Two-bottle Edwardian sterling silver tantalus set

George Betjemann & Sons

£9,800



REF: 9626

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Height: 305 mm (12.01")

Width: 305 mm (12.01")

Depth: 175 mm (6.89")

Description

Rare solid sterling silver example of the classic and famously patented Betjemann Tantalus. This silver tantalus frame features two wood lined sockets that hold two square plain glass decanters with hollow, round bubble stoppers. The body of each decanter is beautifully engraved with a crest featuring a swan with elevated wings and the word confido which means "I trust", attributed to the Sellar family. All parts of the silver frame are hallmarked with marks for Betjemann Lock Co, the company that invented and patented this device.

The concept of lockable decanters, where the contents could be viewed but not opened or poured unless the case was opened by a key, was named after the Greek mythological mortal, Tantalus. Legend has it that Tantalus stole ambrosia and nectar from the gods and was punished for his lack of self-control by being made to stand in a lake with low hanging fruit trees above him. Whenever he tried to grab the fruit the branches would lift beyond his reach and when he bent to drink the water the lake would recede from him. This punishment of temptation is where the word tantalise comes from and the tantalus is often believed to have been designed to prevent household staff from stealing or sampling the decanter's contents.