

Style - without content!

Thinking of buying a tin of biscuits for Christmas? Dick Henrywood has a great idea for the perfect gift

Oh dear, nearly Christmas again and you've still not finished (or even started?) shopping for presents. No doubt you will have some ideas for most people but there are always one or two that seem to tax the imagination. Some might well be happy with a good tin of biscuits, but perhaps I can make a suggestion to forget the biscuits this year and just go for the tin. To be fair, not just any old tin, but a proper collectable biscuit tin. It may surprise some of you to learn that old biscuit tins can be worth quite a lot of money.

The use of attractive tins to contain biscuits dates back to the earlier years of the 19th century, but it was the development of tin printing techniques which was to revolutionise the industry. Various patents were taken out from 1853 and a major breakthrough was the introduction of offset lithography in 1875. The firm of Huntley & Palmers of Reading was the most enthusiastic user, through their associated tin box manufacturing firm of Huntley, Boorne & Stevens, and they became the most prolific issuer of attractive tins. Other biscuit firms followed suit, including such well-known names as Carr & Co, Crawfords, Jacobs, McVitie & Price, Macfarlane Lang, and Peek, Frean & Co. All these made a point of issuing attractive tins for the Christmas trade.

But back to our specific problem of Christmas presents. If we are feeling reasonably generous, a particularly appropriate gift might be the Huntley & Palmers tin known as 'Sledge' issued in 1898 and decorated

An 1898 Huntley & Palmers 'Sledge' tin



with a nice Christmassy sleigh scene. An auction price for this early tin should be around £40 or £50 and its straightforward rectangular shape would make it a practical as well as an attractive gift. The main alternative could be a somewhat later novelty tin, actually in the shape of a sleigh, issued by Jacobs around 1930. Unfortunately, the last example of this tin to appear at auction fetched some £700, which might rule it out for most relatives!

Incidentally, that is by no means the most expensive biscuit tin, since several now fetch four figures. A very good example is Crawford's biplane airliner tin. This was issued in 1926 and may well cost up towards £2,000 at auction for a really good example. Having said that, it would make a fine gift for any lady who flew as a stewardess with the Wright Brothers. But



A Peak Frean & Co biscuits and cakes 1887 calendar



A 1913 Huntley & Palmers 'East & West' tin

joking aside, the choice of tins available is vast, and a selection of seven other good tins is shown here.

Four of them come from Huntley & Palmers, the market leader and issuer of at least 400 different designs and variants in the years between 1868 and the outbreak of World War 2. The first three I always think of as the bell, book and candle of tins. The bell is just that, a copper-coloured tin in the shape of a bell, issued in 1911, bearing an inscription around the neck 'When Ye Doe Ringe, I Sweetly Sing'. Just right to remind us of the Christmas Carols service. The book takes the form of a set of eight books bound



A 1936 'Coronation Coach' novelty tin by W. & R. Jacob & Co



A 1937 Jacob's tin, the 'Caravan Novelty'



A 1935 Macfarlane Lang 'Wonderland' tin



A 1912 Huntley & Palmers 'Bell' tin



together. This was a popular shape issued in four different versions known as 'Library' (1900), 'Literature' (1901), 'Waverley' (1903) and 'Dickens' (1911), the last of which is the rarest of the four. The candle part of my trilogy is actually in the form of a lantern, issued in 1911.

The range of Huntley & Palmers tins is vast, and the final example I have chosen here is in the form of a two-handled vase known as 'East and West'. This was issued in 1913 and the two sides have scenes of Bedouins and Red Indians, representing the eastern and western hemispheres. Each of these four tins should fetch at least £50 at auction, and some considerably more.

The three other tins shown here are unusual in that they have all survived

complete with their own original boxes. These three designs were issued in the 1930s and while it might seem rather strange that a tin should need a box, we must remember that they were intended for use as presents.

Today's anti-packaging army might well have a field day with them! They are all valuable tins, and the 'Caravan' tin, for example, in good condition and with its original box should fetch around £500; possibly somewhat too much even for a family present.

In any brief article it is easy to concentrate on more valuable items, but you do not need to be wealthy to collect tins. There are very many still available from a pound or two upwards, although the novelty shapes will always be expensive. As with any other collectable

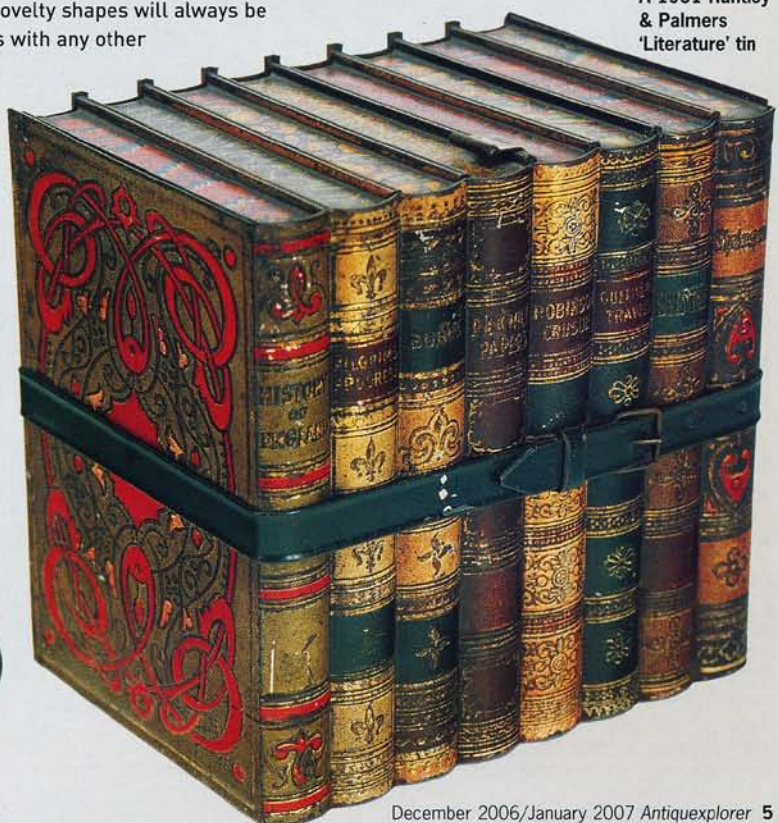
item, avoid poor quality and damage. Rust is inevitably a major problem, but do make allowance for the fact that many tins have survived because they are useful containers. Mint condition is unusual, but always get the best you can afford.

Dick Henrywood is a private consultant specialising in British pottery and collectors' items. The tins illustrated here are all shown courtesy of Dreweatt Neate, auctioneers, who often include interesting tins in their collectors' auctions held at Baynton Road in Bristol.

A 1911 Huntley & Palmers 'Lantern' tin



A 1926 Crawford's 'Pride of London' airliner tin



A 1901 Huntley & Palmers 'Literature' tin