjoy discussing collections with them and perhaps building up more knowledge about them. For any budding tray collector, not only is it a cheap form of breweriana (a few pounds being the normal rate for most trays) but it is also exciting, you never quite know what you might turn up next.

As you might expect such a collection has brought me many accolades – a version of 'Dull Office Worker of the Week' on radio being the best so far!

Interested readers can contact Richard Percival on (0524) 580100 ext 2695 (day) or (0524) 68979 (evenings).