# Napoleon’s bicorne hat expected to fetch £670,000 in high-profile Paris auction



Napoleon Bonaparte, the storied figure of French history, remains a compelling character nearly two centuries after his reign. Known as the 'Little Corporal,' he was not only an astute military tactician but also a master manipulator of public perception, accentuated by his distinctive bicorne hat, famously worn sideways. Now, this iconic piece of headwear is at the forefront of a notable auction of Napoleon's possessions, taking place at Sotheby’s Paris on June 25, where the ensemble is expected to fetch upwards of £5 million (€6 million).

The bicorne hat, crafted by Poupard, Napoleon's official hat maker, has garnered much attention with an estimated sale price nearing £670,000 (€800,000). The hat's unique orientation—a style dubbed "en bataille"—allowed Napoleon to stand out on the battlefield, securing his image as both a leader and a brand. This particular example was a cherished gift to General Mouton, one of his key commanders, highlighting its significance beyond mere fashion. Sotheby's expert Marine De Cenival has noted that this auction offers a remarkable assortment of items pivotal to Napoleon's life, symbolising his enduring legacy as perhaps the most recognised Frenchman in history.

Among the treasures being auctioned are other signs of Napoleon's tumultuous personal life, notably his relationship with his first wife, Josephine. The handwritten marriage contract, meticulously drafted to present a united front before the Vatican, is expected to sell for about £42,000 (€50,000). This document marks a poignant chapter in their complex romance, which ended in divorce when Josephine was unable to provide a male heir, a situation that Napoleon desperately craved.

In addition to these personal relics, historical artefacts from his military campaigns are also on offer. A signature portable campaign bed—revered by Napoleon for its comfort—is estimated to reach £50,000 (€60,000). This was no ordinary bed; Napoleon valued it so much that he used it both in wartime and at his residences in France, leaving behind a poignant legacy that he regarded as a modest gift to his son, meant to preserve the memory of "a father the universe will forever speak of."

The significance of the bicorne is further underscored by its historical rarity; of the estimated 120 hats owned by Napoleon, only about 20 remain today, primarily due to private ownership and the passage of time. This auction presents a unique opportunity for collectors and historians alike to acquire a piece of history that encapsulates the essence of an era marked by ambition, power, and personal conflict. Earlier auctions of Napoleon's possessions have set a precedence for high bids; for instance, one of his hats fetched a staggering €1.9 million (£1.69 million) in a recent sale, reflecting the intense interest in Napoleonic memorabilia.

The auction is further enriched by the presence of other significant items, such as a ceremonial sword and stick used during his 1804 coronation, expected to draw around £336,000 (€400,000), and a gold-enamelled necklace watch, potentially sold for up to £50,400 (€60,000). Together, these items weave a narrative of triumph and tragedy, encapsulating the life of a man who reshaped Europe and whose personal relationships were as intricate as his military strategies.

Napoleon's image resonates beyond mere historical analysis; it has been brought to contemporary audiences through recent adaptations in media, including Ridley Scott's film featuring Joaquin Phoenix. The combination of artistry and historicity fuels ongoing fascination with this compelling figure, as modern audiences grapple with his legacy.

As the auction day approaches, the world watches closely, eager to see the final sales figures of not just a hat, but of deeply embedded symbols of an era. This collection paints a vibrant picture of an unparalleled life defined by power, ambition, and personal trials—a narrative that continues to intrigue and engage.

