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THREE PIGEONS

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A RARE ENGLISH DOUBLE-ENDED WROUGHT-IRON ANDIRON,

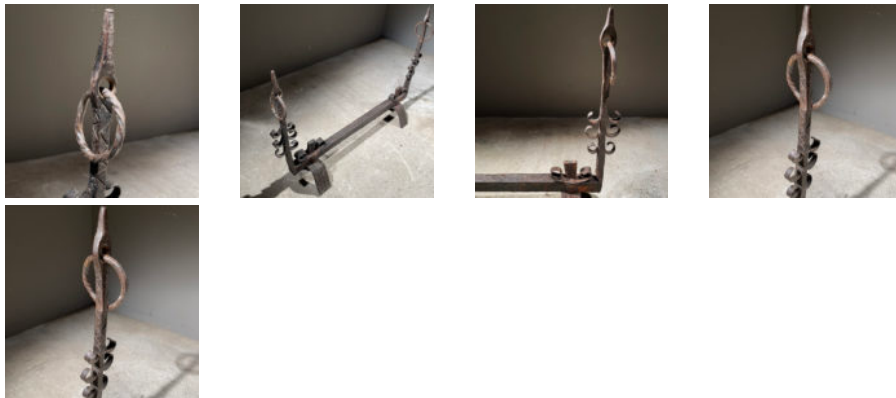
Tudor or Stuart - dated to 1550-1650

the singular rectangular-section billet bar terminating with a spear standard to each end, each pointed finial pierced with an eye suspending a spit-ring, each stem with apotropaic markings and three pairs of scrolls, the bar pegged in order to attach the pair of arched supports,

DIMENSIONS: 61cm (24") High, 95cm (37½") Wide, 19cm (7½") Deep, (the billet bar 87cm long)

PRICE: £2,650

STOCK CODE: 45822



HISTORY

The double-ended andiron gradually went out of use with the advent of the chimneypiece. By the time the Tudors came along, with their wall-mounted stone fire-surrounds and statement tall brick chimneys - the central hearth in the middle of a smoky medieval baronial hall was old-hat. The single conjoined andiron was thereafter superseded with andirons only then made as pairs - two separate billet bars supported in parallel.

The single billet-bar format terminating at each end with a tall standard, enabled a tall conical fire to be built and supported, allowing more room for air to be drawn in at the base of the fire keeping the embers much hotter - driving the smoke up toward the hole - or cupula, or louvred vent - up in the ridge of the roof. The uprights or standards were essential to allow a series of

spits to be supported for cooking. The baronial hall was all about communal cooking. This technology had seen little change for at least five hundred years prior to the Tudors; wonderful Iron Age examples of these andirons have been un-earthed by archaeologists – prime examples being dug up near Welwyn, Hertfordshire (now in British Museum) and the Capel Garmon firedog discovered in the 1850's near Conwy (now in National Museum of Wales), both discovered as grave goods, both dating to around 50BCE and both beautifully wrought with stylised Bull head finials.



Penshurst Place

Despite the centuries of their being employed few examples survive though. This is likely to be both because those in continuous use in a fire will suffer over time and any survivors of Tudor fireplace innovations are likely to have been re-formatted. The best known example is found at Penshurst Place in Sussex (above) – one of very few halls still with its central hearth in place.

This example at LASSCO is clearly hand-made – the scrolls and joins are fire-welded on an anvil – the work of a talented forge but not top-grade. The standards were never quite the same height, the symmetry is a little wonky and it was made like that.

The geometric zig-zags, “X” markings and lines cut into the uprights are also significant – they allude to apotropaic markings of the time. The saltire “X” (that of St Andrew) is found on old fireplace furniture as here, as well as bessimer beams and door lintels: the hearth, window and door all needed guarding against incursions from witches and general evil.

To ensure that the ironwork is as old as we think it is LASSCO has had the andiron tested at Oxford University. Samples were taken from various parts of the piece and photomicrographs

revealed that the make-up of the iron (finery iron not bloomery), the slag content and the method of construction, narrow the likely date of manufacture to between 1550 and 1650.

So this andiron was made and was being used perhaps by the time of the death of Henry VIII in the mid 16th Century and was unlikely to have been made later than the Interregnum of the mid 17th Century. But by the time of the Restoration, when this example was probably decades old, it was likely to have been superseded and stored.

The 6page metallurgical report by Dr Brian Gilmore from Oxford University will be supplied with the andiron.