



**James Lowe**  
Silver Specialist



## The Lesquesne Silver Coffee Pot

**At auction in 1971 estimate £20,000 – £25,000**

**At auction in 1983 estimate £150,000 – £175,000**

**At auction in 2013 estimate £3.5 – £4 million!!**

I have had the pleasure of handling this wonderful piece of silver three times over the years but sadly never as the owner or vendor!

Paul de Lamerie is always lauded as being England's finest silversmith, but as his name suggests he is from the continent. He was in fact Dutch, – Holland actual arriving in England as a 1 year old with his Huguenot family, escaping the religious persecution of the time.

In 1703 he was apprenticed to a fellow Huguenot smith, Pierre Plattel, and by 1713 had set up his own workshop. He very quickly became well known for quality workmanship combined with a sense of style, showing some continental influences which were easily incorporated in the emerging Rococo taste and style of decoration.

The pot was commissioned in 1738 by Sir John Lequesne to commemorate his wedding to Miss Mary Knight of Hampshire and both of their Coats of Arms are engraved to the side of the pot. Sir John was a fellow Huguenot of about the same age as Lamerie and had become a highly successful and wealthy trader in London in the 1720s and a prominent political figure. Contemporary records imply that Lesquesne was somewhat of a smooth operator, gaining his knighthood by being very solicitous and supportive of the newly arrived George II from Germany. Sadly though, the marriage was short lived as Sir John died shortly after in 1741.

English silver of the Queen Anne and George I periods is generally quite restrained: with plain conical, octagonal, or pear-shaped bodies and little in the way of applied or engraved decoration. This pot, although still having a pear-shaped body raised up from a single disc of silver, has bold spiral flutes chased into it and the three scroll legs are cast and join the body on panels which are cast and applied and depict putti clasping the branches of a coffee bush. The short stubby spout emerges from a finely cast mask of a youth emerging from a coffee branch cluster and the handle sockets are cast as snarling lions' masks.

There is a short spout at the top of the body, rather than being a long slender spout from the bottom of the body. It was designed thus for a practical reason. Tea, coffee and hot chocolate all came to England from the mid 17th century and by the early 1700s coffee was being drunk rather like Turkish coffee these days; that is a very thick and heavy brew which had sugar added before being transferred to the pot, making it quite 'gloopy' to pour. This would have been a problem with a long slender curved spout.

The use of coffee bush branches as a decorative feature is, as far as we are aware, unique. Presumably, they were used to denote it being a coffee pot, but it has also been suggested that one of Lesquesne's business ventures might well have been in the importing of coffee to England, so the design may have been a nod to this trade. The finial is cast with shells (very much a Rococo feature) and there are small panels of finely engraved trellis-like decoration in the Chinoiserie taste. There are also some very boldly chased floral clusters and swags. It may be somewhat of a riot of decorative styles incorporated in a pot that measures under 30 cms, but in my opinion it works marvellously well.

So why is this George II silver coffee pot worth hundreds of times more than any other pot of the same era? Firstly, it is the de Lamerie factor. He gained the Royal warrant from George II only three years after setting up on his own, and he was also a silversmith favoured by members of the Houses of Parliament. Most of his production was on a commissioned basis from wealthy patrons, most had coats of arms, and a lot of contemporary records survive.

But despite his popularity and great success over his 30 or so year career, his production was surprisingly limited. Even the smallest of his products was superior in quality and style than most of his contemporaries and he never bought in stock from other smiths – a practice quite common where a smith would buy bits from a fellow smith before hallmarking and marking it with his own maker's mark. The legally enforceable Hallmarking Act, which has been in operation for 750 years or so, has worked well and as far as I'm aware there are no de Lamerie fakes around, and unlike the picture world you don't find silver with the 'school of Lamerie' or 'in the manner of Lamerie' labels.

You would have thought that a silver coffee pot made for use over 250 years ago would show some signs of wear, but this pot is as crisp and sharp as when it left the factory. I am therefore sure that from day one it was a piece of silver that commanded respect and reverence and may have spent much of its life as a showpiece. Even the fruitwood handle looks to be original.

Secondly, is the design factor of the pot. It is the first recorded piece of English silver that carries features from the French Regency style that was prevalent in the early 1720s in Europe. This trend developed into the full-blooded Rococo period of the mid-century which influenced the decorative features of furniture and paintings for several decades.

Thirdly, it is a seminal work of art in my opinion and a wonderful example of the silversmiths' skills. Works of art do not have to be painted on canvas!!

And finally, it is totally unique. Thankfully, because if there were another one around I couldn't even afford the knob on the top!



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