

WW2 BRITISH BERET IDENTIFICATION GUIDE

These 'rules' apply to standard ordnance ordered British made berets of wartime manufacture (be they commando or otherwise, the same basic traits are constant) and not private purchase/tailor made variants where quite frankly anything goes (personally I wouldn't entertain one of these in my collection, unless it had cast iron provenance)

All WW2 berets should feature the following features:

- 1) The beret crown is all wool and very large compared to modern berets (~ minimum of 10" diameter depending on the size). This when worn should be pulled well down over the right ear. There is usually a very small 'hole/lump' in the very centre where the individual triangular segments that make up the crown's construction meet.
- 2) The crown should feature two 12mm diameter brass ventilation eyelets painted gloss black, on the right hand side (6mm hole diameter). On the inside, these holes should be covered by a piece of rectangular black leather (~4cm x ~2cm) hand stitched in place.
- 3) The sweatband should be black leather (doe/deer skin) and houses a black silk draw string, tie-able at the back for a snug fit. These are often removed, missing or lost on wartime berets.
- 4) The liner should be black cotton (if it's shiny, it's probably synthetic and post war). There is a school of thought that all wartime berets have a single row of loose hand stitching (each stitch about 10mm long) that holds a hessian strip inside the liner around the inner circumference of the liner just above the sweatband. All I know is that my Kangol beret has this loose single row hand stitch (but no hessian) whereas my British Beret Basque has a machined double row of stitching instead. The single stitches were pretty fragile and the majority simply wore away. Don't be put off if its not there unless the beret is in mint and unissued condition. The liner should also feature a diamond of double stitching which holds in place (between the liner and the crown) a larger diamond of the same black cotton material as the liner. Its function I'm not sure about, I suspect it's just to add a bit of shape and padding.

There is one known exception to the black the black liner rule. In 1945 Kangol Wear Limited produced some berets with a khaki liner. Be extremely careful if buying one of these!

- 5) All berets should feature (in no particular order) the makers stamp, size, date, broadarrow (crow's foot) and ordnance acceptance stamp in white ink/paint. There should be no attached labels or clear plastic diamonds. Given that these berets are now ~70 years old don't be surprised if the markings have worn/faded away, but this should be consistent with the liner being worn and faded too! Make sure its not just been removed to disguise its post war date.

6) Known wartime manufacturers:

- Kangol Wear Limited (abbreviation for **Knitted ANG**ora wo**OL**)
- Beret Industries Limited
- British Beret Basque Ltd
- A&L Gelfer Glasgow
- Jalpotex Ltd
- J.Compton Sons & Webb Ltd
- Dorothea Mills Limited (Canada)
- Grand Mere Knitting Company Ltd (Canada).

Many of these also made berets after the war, the manufacturer alone doesn't guarantee wartime manufacture. Some notes on makers' stamps:

- Up until ~1948 Kangol Wear Limited was written on one line, after this date Kangol was on one line and Wear Limited was on a separate line underneath
- J.Compton Sons & Webb Ltd berets with the name in an arched pattern are fakes

7) WWII Ordnance stamps are usually in three rows, for example:

W
W↑D
588

The letter above the W↑D is an acceptance date stamp (in WWI the date stamp was below the W↑D). These ordnance stamps are stamped on acceptance of the goods and can therefore sometimes be later than the manufacture date, but obviously not before!! Date codes are as follows:

WWII	
DATE	CODE
1939	R
1940	Q
1941	P
1942	O
1943	N
1944	M
1945	Z

POST WAR	
DATE	CODE
1946	L
1947	E, P
1948	R
1949	A
1950	B, A
1951	B
1952	C
1953	L
1954	M
1955	D, O, T
1956	T
1959	X

Post War Berets

Post war identifiers:

- The use of any synthetic materials (i.e. polyester shiny liners)
- Sewn in labels/clear plastic diamonds
- Stitched pocket to hold a cap badge slider
- Small crown (although wartime ones can be shrunk, it is wool)
- No double brass vent holes
- Cloth or synthetic sweatbands
- Unlined berets manufactured by Bukta are scout berets, not military
- Known reproductions (for re-enactors): WPG (what Price Glory), King and Country, Airborne 1944 (Soldier of Fortune, King and Country and Dorothea Mills Limited (the real wartime manufacturer!))

Warnings and Scams

In order of desirability/value wartime SAS sand coloured, Airborne maroon and Commando green are worth significantly more than other berets, khaki, black, etc. It has been known for 'unscrupulous souls' to take a WWII black/khaki beret (£50-£80) and a post war maroon beret say (~£50) and transfer the wartime dated liner to the post war crown to create a 'wartime dated beret' with a resale value of £400 - £900!!! Always check liner stitching for evidence of tampering.

If the beret has no liner, it is either a non military beret or the liner has been removed deliberately. 99% of time this is because the seller wants to disguise the fact its post war. Never buy one without a liner without provenance.

