

LANGFORDS

Antique & Contemporary Silver

Edwardian silver-mounted crystal locking decanter
George Betjemann & Sons

Sold



REF: 8414

Height: 225 mm (8.86")

Width: 140 mm (5.51")

Depth: 95 mm (3.74")

Description

A fine antique Tantalus lockable decanter, with hand cut glass body decorated with a hobnail and diamond pattern. The mounts, cast handle and lock are sterling silver and the tantalus is fitted with a multifaceted glass stopper.

The lock is marked Betjemann's patent. The Betjemann tantalus was invented by George Betjemann, grandfather of the noted English poet and broadcaster, Sir John Betjeman, in 1881. It was once thought that the Betjemann tantalus was designed in order to prevent a household's butler from stealing or sampling the decanters' contents.

The concept of lockable decanters 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.