

Set of four neoclassical-style tortoiseshell & sterling silver menu holders

William Comyns & Sons

Sold



REF: 8271

Height: 35 mm (1.38")

Width: 39 mm (1.54")

Description

In a distinctly neoclassical design, this is set of four antique menu or place card holders, with oval sterling silver frames and bases, fitted with tortoiseshell disks beautifully inlaid with inlaid silver decorations featuring swags of bellflowers and trumpets draped over central starburst decorations. The tortoiseshell is a clear colour with a fine grain.

The technique used on these place card holders is called piqué, where gold or silver is inlaid into another material, in this case silver on tortoiseshell. Despite being expensive, the use of tortoiseshell in the decorative arts was very popular in 18th and 19th century Europe. Not only did it have a beautiful mottled appearance and was durable, but it was also lightweight and could be easily fashioned into other shapes; jewellery boxes and tea caddies were prime examples.

Tortoiseshell is quite malleable when heated, so when very fine gold, or in this case silver, was fashioned into delicate designs and then pressed into the warmed tortoiseshell, the silver then cooled and the shell contracted to hold the silver in place.