

Victorian Mourning Hair Jewellery

1840-1900

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This thesis is submitted by the undersigned to the Institute of Art Design and technology, Dun Laoghaire in partial fulfilment of the BA (Hons) in Design for Stage and Screen. It is entirely the author's own work except where noted, and has not been submitted for an award from this or any other educational institution.

Date: 15/02/2024

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized capital letter 'A' followed by a smaller, cursive 'u'.

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I would like to thank Siobhán O' Gorman and Lynda Dunne for their support and guidance through this body of work.

I would also like to thank my parents, specifically my mother in which without her support I would not be where I am today.

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Abstract

My thesis focuses on the history of Victorian mourning jewellery from 1840 through to 1900, focusing on hair work in particular, including hair jewellery, braiding techniques, hat box tables. This thesis explores the cultural context, historical significance and the delicate craftsmanship of hair work.

The main research focuses on Memento Mori, which is a contemplative technique that acts as a reminder of one's own death and the fleeting nature of life's pleasures. The Latin phrase Memento mori means "remember you must die." Throughout European history, the idea of "remembering death" has been present, and various societies have customs that take distinct approaches to the same idea.

Queen Victoria, being the ruler of this era, Victorian mourning rituals were largely shaped by Queen Victoria.

The societal rituals of grieving, adult mourners tended to wear black as a prominent colour for their outward show of sadness. The duration of grieving differed based on the deceased's relationship to the living.

This thesis allows a deeper understanding of the rituals of grieving and how symbolism was shown throughout. In this body of research I unpicked the craftsmanship that goes into creating the beloved hair jewellery I based this thesis around.

Research for this thesis focuses on particular jewellery from the Victoria & Albert Museum, the British Museum and the Walters Art Museum.

The idea for this thesis stems from my own love and interest for all things macabre, and the Victorian era. It also ties in with my Major Project as I am creating a Victorian era wedding gown from this time period.

Keywords: Victorian mourning, Hair jewellery, 19th century, Queen Victoria, Memento Mori.

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Introduction

The origin of the inquiry for this thesis began with my interest in jewellery, the Victorian era and all things macabre. I have an intense fascination with mortality, death and the culture of mourning as a whole and thought, there was no better way to combine all of the above than with the topic of ‘Victorian mourning jewellery.’

What exactly is mourning jewellery, we must first ask? Jewellery that honours and commemorates the deceased is referred to as memorial jewellery or mourning jewellery.

Mourning jewellery is a singular, emotional manifestation of grief, recollection, and cultural rituals within the substantial fabric of historical artefacts.

This style of jewellery, which dates back to the Victorian era, combines intricate craftsmanship with the nuanced feelings associated with loss to create a concrete representation of sorrow. These elaborate creations, made of materials such as black jet, onyx, and even woven human hair, are testaments to the grim craftsmanship that arose in the face of loss.

This thesis explores the complex realm of mourning jewellery, revealing the cultural intricacies, changing perspectives on loss, and symbolism of the unique Victorian era. Mourning jewellery was an essential component of Victorian-era culture as it allowed people to express their grief and memorize loved ones.

The purpose of this thesis proposal is to investigate the meaning and significance of Victorian mourning jewellery, as well as the various cultural and social factors that influenced its development and popularity. Throughout this body of work I look at Queen Victoria’s personal memorabilia, Colour theory in mourning etiquette, the memento mori culture, rituals of grieving and different types of Victorian Mourning Jewellery. Gathering information from sources such as primary and secondary images from the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, and from Chris Woodyard’s ‘Victorian book of the dead’.

In this research I proposed to explore and address the following sets of ideas; To examine the historical significance and social role of memorial jewellery in early modern England's mourning cultures.

This study reveals the customary position mourning jewellery grew to occupy, as a means for the remembrance and commemoration of the dead, over the course of the 19th century.

Mourning jewellery represented a particularly distinctive aspect of mourning and funerary ritual and etiquette. I wish to explore the pattern of giving and wearing mourning or memorial jewellery and its increase and flourish, supposedly reaching its cultural apex during the reign of Queen Victoria.

I wanted to research the era in which memorial jewellery reached its peak of popularity and why/the reasoning behind said cultural significance. My plan was to explore in depth memorial jewellery, specifically hair jewellery and how it was created.

