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ALL THE RAVE

Old club flyers are the new collectibles, says **Ruth Jamieson**

▶ **Dave's small South London sitting room** is dominated by three enormous crates. Inside them, meticulously catalogued both chronologically and alphabetically, are 3,000 rave flyers. They are the glossy handbills used to publicise dance parties, from the first illegal raves of 1988, when house music and Ecstasy first hit the UK, to the corporate, money-hungry superclubs of the 21st century. Each one is different and, to Dave, each one is special. He is one of a growing number of collectors whose buying and selling of rave flyers has inflated the price of a single, once throwaway, sheet to as much as £50.

On the wall, in a simple clip frame, is a 1993 flyer for Obsession at The Warehouse in Plymouth. Dave gazes at it with the sort of reverence that priests reserve for babies. "That was the first rave I went to. My friend took me and I didn't leave the dancefloor all night. From that moment I was crazy about raving."

The pride of his collection are his flyers for the legendary South Coast club Sterns, which he handles carefully, like strips of freshly printed passport photos.

"They used drugs puns on brand names such as 'Holsten Pills' and 'Blockbusters, can I have an E please Bob'. Nowadays companies have their logos on flyers legitimately, because they are sponsoring the event. It shows how clubbing has changed."

Meanwhile, Alex, a full-on, dyed-in-the-wool, back-in-the-day raver, is reminiscing. "Acid house to me was something very anti-Establishment, something I hadn't seen since punk, and I jumped in headfirst." Originally he planned to frame his collection in a dedicated "Boy's Room", but marriage, kids and a mortgage came along and the flyers now have to go. He sold a Sunrise second edition recently for £46.

"There was a time when I had 50 of those flyers in my hand," Alex says sadly, "but I would be dripping with sweat after coming out of clubs and they got ruined."

The train-spotterish collecting of flyers may seem at odds with the hedonism of raving, but Beach, a postman from Winchester with more than 40,000 flyers, says he collects because "together the flyers make a story, they

are like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle". For Dave, who started squirrelling away flyers years before he was going to raves, they were a way to hook into a scene that his age prevented him from experiencing first-hand.

Even today's flyer can inspire fanaticism. Nick Agha, the director of flyer pack distributors Don't Panic, is contacted regularly by enthusiasts hunting for the collector's items of the future. "The flyers for Fabric and the 333 are very popular. We get cult designers such as Pentagram and Kerr Nobel to contribute posters to our packs to make them even more collectable."

Sadly, most collectors practise their art in secret, fearing ridicule. They trade anonymously on websites such as eBay. Weed, the author of www.raveflyers.co.uk's price guide, admits: "Freudians might recognise my collecting as anally retentive, but I just can't resist the fractal graphics." ■

For more information on buying, selling and collecting rave flyers visit www.roachmaterial.co.uk, www.phatmedia.co.uk and www.raveflyers.co.uk

CLUB CULTURE
Collections of flyers (above) provide a fascinating visual history of clubbing