

A rare pair of early-17th century gentleman's gloves

Sold



Description

The doeskin gloves with square fingers. The finger seams neatly stitched with the pattern continuing onto the front of the gloves, and the thumb seam delicately stitched with the same pattern. Each gauntlet applied with six triangles of crimson silk embroidered with silver thread, spangles and raised work, in a pattern of hearts, scrolls and shamrocks. The outer-sides open and the top edges with applied silver lace cuffs decorated with spangles. Lined with crimson silk. Restoration to embroidery. English, second quarter of the 17th century. 3036729.

Glove length : 31.00 cm./12.00 in.

Cuff length : 13.00 cm./5.00 in.

Sold November 1998 ticket price £ 3,400

When a couple decided to marry in the 17th century, they invited their family and friends 'to assist at the signing of the contract'. After this had been done in the presence of a notary, the marriage pledges, such as a ring, a wedding medal, a handkerchief and the richly decorated 'wedding gloves' were handed over and the betrothal could be made known. These betrothal gifts were exhibited at the bride's house in a basket decorated with flowers and ribbons during a reception, the 'sitting in state' to which the bridegroom often invited friends to come and admire the gifts he had given. Although the glove had originally served as the contractual seal of the vow of eternal fidelity, it no longer played a part in the solemnization of the marriage in church in the 17th century. Indeed at the most important moment, the 'dextrarum iunctio' it was entirely superfluous, since the couple were required to join their ungloved right hands in token of the plighting of their troth. Meanwhile the glove had become a status symbol, the 'wedding gloves' decorated as richly as possible being used by the bridegroom as an expression of his love for his bride.

Although it cannot be said with any degree of certainty that these gloves were wedding gloves, the symbolism in the embroidery gloves indicates that they were either a message of love, a token of favour or an honoured pledge. Both the shape and the embroidery of these gloves are typical of those of the second quarter of the 17th century. The gauntlet has developed into a long slender form, and the fine lace cuff and the red silk lining must have created a beautiful effect.