



*G.W.R. puzzle showing the historic town of Totnes in Devon. This image was also used in their poster campaigns.*



*Jigsaw puzzle and other period toys - 'Society dissected - The latest craze'.*



*Chad Valley puzzle for G.W.R. showing Stratford. Chad Valley also made promotional puzzles for Cunard.*

# a history and price guide to jigsaw puzzles

by Judith Clarke

Jigsaws have eased travel, tension and tedium throughout the twentieth century but they began as educational tools for affluent children back in the 1760s with the advent of John Spilsbury's *Dissected Maps For Teaching Geography*. Spilsbury (1739-1769) was a map maker by profession and had the novel idea of mounting maps on thin wooden board, dissecting them and then selling them in boxes for children to reassemble. Though Spilsbury died soon after his invention the dissected map did not die with him. Other early manufacturers of 'jigsaws' include William Darton and Son and John Wallis and Sons. These two firms produced jigsaws from the late eighteenth to the mid nineteenth century and although they borrowed freely from the ideas of others they also managed to make jigsaws more appealing.

Early dissected maps are extremely rare and in September 1998 Lawrence's of Crewkerne offered five Spilsbury puzzles which sold for the grand sum of £17,000. As with any branch of collecting and antiques these are the dream finds or acquisitions, the star lots of their particular field. More recently, in April of this year, a dissected map c. 1780 of the roads of England and Wales in original box sold for £1,700.

Early subjects for jigsaws continued to be along the lines of educational maps, history, nobility and religious subjects but from around 1840 puzzles featured popular nursery rhymes, animals and religious fables. Titles such as 'Acts of the Apostles', 'Life of Wesley' and 'Zoological Gardens' were all made by a firm called Barfoots.

Throughout the Victorian period the number of puzzle makers increased with names such as John Betts, Arthur Park and William Spooner coming to the fore and in the late Victorian era the firms of William Peacock and Tuck, the latter best known for their postcards. The founder, Raphael Tuck, died in 1900 but his sons had for many years run the business. They began making jigsaws in the 1890s. Though Tuck was innovative in its methods of production (popularising the use of plywood and strong card) and inventive (ZagZaw puzzles and 'picture puzzle postcards' in the 1920s) their jigsaws remained some of the most traditional in choice of subject matter. Raphael Tuck is also well known for using novelty shaped pieces or 'whimsies' within their puzzles as did the American firm of Parker Bros who used animal figures and other objects.

Up until 1900 the jigsaw puzzle had not really been designed with the adult in mind. However, the next decades saw increased leisure time for vast numbers of the population and improvements in the making and cost efficiency of puzzle manufacture. Early puzzles were made of wood and cut by hand-saw. The introduction of the jig-saw or fret saw around 1900 greatly speeded up the manufacturing process and made puzzles cheaper to produce as did the use of plywood. Cardboard almost completely dominated after the Second World War whilst today we seem to have come full circle with many small manufacturers of jigsaws reverting to the wooden puzzle. In the 1920s Chad Valley began manufacturing promotional puzzles. These were produced for the Great Western Railway and sold at stations for passengers to purchase and complete during their journey. These promotional puzzles are very sought after. The great age of art deco style prevalent throughout their period of manufacture makes them particularly attractive and desirable puzzles to collect.

Some examples of the G.W.R. puzzles can fetch as much as £200 each but most that come up for sale at auction are estimated at £35-£50 for the more common examples in moderately good condition. Subjects

such as King Arthur on Dartmoor or scenes of Stratford might fall within this category with higher prices for transport related subjects.

In the post Second World War era puzzle prominence was achieved by Tower Press and Waddington's particularly well known for their circular puzzles. Among the plethora of other companies that produced jigsaws which are now collectable are Salmon, Efrog, (Corfe backwards) also well known for their Festival of Britain puzzle) not to mention the highly collectable American puzzles of Frank Ware and John Henriques as well as quality puzzles made by amateur makers.

When purchasing a jigsaw puzzle, whether for play, profit or pleasure check that it is original, complete and in good condition. Both wooden and cardboard jigsaws should have their boxes. Jigsaws are very reasonably priced when compared to some other 'toys' and many can be found for between £10-£50.

Evocative and highly nostalgic subjects are very popular as are puzzles with an advertising theme or depiction of some cult name such as the Beatles. Transport remains a top theme of the twentieth century whilst older jigsaws obviously have a scarcity value regardless of subject matter.