Additionally, I wanted to research and explore more about the history, origins, and early development of memorial jewellery.

I wished to research the use of memorial jewellery based on social class, if it was available to all classes, its popularity with the upper class and if the jewellery type differed based on class.

I also wished to explore mourning in the Victorian era and the etiquette that came with the whole ritualistic behaviours

Chapter I

The Background of Victorian Mourning Jewellery

In this chapter I explore the term memento mori, where its derived from and how it came to be incorporated into mourning jewellery. In this chapter I shed light on some exquisite Victorian Mourning jewellery, along with some of Queen Victoria's own jewellery from her collection. I then go on to speak about colour theory and why certain materials were used to create mourning pieces.

Memento Mori

According to the Gemological Institute of America, the custom of wearing mourning jewellery dates back to the 16th century, when macabre pieces, sometimes decorated with skulls and crossbones, were worn as a physical representation of the Latin phrase memento mori "remember you must die". (Antique Jewelry University, 2023)

By the 19th century, however, grieving had changed in character as the focus switched to the person and the celebration of love, sentiment, and memory. The monarch herself, Queen Victoria, whose name has come to represent the state of grief, served as the model for this new mood.



Fig 1. Sixteenth Century French Memento Mori Pendant. 16thC. *the British Museum*.

<https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/image/22910001>

'Memento mori' gold pendant in the form of a coffin enamelled in black and white with a hinged rock-crystal cover and a skeleton in high relief. The reverse and insides are enamelled with tongues of fire.

Jewellery designed to serve as a constant reminder of mortality and the importance of leading a moral life during the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries is known as memento mori jewellery.

The theme's intention is very clearly conveyed by the translation of the Latin, "remember you must die." The main elements that strikingly conveyed the underlying feeling of impending death were skulls, skeletons, and coffins, which were frequently crafted in gold and enamel .

The memento mori diamond contained a significant amount of text that expressed ideas about death, mortality, remembering, and religion. Written in Latin, French, or English, they were either surreptitiously engraved or enamelled on the exterior of a jewel or covertly on the interior, visible only to the specific recipient.

Although they might also be pendants, brooches, or locket, rings were the most popular type of memento mori jewellery. There was a rise in bequests for mourning rings in the sixteenth century. These were frequently merely simple bands with an inscription honouring the deceased (sometimes even mentioned in the estate.)



Fig 2. Memento Mori Fede Ring c.1526-1575 *the British Museum*. Gold ring, band with hands clasped, gemstones and skull detailing.

https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_WB-199

According to Moll, a predetermined list of mourners were left with money designated for the creation of the rings. The motif combined with memorial jewellery around the middle of the seventeenth century, and it became common to incorporate the deceased person's hair, important dates, and initials into the piece in addition to the skull, coffin symbols, and message.

The custom thrived throughout the eighteenth century, but the name of the person being memorialised became more prominent, the mourning motifs became less graphic, and the employment of exquisite hairwork and elaborate allegories became the norm.

Memento mori rings were worn as a symbol of remembrance and a reminder of one's own mortality in the sixteenth century, the hair-work tradition first appeared in that form. From that point forward, they were utilized by the aristocracy and royalty as items of status as well as memorials for lost loved ones, frequently in lavish, ornamental designs. But by the Victorian era, they had started to show up across the social scale, incorporating Victorian notions of sentimentality and personal remembrance.

mourning rings—rings that people wore in memory of dead parents, spouses, friends. The rings are engraved with the decedent's initials, and sometimes with a death date. This was a commonplace practice in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, this exchanging of mourning rings. The rings helped the bereaved continue to feel close to their dead. And the rings kept the reality of death ever before people, intimately wrapped around their fingers. (Moll, 2021)

As previously mentioned, the memento mori object, translated to "remember, you must die" or "remember, you are mortal," The term "memento mori" dates back to 1287 in medieval Latin, while the first known use of the term was in 1598 and hasn't really died down, regardless of decorative trends.' The traditional memento mori piece was not strictly mourning jewellery; rather, it was a general warning about the transient nature of life rather than a reference to a specific individual.

