

12mo (65 by 105mm) map of England and Wales, and 52 cartographic playing cards, mounted on guards, all with fine original hand-colour, manuscript inscription to upper pastedown, “Francis J. Cooke A Gift from His School Fellow, A. Armstrong”, seventeenth-century black morocco, lavishly gilt, spine in three compartments, with initials R.W. (inverted), rubbed.

THE FIRST CARTOGRAPHIC PLAYING CARDS BOUND AS A MINIATURE ATLAS

[Complete Set of Cartographic Playing Cards of England and Wales].

Author
[BOWES, William] [Engraved by] RYTHER, Augustine

Publication date
1590].

Publisher
Augustine Ryther,

Publication place
[London,

Physical description
12mo (65 by 105mm) map of England and Wales, and 52 cartographic playing cards, mounted on guards, all with fine original hand-colour, manuscript inscription to upper pastedown, “Francis J. Cooke A Gift from His School Fellow, A. Armstrong”, seventeenth-century black morocco, lavishly gilt, spine in three compartments, with initials R.W. (inverted), rubbed.

Dimensions
60 by 110mm (2.25 by 4.25 inches).

Notes
These cards are the earliest set of geographical playing cards of any country. They also have the distinction of being the first time that each county is depicted separately.

The 52 playing cards are arranged in suits corresponding to regions: Eastern and Midland; Southern and Western; Northern; and Welsh. The cards themselves consist of a thumbnail map of the county – based upon the general map of England and Wales in Saxton's Atlas – all to the same scale, and depict major cities and towns – marked by their initial letter – rivers, hills, and woods. To the upper right is a compass rose with a scale bar lower left. To the upper left and lower right the card number is marked in Roman numerals 'I-XIII', according to size of county, beginning with the smallest. Surrounding the map is an elaborate border that differs between suits. Upon the present set the compass roses are also coloured by suit. Above and below is a brief description of the county detailing its size, relation to other counties and its resources.These cards are the earliest set of geographical playing cards of any country. They also have the distinction of being the first time that each county is depicted separately.

The cards have been attributed to William Bowes – a playing card designer who was active in London between 1590 and 1605 – whose initials along with the publication date, appear on the first introductory text card, present in the British Museum example. Their publication and engraving has been attributed to Augustine Ryther, whose signature 'A/RYT/R' appears on the map of England and Wales, on a banner between the legs of the compass dividers. Ryther (fl. c.1579-1593) was an engraver, publisher, and scientific instrument maker who engraved several of the maps for Saxton's Atlas.

The cards are exceedingly rare. We are only able to trace three examples. Two in institutions and one in private hands:

1) The British Museum, consisting of 60 cards, mounted on four sheets. The seven additional cards: portrait of Elizabeth I; royal coats-of-arms; map of London after Hogenberg; and four introductory text cards. Titlepage dated 1590.

2) The Royal Geographical Society: 45 cards, lacking one suit.

3) Private Collection: set of 60 cards, bound together with a several other plates, with titlepage dated 1595.

It would appear that the present set was bound soon after the time of publication to form a miniature county atlas, which would explain the inclusion of the map of England and Wales at the front, with the non-cartographic cards being seen as superfluous.

Contents

1) England and Wales.

First Suit – Eastern and Midland Counties

1) Rutland
2) Middlesex
3) Huntingdonshire
4) Bedfordshire
5) Hertfordshire
6) Buckinghamshire
7) Cambridgeshire

8) Northamptonshire
9) Warwickshire
10) Suffolk
11) Kent
12) Essex
13) Norfolk

Second Suit – Southern and Western Counties

1) Berkshire
2) Worcestershire
3) Oxfordshire
4) Surrey
5) Herefordshire
6) Dorset
7) Gloucestershire
8) Cornwall
9) Wiltshire
10) Sussex
11) Somerset
12) Hampshire
13) Devon

Third Suit – Northern Counties

1) Westmorland
2) Leicestershire
3) Nottinghamshire
4) Derbyshire
5) Durham
6) Cheshire
7) Staffordshire
8) Shropshire
9) Cumberland
10) Lancashire
11) Northumberland
12) Lincolnshire
13) Yorkshire

Fourth Suit – Welsh Counties

1) Flintshire
2) Anglesey
3) Radnorshire
4) Monmouthshire
5) Denbighshire
6) Caernarfonshire
7) Pembrokeshire
8) Cardiganshire
9) Montgomeryshire
10) Glamorganshire
11) Breckonshire

12) Merionethshire
13) Carmarthenshire

Bibliography
Kingsley & Mann, Playing Card Maps, in MCC, Vol 9, no 87, 1972; Turner, G. L. E., Elizabethan Instrument Makers: the origins of the London trade in precision instrument making, Oxford 2000, 36; King, G. L., Miniature Antique Maps, Map Collector Publications, Tring 1996, pp. 60-1; Skelton, R. A. County Atlases of the British Isles, 1579-1850, Carta Press, London 1970, pp. 16-18; Hind, A. M., An Elizabethan pack of Playing-cards, British Museum Quarterly, XIII, 1939, p. 2 Heawood, E., English County Maps in the Collection of the Royal Geographical Society, R.G.S., London 1932, p. 13, plate 21.

Provenance

Price:

Inventory reference: 2384

© Daniel Crouch Rare Books Ltd | 2025