

Robert Burns Pocket Watch With Love Note From Jean Armour Sells For £39,650



A pocket watch belonging to Robert Burns and valued at £2,500 sold at Lyon & Turnbull for £39,650 yesterday. The silver pair cased pocket watch also contained a paper insert with bird and heart motifs and initials in ink from his wife Jean Armour and the rear cover has the name RobT Burns Mauchline 1786.

Colin Fraser Head of Silver and Jewellery at Lyon & Turnbull said "This is a great result. As a result of some excellent press coverage in the last week, we had bidders in the room, on the phone and the internet from Scotland and across the globe. The buyer wishes to remain anonymous."

Jean Armour was the famous, and arguably long suffering, wife of the poet Robert Burns. Born in Mauchline, Ayrshire in 1765 she met Burns in 1784 on drying green hanging out her washing. After chasing his dog away from her laundry they quickly struck up a relationship. By 1785 she was pregnant and the couple were not yet married, this was not the first time Burns had found himself in this predicament; her horrified father removed her to Paisley to save the family embarrassment and forbid her from seeing Burns again.

The local Kirk, having got wind of the situation, called the pair back to Mauchline to answer for themselves, Burns had reputedly intended to marry Jean, but her father, in his anger, had destroyed the informal agreement document. Burns quickly found solace with a number of other woman, and briefly considered moving to Jamaica, thinking he had been forsaken by Jean he then tried to declare himself single. Once he heard of

Burns' intentions Jean's father quickly issued a warrant for his arrest forcing him into hiding. It was during this period that Burns wrote the Kilmarnock Edition and that Jean gave birth to twins. She soon fell pregnant by Burns again, and by 1788 was destitute, disowned by her family and soon due to deliver another set of twins. Burns made a second attempt at marrying Jean that year, now a relatively famous and successful poet Jean's father's view of Burns miraculously turned in his favour. The pair were married, and she gave him nine children, the last of which was born on the day of his funeral in July 1796; Jean outlived him by well over thirty years, long enough to see his reputation become one of national acclaim.

The Belle of Mauchline, as she was once known, had a remarkable memory for quoting verse and Burns often read his work to her and greatly valued her opinion.

Despite his famous promiscuity, Jean remained his true love to the end of his days, a token of their affection can be seen in the hand-pierced paper decoration found in the back of the watch case, displaying the lovers' initials under two love birds. His love for her the subject of many of his poems; 'There's not a bonny flower that springs; By fountain, shaw or green; There's not a bonny bird that sings, but reminds me 'o my Jean.'