By the mid 17th century Memento Mori rings were given a more personal stamp by the addition of names usually in the form of initials, dates and even coats of arms, transforming them from exhortations to virtuous living into memorials of individuals.

Instructions for ordering and distributing memorial rings were often given in wills, the list of people who were deemed worthy to receive these rings was frequently quite long, and thus the expense was considerable.

Queen Victoria – Personal Memorabilia

Queen Victoria was born on May 24, 1819, at Kensington Palace, as Alexandrina Victoria, after her godfather, Tsar Alexander I, but she preferred to be known by her second name, or the nickname 'Drina. Victoria was born fifth in the line of succession to the British monarchy, after George III's four eldest sons, including her three uncles and father, Edward.

Despite the fact that her grandparents, King George III and Queen Charlotte, had 15 children, Victoria's generation had only one legitimate heir to the throne: King George IV's daughter Princess Charlotte. However, Charlotte died in childbirth before bearing an heir, prompting her uncles, notably Victoria's father, Edward, to go on a frenetic quest to marry and produce a legitimate successor. Edward quickly married the widowed German princess Victoria of Saxe-Coburg-Saalfeld, and the couple had Victoria a year later, in 1819.

According to Vargas' article '16 Fascinating Facts You Didn't Know About Queen Victoria' Before her 17th birthday party, then-Princess Victoria met her first cousin, Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha. Four years later, Victoria, now the monarch, proposed to Prince Albert on October 15, 1839, and they married on February 10, 1840, in the Chapel Royal of St. James's Palace in London.

Over the course of her life, Queen Victoria was mother to nine children with Prince Albert. Victoria, Edward VII, Alice, Alfred, Helena, Louise, Arthur, Leopold and Beatrice.

Her sons and daughters would later go on to marry into several other European monarchies, and would go on to produce the Queen's 42 grandchildren. Her descendants still rule over several countries in Europe. (Vargas, 2022)

Queen Victoria, had numerous losses during the course of her lengthy reign of 63 years from 1837-1901, spending decades lamenting the loss of not just Albert but also her mother and three of her children.

Since the queen was a role model for her court and a beloved public figure, mourning jewellery became one of the most popular orders and included softer, more sympathetic designs like hearts and flowers as well as miniature pictures of the deceased.

In the years following the passing of her Husband Prince Albert in 1861, Queen Victoria preserved her illustrious reputation as the "perpetual widow" (Antique Trader) while also

contributing to the codification of the intricacies of grieving fashion. Over the course of the next four decades, she famously and openly exhibited her sorrow by draping herself in black crepe and wearing an abundance of jewellery and commissioning countless items to honour her beloved late husband and other family members.



Fig 3. Pictured above; One of Queen Victoria's mourning pieces honouring her daughter, Alice: onyx, banded agate, enamel and diamond pendant circa 1878, centering on an onyx heart with Alice beneath a coronet, and a glazed compartment containing a lock of hair. This sold at auction for \$34,821. Courtesy of Sotheby's

<https://www.townandcountrymag.com/style/jewelry-and-watches/a35809006/queen-victoria-mourning-jewelry-sothebys/>



Fig 4. Banded agate and diamond locket, 1861, with a miniature photograph of the Duchess of Kent and a lock of hair, commissioned by Albert for Queen Victoria on the death of her mother; The miniature photograph of the Duchess of Kent and lock of hair. Also gathered from Sotheby's

<https://www.townandcountrymag.com/style/jewelry-and-watches/a35809006/queen-victoria-mourning-jewelry-sothebys/>

Pictured above are two of Queen Victoria's mourning pieces. Alice, Victoria's third child, passed away from diphtheria at the age of thirty-five on December 14, 1878, on the seventeenth anniversary of Prince Albert's passing. Princess Marie of Hesse and by Rhine, Princess Alice's youngest child, had also passed away from the same illness at the age of four.

In the first image we see a hardstone enamel and diamond cross with the text "Alice" beneath a coronet that also holds a lock of the previously named woman's hair, centering on an onyx heart. Which was one of three broaches Queen Victoria adorned to commemorate and mourn the passing of her daughter Alice.

Queen Victoria's passion for jewellery also reflected her love story with Prince Albert, who personally designed and commissioned numerous jewels for his wife during their marriage.

