

EXETER. An extremely rare George III Silver mounted Cowrie Shell
"Fish" Snuff Box made in Exeter in 1818 by John Webb.

Sold



Description

West Country Snuff Boxes are virtually non-existent, as so very few were made. This very unusual George III silver mounted natural shell example was made by the very scarce maker, John Webb, and assayed in Exeter in 1818. This rare piece is modelled to simulate a fish in its shape and the natural shell unusually has the shape of a fish as well. The cover is beautifully engraved with a mouth, eye and tail, as well as finely executed scale work, to simulate a fish. The side silver mounts hold the shell in place and are decorated with ribbing and vertical linear lobes. The shell is naturally shaded and the side mounts are engraved with the presentation inscription "Decr 23rd M. BARTLETT to J. UNDERHILL 1864", this obviously being given as a Christmas present. Silver mounted shell boxes were not made in great quantities at all, due to their fragile nature, however we have never seen a West Country one before. We have been researching the maker, John Webb, and he had a distinctive maker's mark with two pellets, one inbetween and one after his initials. The date letter "b" is the distinctive one for Exeter in 1818 which kicks back at the bottom, and the lion passant in the square punch. Webb was first mentioned in the Exeter assay books in 1818, so this piece represents an early example of his work. In the list of work assayed in Exeter are three box mounts, one of which will refer to this box, which is very nice indeed. As intimated, work by Webb is rare most probably as the last time he is mentioned is 1822, so he only had a four year working life. The piece is in excellent condition. Length: 3.6 inches, 9 cm. Width: 1.55 inches, 3.88 cm. Height: 0.9 inches, 2.25 cm.