



**A magnificent mid-19th century silver and silver gilt filigree casket of Irish and Jewish interest inscribed 'By M. Erlich Manufacturing Jeweller Dublin 1858
£18,500.00**

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Of exceptional size, the main body designed as a series of square motifs of undulating form centred on a raised gilt stud to the chamfered corners formed of round tower form with gilt ball top and square base. The conically raised lid echoes the main body in the lower register before tapering to the top with diamond shaped motifs with triangular infill and gilt studs with a delicate chain defining the sections. The top formed of a plain silver rectangular panel surmounted by a filigree bouquet of flowers. The edge of the base decorated with outwardly curved trefoils and plain silver bases to the corner towers.

Filigree has been an art form used in both jewellery and objects since ancient times around the globe. In Ireland there was a particularly flourishing period in the early medieval period which echoed the complex patterns seen in illuminated manuscripts, the famous carpet pages found in early manuscripts. This Insular period is also renowned for the penannular brooches and articles of church silver decorated with exceptionally complex filigree work. During the 19th century several archaeological finds led to a new appreciation of such work and a revival in the technique.

In Europe the prime period for filigree objects was the 17th century, particularly in the Iberian Peninsula, where the tradition was inherited from its Islamic past, Italy and the Netherlands. Global trade during this period brought an interest in the art forms of the East where filigree also had a long history and inspired new motifs and decoration in Europe. Caskets were particularly popular, often as part of a dressing table set or simply as objects of curiosity, especially those of Indo-Portuguese origin. Despite a decline in popularity during the 18th century, the 19th century saw an upsurge in interest as collectors began to recognise the quality of works produced in earlier eras and this in turn produced a flourishing industry in historicising works.

A 17th/18th Century filigree casket, its origin has been attributed to both the Netherlands and Indo-Portuguese craftsmen.

Filigree has also been an important feature of Jewish metal work, both in Europe and the Levant, as an art form it was perfect in providing intricate and precious containers that complied with religious restrictions, a tenant shared with Islamic tradition. Many such objects were made in

Russia and central Europe, often in the form of spice boxes and usually of tower form, and notably by the communities in the Yemen. Filigree would be a major feature of works produced by the Bezalel Academy of Art after its foundation in Jerusalem where artists from the greater diaspora came together sharing ideas and techniques.

A complex mid-19th century central European spice tower

This superb box demonstrates exceptional skill in the filigree technique at a time when its popularity was increasing. It draws on the traditions of earlier periods while displaying a boldness of design in keeping with 19th century ideas of design.

Sadly, not much is known of its maker as many records from this period in Ireland have been destroyed.

Myer Erlich or Ehrilch, was born in 1827 in England and moved from Birmingham to Dublin in 1853. He was probably trained in Birmingham as a silversmith, and he quickly established himself in Dublin as within 5 years of his arrival he is signing this box as a manufacturing jeweller. Interestingly, in form the box bears comparison with the large freedom caskets which were produced during the Victorian period as civic gifts to individuals and often produced by Birmingham firms.