Including the piece shown in the second image, An agate and diamond pendant that opens up to reveal a miniature photograph and has an inscription on the back by the Prince Consort. It was given to Queen Victoria by Prince Albert to commemorate the death of her mother, which also beheld a lock of her late mothers hair.

‘Whose hair I wear I loved most dear’ the old epigram that explains as much as anything can the inexplicable desire for hair jewellery - adornments made from a loved one’s lock of hair, which, in the context of the 20th century, appears obscene.

Human hair has been incorporated into jewellery since at least the seventeenth century. Around that time, the hair of the dear departed began to be incorporated into memento mori pieces, as a wearable remembrance of those who had gone before. Somewhat less morbidly, hair from treasured living friends and family was worked into small pieces of art as an inlay for sentimental rings and locket, pendants, watch fobs, anything that could be adapted to secure a precious scrap of hair.

The process was reasonably priced and affordable to many and its popularity grew rapidly as treasured gifts were exchanged between friends and relatives.

Although hair jewellery had been worn before 1861, Queen Victoria's usage of it following the passing of her husband, Prince Albert, revived and increased its appeal. Due to Queen Victoria's loss, jewellery designs changed from modest memories and symbols of affection to more dramatic and solemn mourning jewellery that featured the hair of a deceased loved one.

Almost all mourning jewellery from that time forward bore a small compartment in which to enshrine a lock of hair, morbid perhaps, but it was embraced wholeheartedly throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. At its height, hair jewellery was used to commemorate betrothals and weddings as well as deaths.

Despite the fact that it existed long before Queen Victoria, mourning jewellery came to be strongly associated with the Victorian era. During the Victorian era, mourning jewellery was more so commercialized rather than created.

The most common type of mourning jewellery worn was mourning rings. Usually, the deceased person's relatives covered the cost of them. In most situations, a family's level of income determined how much they would spend on ornate designs.

Close relatives of the deceased were frequently given mourning jewellery in various circumstances. The variety of mourning rings included simple gold bands and elaborate creations with diamonds and valuable stones. During this time, ivory carvings or portraits were highly common, and they were frequently inscribed with the name, date, and age of the deceased.

Colour Theory and Precious Materials

During the Victorian era, mourning jewellery was most frequently made in the colour black. For those who could afford it, jet was a particularly well-liked gemstone option. A fossilised organic gemstone known as jet is admired for its deep black hue and silky, waxy lustre. Hematite, black agate, black onyx, and obsidian (natural volcanic glass) were also very well-liked stones.

Black glass was frequently used as a substitute for natural black gemstones for individuals who could not afford them. Because it was so inexpensive and there weren't many alternative black materials available for gem settings, black enamel was the standard for most mourning jewellery designs when it came to jewellery mountings.

However, as different colours had different connotations when it came to grieving, other coloured fabrics may frequently also be utilised. For instance, it was thought right to lament and honour a woman with white mourning jewellery when she passed away unmarried and virginal; in this instance, white enamel was frequently utilised. Pearls were frequently used in mourning jewellery and set shortly after a child succumbed.



Fig 5. Georgian Mourning Ring of two unmarried siblings as indicated by the use of white enamel. The Walters Art Museum. <https://art.thewalters.org/detail/2520/memorial-ring/>

Colour and theory are significant to us now because colour and sentimentality have been entrenched in the human mind since cultural inception. Colour theory is primarily a contemporary creation that has gained popularity through science and observation.

Colour theory is significant to jewellery collectors because it helps them understand early-modern jewels. Jewels from the nineteenth century were intimately associated with a sentimental pattern, which employed a colour, theme, or design as a literal adjustment to human emotion. To comprehend these design features, we must first grasp what they signified at the time.

Outside of the colours black (death), white (virginity/purity), blue (considered royalty), and red (passion), jewels from the c.1550-c.1760 period require further interpretation, but by the late 18th to early 19th century, there is more clarity in what their meanings are, due to studies and publishing's of the time. (Art of Mourning Colour theory: Part 1)

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's Theory of Colours is a significant reference for mourning jewellery collectors since it describes much of the colour theory that would affect the style, construction, and fashion of mourning and sentimental jewellery.

