



## A SWEET FIND



**Y**ears and years of handling antiques, coupled with continual reading and research are what prepare and equip specialist dealers and collectors with the skills to recognise rare pieces.

Sometimes they have to wait a lifetime to find that special treasure, but in the case of Cape silver dealer Jeremy Astfalck of The Old Corkscrew, in Franschhoek, the wait was half a lifetime.

Jeremy, who has been in the antiques business for some 30 years, is one of the most enthusiastic, positive and informed local dealers, who's naturally developed an instinct for finding the rare and unusual.

Jeremy was up in Gauteng to attend the household sale of a deceased estate. The first day he viewed the larger items and the next day went back to view all the smaller, 'less important' items. The moment he spied a small, oval silver box with a hinged lid engraved with a coat of arms, his heart stopped. Advertised in the auction catalogue as 'Continental silver' with a value of between R600 and R800

this small box, once used on a daily basis by the owner for keys and odd bits and pieces, was, Jeremy instantly realised, a very old sugar box. "I spent the whole day with that box," he says. "And that night I hardly slept."

At the auction the following day it was obvious that word had got out and when the box came up for sale, telephone bids from dealers in Europe were keen. But Jeremy was determined and he had the advantage of being on the spot and being 100 percent sure of what he was bidding on: a very rare sugar box, hallmarked London 1662 from the time of Charles II, just after the Cromwellian Commonwealth. The box was eventually knocked down to Jeremy for R170 500.

The maker's mark is HB joined with a mullet below; last year the Fogg Art Museum in America attributed this to either Humphrey Bates or Hugh Bollen. The coat of arms engraved on the lid of the box is that of the Offley family. The box is the third earliest documented example. The first is dated 1650 and the second 1661. In 1996, the 1661 box sold at Sotheby's in London for £19 000. How amazing that such a rarity should be found in this country and even more that a local dealer should recognise it for what it is. ■■■

Members of the South African Antique Dealers' Association will be exhibiting their wares at the Annual Antique Dealers' Fair at the Kirstenbosch Conference Centre from 14 – 15 February 2009. Call 021 422 1319.

### SOURCES

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