



A thirst-quenching collection



For most people a visit to the local pub entails quenching your thirst, making the most of the relaxing atmosphere, and enjoying the company of friends, but for one keen collector, the older items behind the bar are just as interesting

Cast your mind back to the last time you were in a pub. What do you remember? You may recall the decor, the staff, or perhaps the pint you sipped was particularly memorable. But do you remember the design on the beer trays used in the establishment?

To the uninitiated, the logos, wording and imagery on a humble beer tray may seem like an odd thing to look out for, but for collector Richard Percival, it's the first thing he notices when he goes into a public house.

With more than 1,500 in his collection, Richard has what he believes is the largest collection of vintage beer trays in the world, including many Scottish examples featuring the logos and advertising slogans of breweries that no longer exist. It may seem like a strange hobby, but Richard's obsession with brewery memorabilia – he also collects ash trays, mirrors, match strikers and show cards – is creating a fantastic archive of an industry which has changed dramatically over the years, and also reminds us of the intricate images used in advertising before the days of television and computer-aided design.

A keen football fan and self-confessed 'real-ale fanatic', Richard first became interested in the trays while at a pub before an away game during the 1980s, when a Shipstons Brewery tray caught his eye. 'I got the first one for my own use, for putting beer on', he explains. 'The tray was from the 1960s and had a picture of



Richard believes his collection of beer trays is the largest in the world

two drey horses on it. I thought "I like that." Before long he was bartering with bar staff as he noticed more and more attractive designs. 'I was literally asking the landlord if I could have them and putting a few pounds in the charity box on the bar in exchange.'

As his passing interest turned into a hobby, Richard began attending collectors' fairs to pick up older examples, and today relies on his many contacts, who tip him off when they notice rare trays up for sale, and the internet auction site eBay, which offers all kinds of treasures from the past. 'The most I've paid for one tray is £300.'

Richard admits, 'but you usually pay around £50 for a good pre-war tray.'

After years of obtaining so many different trays, Richard is now on the lookout for scarce examples to fill the gaps in his collection. His knowledge of the brewing industry has naturally increased over time, and he now knows how to tell a scarce example from something more common. 'Pre-war trays have a black back, if you turn them over,' he says, 'this is because of the production method back then. They used heavy steel and just put black paint on the back, but the need for steel for aircraft manufacturing put a stop to this during the war. After the war a light alloy was used instead and they became much lighter, and then later still they began to be made from tin, as it was cheaper.'

Today, as with so many modern products, the trays are made from plastic and do not feature the same attractive designs of yesteryear, so Richard's collection stops at 1970. By this time most independent breweries had been swallowed up by bigger firms or driven out of business. 'Edinburgh had around thirty different breweries at one point,' Richard says. 'Today there are only one or two.'

The modern versions might not offer the same appeal, but the array of trays produced in years gone by still gets Richard excited. 'Once every six months or so a new tray appears, which I didn't know existed,' he says. While waiting for



Above: Just some of Richard's beer trays. Right, from top: A pre-war black backed J & R Tennent Ltd Glasgow Brewery, JJ Morison Ltd Edinburgh Brewery, taken over in 1960, an extremely rare 1890s brass tray from John Jeffrey & Co Ltd of Edinburgh, the brewery was taken over in 1960

these new discoveries, Richard continues to search high and low for the missing items he knows are out there. Now he is appealing to readers of *Scottish Memories* for their help, and has compiled a long list of Scottish trays he has yet to find. 'I will pay up to £75 for a black-backed pre-war tray that is in very good condition,' Richard says. 'Items I'm looking for include a Blair & Co (Alloa) Ltd black-backed pre-war tray; any tray from Devanha Brewery Co Ltd of Aberdeen; an oval black-backed pre-war tray from

Drybrough & Co Ltd of Edinburgh; and an oval black-backed pre-war tray J & R Tennent Ltd of Glasgow. I'm also really desperate for a copper tray from Thomson, Marshall & Co Ltd in Aberdeen, a brewery which closed in 1902.'

The cost of a pint may have changed many times over the years, and the faces behind the bar might be different, but next time you're in the local, keep a look-out for the older items on the walls and in use, you just might find a rare relic from the past. ❦



VINTAGE TRAYS WANTED!

Richard is now looking for specific trays to add to his collection and needs the help of readers. If you have a tray you would like to sell, or would like to see a full list of the trays Richard is looking for, please contact him on telephone: 01333 313797; e-mail: richard.percival@hotmail.co.uk; or write to him at 4 Still Park, Pittenweem, near Anstruther Fife, KY10 2NT.



An example of an early 1960s tray from Edinburgh Brewery Drybrough & Co Ltd which was taken over in 1966. Richard says: 'I know of at least two pre-war black backed trays that I do not have in my collection, both are oval.'

A black backed pre-war example dating from the 1920s from Archibald Arrol & Sons Ltd of Alloa. The brewery was taken over in 1930

A very rare pre-war black backed tray dating from around 1930 from the Edinburgh Brewery William Younger & Co Ltd

Lorimer & Clarke Ltd, another Edinburgh Brewery. The tray is made of enamel and dates from around 1910. The Caledonian Brewery is still brewing today