Assembling jigsaws might seem a staid pastime in the light of the electronic games world but they have been enjoying a renaissance of popularity both as a collecting hobby and by those who like to pit their wits against the ingenuity of the makers both past and modern. Jigsaws satisfy the human need to challenge and complete a project but are far less strenuous than ballooning over the North Pole or trekking through the Himalayas. They cause a lot of fret but very little sweat.

**Further information:**

The delightfully named Benevolent Confraternity of Dissectologists was set up in 1985 and numbers some 400 jigsaw enthusiast members around the world. The joining fee is £3 (£5 for overseas) and the society publishes a quarterly newsletter. For further information contact Tom Tyler, 32 The Limes, Ipswich, IP5 1EA. U.K. Tel: 01473 723458 or email: tom.tyler@btinternet.com

Mr. John Powell gives talks on collecting old wooden dissected and jigsaw puzzles as well as clockwork toys and parlour games. He can be contacted on 01905 773357 or by writing to 65 May Tree Hill, Droitwich, Worcester. WR9 7QU.

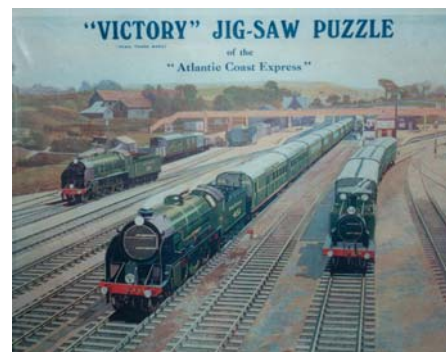
**Books**

- The Jigsaw Puzzle Book*, Linda Hannas, 1981.
- The English Jigsaw Puzzle 1760-1890*, Linda Hannas, 1972.
- Jigsaw Puzzles of the Twentieth Century*, Tom Tyler, Richard Dennis, 1997.
- Jigsaw Puzzles, An Illustrated History and Price Guide*, Anne D. Williams, 1990. (American puzzles)

The name Spilsbury lives on with the Spilsbury Puzzle Company at [www.gopuzzles.com](http://www.gopuzzles.com) - a company that sells new games and puzzles.



Victory jigsaw with whimsies depicting animals- spot the elephant.



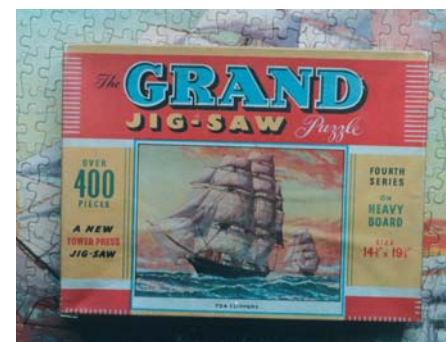
Victory puzzle of the 1930s.



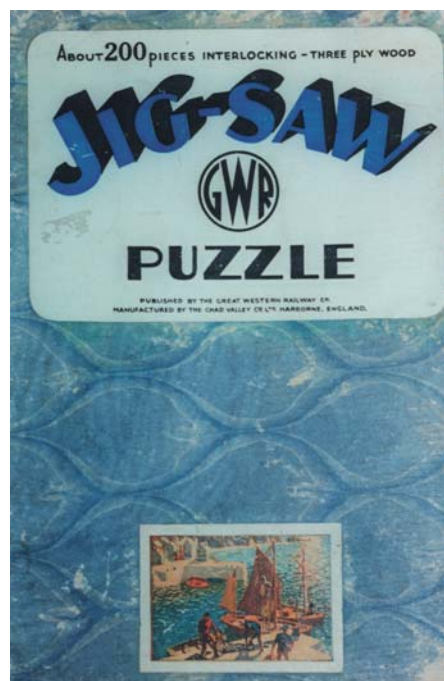
Edwardian jigsaw in box. Front cover key illustration by John Hassall - most famous for his 'Skegness is So Bracing' poster.



Interlocking promotional jigsaw for Bisto - a nice addition to any advertising or puzzle collection.



Tower Press jigsaw from the 1950s in the Grand series. £3 - £5.



Detail of box for Chad Valley puzzle - some G.W.R. puzzles have up to 400 pieces.



G.W.R. puzzle made by Chad Valley. This image by Donald Lampitt was used by G.W.R. in their poster campaigns.

Photographs courtesy of Bygones Museum, Torquay and Mr John Powell.