



Folio album (260 by 305mm). 67 leaves, 402 playing card backs, 10 playing card faces, pasted in 6 per leaf; blind-stamped green buckram, lettered in gilt to upper cover, upper board detached, minor discolouration to a few upper leaves.

MORE GRACEFUL FIGURES THAN THOSE NOW SEEN' (DICKENS)

De La Rue & Co.'s Playing Cards.

Author

DE LA RUE & CO.

Publication date

1878-1879.

Publisher

[110 Bunhill Rd, London],

Publication place

[London],

Physical description

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Dimensions

Notes

Catalogue of playing card designs from influential British maker, De La Rue & Co.

Thomas De La Rue (1793-1866) transformed the production of playing cards in Britain. Born in Guernsey, he pursued careers as a leather-embosser, bookbinder, and straw-hat manufacturer, before moving into playing cards in 1828. Granted a patent in 1831 for the use of letter-press printing in playing card manufacture, he moved the process away from woodblock printing, allowing the rapid production of cheap decks (by the mid-19th c., 265,000 decks per year) with attractive designs on the backs – as the present catalogue illustrates.

In 1844, De La Rue had employed the architect and designer Owen Jones to design the backs of his cards. His distinctive motifs took inspiration from Chinese, Indian, and Islamic art, often botanical or geometric in composition. Charles Dickens praised, in an article on playing cards in *Household Words*, the ‘talented artists’ used by De La Rue. With Jones having died in 1874, it is unclear whether the designs in the present catalogue are his work. They do, however, very much reflect his style.

An export stamp on the verso of the front free endpaper dated 1879 and a fragment of a small receipt written in French pasted to the 12th leaf suggests that this copy was used in Paris.

Rarity:

Complete catalogues such as this are rare to the market. We have only been able to trace one other catalogue, from the 1869-1870 season, which sold at Sotheby Parke Bernet in 1981.

Bibliography

Provenance

Price: £10000

Inventory reference: 21882