



52 engraved playing cards with original hand-colour, housed in slipcase with printed design to both sides, upper half lacking.

MONARCHS OF EUROPE

[Rowley's new deck]

Author

ROWLEY AND CO.

Publication date

c1775].

Publisher

Rowley & Co,

Publication place

[London,

Physical description

52 engraved playing cards with original hand-colour, housed in slipcase with printed design to both sides, upper half lacking.

Dimensions

92 by 64mm (3.5 by 2.5 inches).

Notes

The Maker

The accompanying advertisement lists the present decks as "sold at the Patentee's Card-

Manufactory, No. 6, in the Old Bailey: at the London Coffee-House, Ludgate-Hill; by M. Darly, Engraver and Printfeller, in the Strand: and by all Stationers and Country Shop-keepers - Price 2s. 6d. per Pack, or One Pound Seven Shillings per Dozen, for Ready Money only”.

Despite claiming to be a “card manufactory”, there is no evidence of any other deck of cards produced by Rowley & Co. In fact, there is no evidence of Rowley operating from No 6, Old Bailey until 1773, and by 1783, the premises were being operated by a printer named Daniel Constable, and ten years later by another named John Barker. This suggests that the firm’s output may have been limited to this one deck of cards.

From 1765, the Ace of Spades was required by the Stamp Office to carry treasury duty and die number. While earlier examples of this deck, which are otherwise identical, do not bear these marks, it appears that Rowley & Co. published the playing cards from 1773, and that the present example was made after the introduction of the requirement.

The Cards

Rowley & Co., of No. 6, Old Bailey, London, published a deck of playing cards that intended to reform the traditional English deck but which sadly never caught on. The court cards display portraits of the monarchs of England, France, Spain and Russia with their attendant Knaves, all in oval frames. It is the pip cards, however, that show the greatest departure from English tradition, with the customary suit symbols changed to Pikes, Chalices, Trefoils and Topaz, coloured respectively in black, red, green and yellow. In a three-page accompanying notice published alongside the cards, Rowley offered some explanation for his design choices:

“By the four suits, we are to understand the four classes of men into which every kingdom is divided: the Nobles, the Clergy, the Citizens and the Peasantry... The four suits have undergone but little more alteration than seemed necessary to point out their original meaning... For the Spade, is given the esponsion of our first regiment of guards. The clerical order is represented by the chalice, or sacramental cup. The Diamond is engraved to resemble the modern improved out of previous stone: which, being printed in yellow, may remind us of the Topaz: And, for our Club, the trefoil, or clover-grass, is restored both in form and in colour. We have, therefore four colours: which novelty may not be displeasing: and it is possible that, in a short time, the names of Pike, Chalice, Topaz, Clover, will be as familiar in the mouths of English card-players, as Spade, Heart, Diamond, Club.”

Bibliography

Provenance

Price: £3000

Inventory reference: 20705