



52 engraved playing cards in original yellow cardboard case, with damage to case.

PLAYING POLITICS

Deakin's Political Playing Cards

Author

DEAKIN & CO.

Publication date

1886].

Publisher

[W.H. Willis & Co.,

Publication place

London,

Physical description

52 engraved playing cards in original yellow cardboard case, with damage to case.

Dimensions

90 by 64mm (3.5 by 2.5 inches).

Notes

The Maker

The box advertises that the cards “may be had of Deakin & Co. Original Style Printers [at] 45 Eastcheap, London”. The only materials attributed to these printers, however, are the three editions of this deck of cards. It seems that, rather than printers, Deakin & Co. was in fact a wholesale stationers, and their playing cards were printed by W.H. Willis & Co., a company formed in 1869

which produced a huge variety of playing cards until 1892.

The Cards

Advertised as being “Suitable for Whigs, Tories, Radicals, and Home Rulers”, this deck was made in the wake of the political turmoil happening at the time. With the role of Prime Minister filled by alternately the Conservative Disraeli and Liberal Gladstone since 1868, Robert Gascoyne Cecil, 3rd Marquess of Salisbury emerged as the new leader in June 1885. Having held the office for little more than six months, he was opposed by the returning Gladstone, with whom he interchanged the top job twice during the course of the next eight years.

While the pip cards are simple playing cards, albeit with miniature versions of the cards themselves in opposite corners, the court cards in this deck reflect the various figures, stances and controversies that gave contemporary politics such memorable (and marketable!) character. The Marquis of Salisbury is depicted as a double-figure on the King of Diamonds, holding a tankard reading “Cheap Beer”, while Gladstone is portrayed as the King of Hearts, bearing a banner with the slogan “G.O.M.” for ‘Grand Old Man’.

In two years, there were three editions of the cards printed after the first, of which the present deck is an example, sold 60,000 packs in 1886.

Bibliography

Provenance

Price: £1200

Inventory reference: 20694