Colour and psychology are linked in Goethe's idea by the theory that colour elicits emotion. His symmetric colour wheel (below) demonstrates that each colour requires the complement of a corresponding colour, and that as the gradients descend, they still relate back to the parent colour. Goethe's idea emphasised the significance of magenta, as seen at the top of the chart.

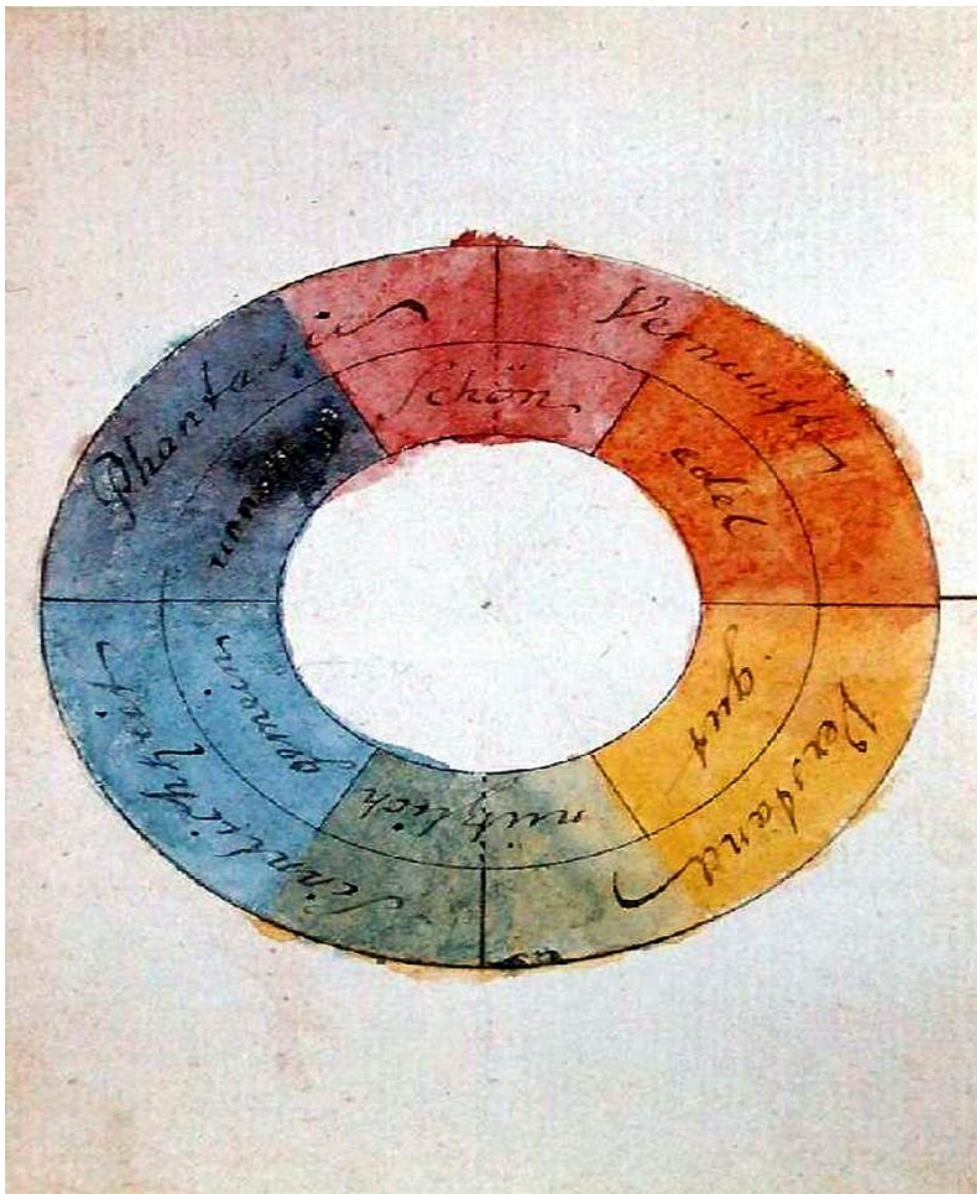


Fig 6. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Circle of Colours for the Symbolisation of Human Spiritual and Spiritual Life, 1809 ,Frankfurter Goethe-Museum.