## 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.apnews.com/article/france-napoleon-hat-auction-17488b43e428aefee869c6b19bed2103)
* Paragraph 2 – [[3]](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/france/article/2023/11/19/napoleon-s-hat-sells-for-record-sum-at-french-auction_6269545_7.html), [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/nov/19/napoleon-hat-fetches-record-price-paris-auction), [[5]](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-67465802)
* 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), [[6]](https://www.wsls.com/news/world/2023/11/17/one-of-napoleons-signature-bicorne-hats-on-auction-in-france-could-fetch-upwards-of-650000/)
* 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), [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/nov/19/napoleon-hat-fetches-record-price-paris-auction)
* 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.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.apnews.com/article/france-napoleon-hat-auction-17488b43e428aefee869c6b19bed2103> - A faded and cracked felt bicorne hat worn by Napoleon Bonaparte sold for $2.1 million at an auction of the French emperor’s belongings. The hat, known as a bicorne, is in Napoleon's trademark colors—black, with the French flag's colors blue-white-red as insignia—and attracted interest from collectors worldwide. It was last owned by businessman Jean-Louis Noisiez, who died last year. The final price was more than double the estimate of $650,000 to $870,000, and nearly four times the reserve price. Napoleon is believed to have owned around 120 such hats in total, most of which are now lost.
3. <https://www.lemonde.fr/en/france/article/2023/11/19/napoleon-s-hat-sells-for-record-sum-at-french-auction_6269545_7.html> - A hat belonging to Napoleon Bonaparte when he was French emperor sold for a record €1.932 million ($2.1 million) at a French auction. The hat, known as a bicorne, is in Napoleon's trademark colors—black, with the French flag's colors blue-white-red as insignia—and attracted interest from collectors worldwide. It was last owned by businessman Jean-Louis Noisiez, who died last year. The final price was more than double the estimate of €600,000 to €800,000, and nearly four times the reserve price. Napoleon is believed to have owned around 120 such hats in total, most of which are now lost.
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/nov/19/napoleon-hat-fetches-record-price-paris-auction> - A two-cornered hat worn by Napoleon Bonaparte during his reign as French emperor has fetched a record €1.932 million (£1.69 million) at an auction in Paris. The black bicorne beaver felt hat was initially estimated at €600,000-800,000. The price surpassed the €1.884 million paid for another of Napoleon’s hats in 2014. The hat is one of 20 remaining out of 120 the French military commander is believed to have owned in his lifetime. Napoleon wore his hats sideways to ensure he was distinguishable on the battlefield, creating one of the most recognizable brands in history.
5. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-67465802> - A hat belonging to Napoleon Bonaparte when he ruled France in the 19th Century has been sold for €1.9 million ($2.1 million; £1.7 million) at auction in Paris. The bicorne black beaver felt hat was valued between €600,000 and €800,000. The person who bought the hat has not made themselves known. Historians say the hat was part of his brand. Wearing it sideways made him recognizable in battle. He owned about 120 bicorne hats over the years. However, only 20 are thought to remain—many in private collections.
6. <https://www.wsls.com/news/world/2023/11/17/one-of-napoleons-signature-bicorne-hats-on-auction-in-france-could-fetch-upwards-of-650000/> - The faded black felt hat is the star piece, valued at between €600,000 and €800,000 ($650,000 to $870,000). While other officers customarily wore their hats with the wings facing front to back, Napoleon wore his with the ends pointing toward his shoulders. That style—known as “en bataille,” in battle, in French—made it easier for his troops to spot the military general and statesman in combat. The hat on sale was first recovered by Col. Pierre Baillon, a quartermaster under Napoleon and one of his comrades in arms in many battles, including Waterloo, according to the auctioneers. The hat then passed through many hands before Noisiez acquired it. The entrepreneur spent more than half a century assembling his collection of Napoleonic memorabilia, firearms, swords, and coins before his death in 2022.
7. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/23/napoleon-josephine-marriage-contract-sold-auction> - The marriage contract signed by Napoléon Bonaparte and Joséphine de Beauharnais on 8 March 1796 has been sold at auction for several times the estimated price. The document, until now held in a private collection, was De Beauharnais’s copy and gives her full name of Marie Josèphe Rose Tascher de La Pagerie. It was signed the day before the marriage and three days before Bonaparte left Paris for Nice to take command of the army of Italy during the French revolutionary wars. It had been estimated to be worth €80,000 to €100,000 (£49,000 to £61,000), but was sold after furious bidding on Sunday to the Paris Museum of Letters and Manuscripts for €350,000 without auctioneer’s commission and fees (€437,500 including auctioneer’s costs). The contract was drawn up a year after the couple met and two months after Bonaparte, then a young general, proposed to De Beauharnais, the sophisticated and worldly widow of a guillotined French revolution general. Although his family disapproved, Bonaparte was besotted and described his fiancée as “worse than beautiful.” The contract states that the pair have “no common property” and that neither should be held “responsible for the debts and mortgages of the other.”