# Napoleon’s bicorn hat and private collection to fetch over £5 million at Paris auction



Napoleon Bonaparte, a figure whose impact on European history is both profound and complex, is once again at the centre of attention as a collection of his prized possessions heads to auction in Paris. Leading this auction, managed by Sotheby's, is perhaps the most recognisable item associated with him—his bicorn hat. Expected to fetch nearly £700,000, this hat is part of an extensive collection comprising around 100 items, with a total estimated value exceeding £5 million (€6 million). Among these items are personal memorabilia, including documents from his tumultuous marriage to Joséphine, a set of his linen clothes, and even a portable campaign bed that he held dear throughout his military campaigns.

The bicorn hat, crafted by Poupard, Napoleon’s official hat maker, takes on immense significance as a symbol of his identity. Worn with its wings parallel to his shoulders—an unconventional style meant to set him apart—this particular hat was later gifted to General Mouton, one of his closest commanders. Marine de Cenival, a Sotheby’s expert, emphasised the uniqueness of this auction, stating, "This is the first time that we are offering such an important group of lots about Napoleon. He is probably the most famous French person in the world."

This event unfolds against a backdrop of a rich history of Napoleon's life. From his rise on the island of Corsica in 1769 to his self-coronation as Emperor of France, Napoleon's legacy is marked by both triumph and tragedy. The collection, curated over 40 years by Pierre-Jean Chalençon, well-known as 'Napoleon's press officer', consists of artefacts that span his military conquests, family life, and even his exile to the desolate island of Saint Helena. Chalençon has recently found himself in financial distress and is selling the collection, alongside his Parisian mansion, as he attempts to resolve a €10 million debt.

Included in this extraordinary auction are intimate relics from Napoleon's relationship with Joséphine, his first wife. A handwritten marriage contract between the two is projected to sell for up to £42,000, while a folio thought to contain their divorce papers may bring in around £67,000. Their relationship has often been portrayed as passionate yet volatile, further fuelled by the frequent, ardent letters Napoleon penned to her, often met with terse replies that frustrated him deeply.

Moreover, this auction comes on the heels of a record-breaking sale in November 2023, where another bicorn hat worn by Napoleon sold for an astonishing €1.9 million ($2.1 million). This item, part of a larger collection of his memorabilia, underscores the continued fascination with Napoleonic artefacts and their significant stature in historical auctions.

As the auction date of June 25 approaches, anticipation builds around these items, each holding a narrative threaded into the broader tapestry of European history. The sale offers collectors and history enthusiasts alike a rare glimpse into the life of one of history's most impactful figures, as well as the opportunity to acquire items that shed light on his storied past.

In tandem with the auction, an exhibition will be running in Hong Kong until May 27, followed by a display in New York from June 5 to June 11, further enhancing the allure of these historical pieces ahead of their sale in Paris.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14740173/Napoleon-hat-auction-prized-possessions.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.sothebys.com/en/buy/auction/2025/napoleon-une-collection-historique-pf2591)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14740173/Napoleon-hat-auction-prized-possessions.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://edition.cnn.com/style/article/napoleon-josephine-tiaras-sothebys-london-sale/index.html), [[5]](https://www.rfi.fr/en/international-news/20231119-napoleon-s-hat-sells-for-record-sum-at-french-auction)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14740173/Napoleon-hat-auction-prized-possessions.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://news.artnet.com/market/hat-belonged-napoleon-bonaparte-just-sold-1-4-million-sothebys-2012810)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14740173/Napoleon-hat-auction-prized-possessions.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[6]](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-67465802)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14740173/Napoleon-hat-auction-prized-possessions.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[5]](https://www.rfi.fr/en/international-news/20231119-napoleon-s-hat-sells-for-record-sum-at-french-auction)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14740173/Napoleon-hat-auction-prized-possessions.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.sothebys.com/en/buy/auction/2025/napoleon-une-collection-historique-pf2591), [[6]](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-67465802)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14740173/Napoleon-hat-auction-prized-possessions.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.sothebys.com/en/buy/auction/2025/napoleon-une-collection-historique-pf2591> - Sotheby's is set to auction a significant collection dedicated to Napoleon Bonaparte and the Empire period on June 25, 2025, in Paris. This collection, assembled over more than 40 years by renowned collector Pierre-Jean Chalençon, includes Imperial furniture, silverware, porcelain, sculpture, Old Master paintings, and drawings, all with prestigious provenance. The sale offers a comprehensive portrait of Napoleon's life, spanning his childhood, military career, coronation at Notre-Dame, family life with his siblings, the fall of the Empire, and his exile to the island of Saint Helena. This auction presents a unique opportunity to acquire pieces of French history. For assistance with bidding and registration, interested parties can contact Sotheby's at enquiries@sothebys.com or call France +33 (0) 1 53 05 53 48.
3. <https://edition.cnn.com/style/article/napoleon-josephine-tiaras-sothebys-london-sale/index.html> - In December 2021, two tiaras believed to have belonged to Empress Joséphine Bonaparte, the first wife of French Emperor Napoleon, were auctioned at Sotheby's in London. The tiaras, crafted in the early 19th century, are part of matching jewelry sets and feature engraved gemstones depicting classical figures. One tiara, made of gold with blue enamel accents and vivid red carnelian engravings, sold for £576,000 ($763,000), exceeding the high estimate of £500,000 ($662,000). The second gold and enamel tiara, featuring cameo portraits of ancient Greek deities, was previously held on loan by London's Victoria & Albert Museum and was noted as 'probably a gift from Napoleon’s sister Caroline Murat.' The sale highlights the enduring fascination with Empress Joséphine and her influence on neoclassical fashion during Napoleon's reign.
4. <https://news.artnet.com/market/hat-belonged-napoleon-bonaparte-just-sold-1-4-million-sothebys-2012810> - In September 2021, a bicorne hat that once belonged to Napoleon Bonaparte sold for €1.2 million ($1.4 million) at Sotheby's in Paris. Believed to have been worn by the first French emperor on July 7, 1807, during a meeting with Russia’s Alexander I to sign the Treaty of Tilsit, the hat far exceeded its pre-sale estimate of €500,000–700,000 ($587,000–822,000). This sale was part of a Sotheby's Paris event dedicated to Napoleon, marking the bicentenary of his death. Other items in the sale included gilded bronze candelabras, a set of flintlock officer pistols, and locks of the emperor’s hair, reflecting the enduring interest in Napoleonic memorabilia.
5. <https://www.rfi.fr/en/international-news/20231119-napoleon-s-hat-sells-for-record-sum-at-french-auction> - In November 2023, a bicorne hat belonging to Napoleon Bonaparte sold for a record €1.932 million ($2.1 million) at a French auction. The hat, known for its black color with the French flag's blue-white-red insignia, attracted interest from collectors worldwide. It was last owned by businessman Jean-Louis Noisiez, who passed away the previous year. Other Napoleon memorabilia from the Noisiez collection, including a Legion of Honour medal and a pair of silver spurs, were also auctioned. The sale underscores the enduring fascination with Napoleon's personal artifacts and their significant value in the collector's market.
6. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-67465802> - In November 2023, a bicorne hat worn by Napoleon Bonaparte was sold for €1.9 million ($2.1 million) at an auction in Paris. The black beaver felt hat, valued between €600,000 and €800,000, was part of Napoleon's signature attire and made him recognizable in battle. Historians note that he owned about 120 such hats over the years. The identity of the buyer has not been disclosed. This sale highlights the continued interest and high value of Napoleonic memorabilia in the auction market.