Antique and vintage mourning jewellery comes in a wide range, giving collectors several options.

Black bead and jet necklaces, bracelets, brooches, pendants, rings, and pins have an elegant melancholy to them. Expensive hairwork jewellery is popular, and weeping willow designs and neo-classic themes are shown in many pieces. There are also memento mori pieces with skulls as a mourning motif. Although the classic mourning gemstones are onyx and jet, other materials including glass, pearls, and rhinestones are also common.



Fig 7. A Trio of Carved Jet Mourning Jewellery, Alex Cooper

Some jewellery even has inscriptions carved on it. In some of the ornate mourning sculptures, almost every flower, animal, or object—such as a heart or cherub—has a particular symbolic meaning, as seen in figure 7.

Burial sites and the innermost parts of deceased individuals graves were where some of the world's oldest pieces of jewellery were found. These prehistoric jewellery types were worn during funeral rites to pay respect to the deceased. Many were made of gold, and many

ancient pieces of jewellery worn in grief or as memorials frequently incorporated teeth, hair, or bones from human remains.

When Queen Victoria of England was grieving the loss of her adored husband, Prince Albert, mourning jewellery popularity peaked. She popularised the custom by wearing mourning jewellery during the time period.

After the passing away of a husband, it actually started becoming traditional in 1861 for widows to wear mourning jewellery for one to two years. However, for the rest of her life, Queen Victoria wore her bereavement ring. Jewellery for the dead was not just for ladies. In memory of their loved ones, many men also donned macabre souvenirs and mourning jewellery, typically in the shape of cufflinks, locket, and pocket watch fobs. A popular form of mourning jewellery worn by both men and woman were memento mori rings.

Gifts of remembrance, such as tiny ivory or enamel portraits, hair-wrapped bracelets, and locket with personal inscriptions, were as much a part of love as they were of loss. During Queen Victoria's reign in the nineteenth century, when mourning itself appeared to become an art form, the popularity of mourning jewellery skyrocketed.

During the Victorian era, the mourning motifs grew to include forget-me-nots, flowers, hearts, crosses and ivy leaves. Whitby jet (a fossilized wood found only in Whitby, UK) became a popular material for such artefacts. (Galton, 2012)

Although mourning jewellery may seem gloomy to our modern eyes, understanding the context in which it was worn offers a different viewpoint. In the Victorian era, people lived an average of 40 to 45 years.

Chapter II

Rituals of Grieving and the Culture of Hair Work

This chapter will look at the background, cultural significance, creative expression, rituals of grieving, and current interest in Victorian memorial hair jewellery . The dead person's hair was collected, woven into elaborate patterns, and frequently used to make several types of jewellery, including rings, brooches, and lockets.

Background to Victorian Mourning Jewellery

There was a strong fixation with sorrow and remembering during the Victorian era for several reasons, which lasted from the early 19th to the early 20th centuries. A few key factors being bereavement and mourning. The Victorian era was marked by elevated mortality rates, especially for infants and small children . As a result of illnesses and insufficient medical progress, because of this ongoing exposure to death and loss, there was an open and intensely felt culture of mourning.

Also another being the influence of Queen Victoria herself. Following the death of her husband, Prince Albert, in 1861, Queen Victoria herself provided an example of deep sadness and grieving. She abstained from public appearances and dressed in black for the remainder of her life, inspiring others to observe similar rituals of grief.

Memorial hair jewellery was one intriguing and distinctive result of this cultural obsession. These beautiful creations, made from human hair, act as physical reminders of love, grief, and remembrance.



Fig 8. An 1861 portrait of Queen Victoria by Charles Clifford. A full-length portrait of Queen Victoria, standing and facing three-quarters to the right. She looks ahead and away from the camera. She positions her arms in front of her torso. She is shown wearing a crown and a dark velvet dress with a sash.

Creative expression

Jewellery makers and professional hair weavers established successful businesses from the constant demand of hair jewellery, was the pinnacle of the devotion and romanticism that defined the Victorian age. Some pieces were created as "memento mori" when translated "remember you must die" pieces, while others were not. The exhortation memento mori, which literally translates to remember death, urged the wearer to live a moral life.