You also see a lot of berets with the last digit of a 1940s date worn away (in some instances repainted in) walk in fact run away! Never trust a beret with an uneven worn or suspicious date,

Looking after your beret

100% wool wartime berets are the lobster and caviar of the moth world. It is recommended to pop them in a bag and place in your freezer for 2 or 3 days, to wake up any moth larvae. Remove for 2 or 3 days to stir them, then refreeze for a further for 2 or 3 days to kill them. When done I'd recommend keeping them in a sealed freezer bag.

Summary

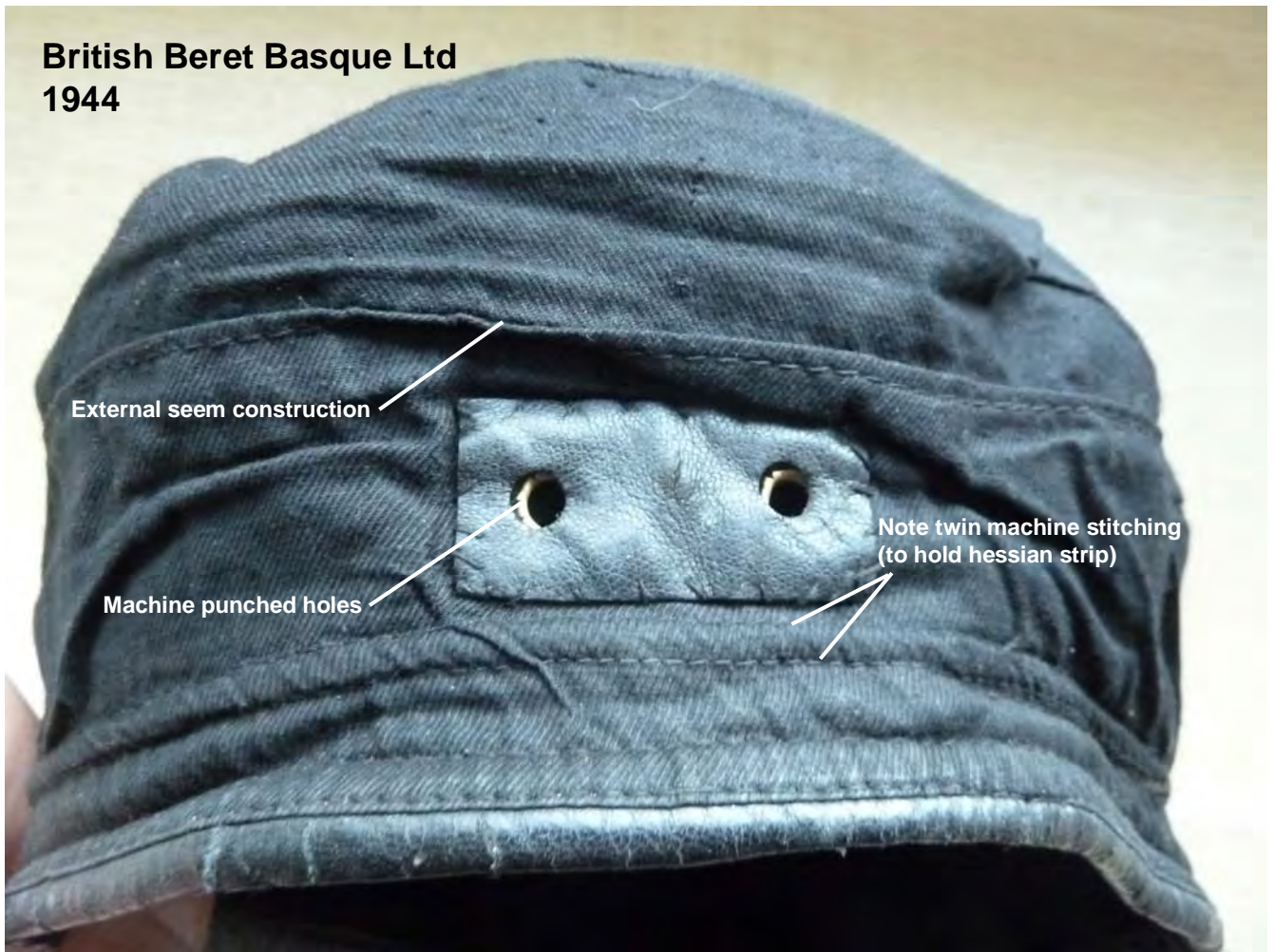
Hopefully this summary is helpful but by no means complete, I'd welcome any comments additions or corrections. I've attached some useful shots of wartime berets to hopefully show some of the above traits. More useful photos of the beret stamps can be found on this excellent website, to which I am indebted for some of the info above:

<http://home.tiscali.nl/nijsten/berets.html>

Happy hunting!

Paul Bell
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**British Beret Basque Ltd
1944**



**Kangol Wear Limited
1944**



**Kangol Wear Limited
1944**



**Kangol Wear Limited
1944**



No berets were hurt during the making of this guide!



Commonwealth War Department Marks

