Victorian Betjemann silver-plated cut glass spirit tantalus

Betjemann Brothers

£395



REF: 10239

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Height: 205 mm (8.07")

Description

Late-Victorian-era cut glass decanter and stopper fitted with a lockable Betjemann tantalus silver-plated collar, complete with the original key. The decanter is crisply cut in hobnail, diamond and lattice formations, while the cut corners of the decanter feature horizontal fluting and there is a starburst cut into the base. The ball-shaped glass stopper is multi-faceted and has a fluted dome.

The lock is marked Betjemann's patent. The Betjemann tantalus locking system was invented by George Betjemann, grandfather of the noted English poet and broadcaster, Sir John Betjeman, in 1881.

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.