For millennia, memento mori has been a common motif in art. The 14th-century artwork "The Danse Macabre," that depicts death escorting bones and people from all walks of life to their graves, is among the most well-known examples. The message is unmistakable: death is the ultimate equaliser, regardless of one's position in life. Additional illustrations include

skull and skeleton drawings, which were frequently employed as a warning against vanitas, the transient quality of worldly joys.



Fig 9. The Danse Macabre (1493) by Michael Wolgemut, from the Nuremberg Chronicle of Hartmann Schedel



Fig 10. Antique Georgian 18 carat gold and enamel Memorial, hair and skull ring. Made circa 1820 courtesy of Brenda Ginsberg Art & Antiques

An example of a memento mori piece. The ring shank has the appearance of overlapping branches that split into three at each shoulder and join the oval, flower-shaped bezel at that point. A skull lays on a bed of the beloved's densely woven hair in an oval reserve at the top. Gold lettering set in a black enamel border: IN MEMORY OF

Rituals of grieving

While some may find this disturbing, for the Victorians, death was a common and accepted part of daily life, especially in light of the time's higher infant mortality rate.

The Intricate Craft of Using Human Hair for Jewellery, Art, and Decoration, Burgess mentions that there were insufficient cleanliness regulations in place to stop the spread of infections that could have harmed baby health, the Victorian era saw a high infant death rate. 'Victorian medical professionals found it difficult to treat newborn infections because to their poor knowledge of germ theory and infectious diseases, which increased the infant death rates.' (Burgess, 2018)

The Victorian era's widespread nutritional inadequacies, particularly among the lowest socioeconomic strata, contributed significantly to infant mortality because malnutrition increased a person's vulnerability to a number of diseases. Due to the high fertility rates that were common, families frequently had a large number of children, which made it difficult for parents to provide each baby the care and attention they needed, which increased the infant mortality rate.

All of these elements show how complex the issues were that led to the high infant death rate in the Victorian era.

Cholera, typhoid, smallpox, and scarlet fever were prevalent diseases that claimed many lives in an almost perpetual state of war in Europe. Approximately one in three children passed away before turning five, and epidemics occasionally increased that figure to one in two. Simply put, during the Victorian era, death was a constant companion. The survivors who had to deal with frequent losses found some solace in mourning jewellery.

