LANGFORDS
Antique & Contemporary Silver

Set Edwardian silver napkin rings

William Devenport

Sold

Langfords
London Silver Vaults • Vaults 8 & 10 • 53-64 Chancery Lane • London • WC2A 1QS
+44 20 7242 6646 • silver@langfords.com • www.langfords.com

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Description

Unusual and attractive set of six antique silver napkin rings with hand-engraved decoration. Each napkin ring has four lobes in cross section with cast scroll edges that give extra weight and strength. Each of these rings is engraved with an initial. A to F, so every family member knows which is his or hers.

It is said that silver napkin rings emerged at the start of the 19th century in France and rose in popularity among the European bourgeoisie from 1800. Few Georgian silver napkin rings remain so the vast majority of antique silver napkin rings found today were made after 1850.

Their primary purpose was one driven by hygiene. Napkins were not washed every day so a personalised napkin ring would assign a particular napkin to an individual. Curiously, etiquette ensured that guests were never presented with a napkin ring; it would imply they had been given a previously used napkin.

Typically made in pairs or sets of four, six or 12, silver napkin rings provided an extra opportunity to decorate the dining table and silver was the perfect material. (Incidentally, silver also has antiseptic properties.) Silver's malleability meant it could be fashioned into different forms and embellished in fine detail to produce some very fine examples reflecting the styles and fashions of the day; from the simple to the very elaborate displaying intricate chased designs and stylised engraving.

Not all napkin rings were circular. Square, elliptical and hexagonal examples are not uncommon, while figural silver napkin rings were very popular in America, depicting all sorts of forms including dogs, cats and horses.

Sometimes referred to as a christening bangle, from their arrival, napkin rings have traditionally been a popular christening gift, and for weddings too.

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