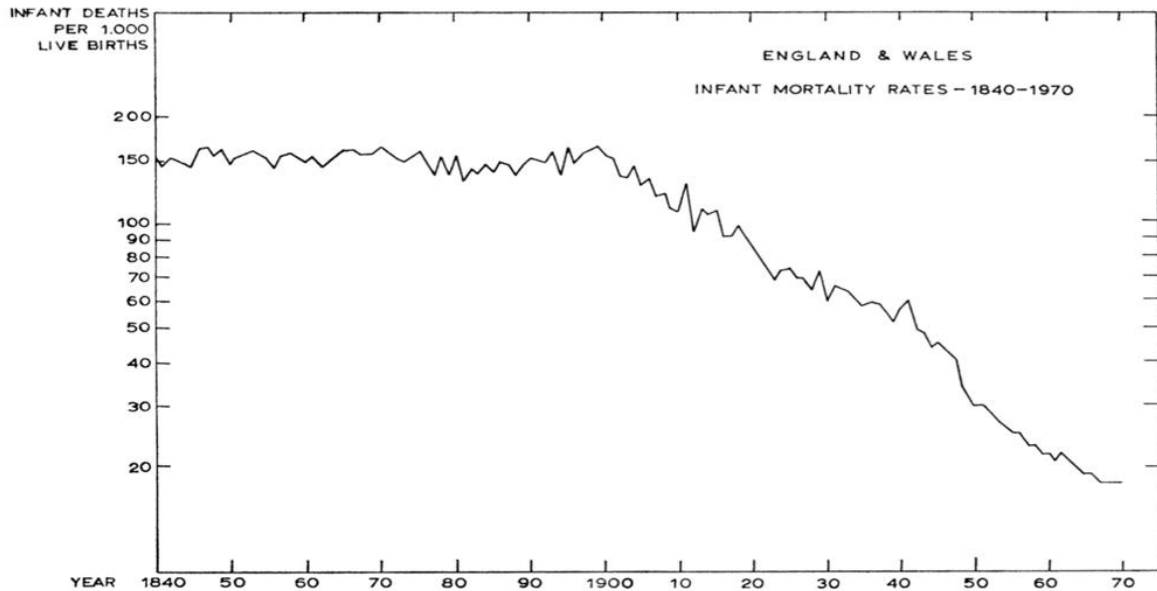


FIGURE I

Fig 11. Chart from a book by Beaver 1973, “Population, Infant Mortality and Milk ”

Rituals of grieving

The grieving process during the Victorian era was codified, meaning there were set rules, and hair jewellery played a vital role in these practices. Black attire and mourning jewellery were worn for extended periods to signal one’s grief. Hair jewellery, being personal and unobtrusive, allowed individuals to mourn discreetly yet continuously. It was often given as a token of love during the deceased person’s lifetime, and the hair was collected in anticipation of their eventual passing. The majority of the following forty years saw Queen Victoria dress in black crepe gowns and mourning jewellery. She ordered busts, memorials, and photographs of Prince Albert along with other keepsakes that served as remembrances of her husband.



Fig 12. Elderly woman possibly dressed in mourning clothes between 1890-1900. John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland. Public domain

Fig 13. Queen Victoria and children in mourning dress. Wikimedia commons; public domain



Fig 14. Queen Victoria, in a mourning head-dress

Source: Carl Rudolph Sohn (1845-1908) [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons



Fig 15. Early Victorian Mourning Dress Victorian era, 2022 <https://victorian-era.org/victorian-era-mourning-period.html>

The mourning gowns were made of Henrietta and Melrose, 'Henrietta cloth was a twilled fabric with a silk warp. Melrose was linen named after the town in Scotland it came from', which were trimmed with crepe, and the handkerchiefs were made of cambric. During this time, the use of jewels reached unprecedented heights. (Joshi 2022)

Victoria popularised black amber. Gold and gutta-percha were employed as costume jewellery in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Hair style, as well as rings and bracelets, were popular in this country.

Victorian mourning clothing were designed primarily for women, particularly widows. This style secluded the widow from society during her time of need. The length of the garments reflected the person's relationship with the deceased.

Stages of Mourning

According to Grove in 'Grief and Tradition: Exploring the 19th century mourning customs' during the nineteenth century, a widow was expected to mourn her husband's death for more than two years, around 30 months in total, whereas a husband was only required to mourn for 3 months. Mourning is divided into three stages: full mourning, second mourning, and half mourning.

In full mourning, a woman wore black monotonous garments for a year and a day, and she was not allowed to leave the house or wear decorations. A weeping veil of black crape was an essential feature of her attire.



Fig 16. An example of the forementioned attire. 'Stories of then' 26/6/2018

Widow pictured shrouded in all black with mourning veil.

<https://storiesofthen.blog/2018/06/26/victorian-superstitions/>

A widow was forced to give up her social life in order to attend church services. She was allowed to marry if she had no source of money or had to support her little children, but she

had to return her mourning gown the next day. The veil was lifted and put back over the head after nine months of mourning. Minor jewels could be worn by the widow.

Half mourning lasted three months, and the widow was permitted to wear certain coloured materials like as grey and purple. Men wore dark suits with black gloves, and children wore white as mourning attire.

Mourning apparel was a particular manner of displaying wealth and position. A household would frequently order the entire household to dress in black mourning attire. In times of grief, middle and lower-class ladies would go to considerable measures to appear trendy. It was extremely normal to dye garments black and then bleach it out again.

Mourning clothing was primarily reserved for the widow. It was meant to neutralise the widow's interactions with society, just as the Queen Victoria had done. For the first full year, it was customary that a widow would never leave her home without wearing full black clothes and a weeping veil. Her social goal was strictly church-related.

With Victoria's death in 1901, the mourning period came to an end, and the world, in part, emerged from it. Women were no longer bound by the Victorian era's rigorous system of mourning. ("Victorian Era Mourning Period Rituals, Clothes To Wear")

In this era, there is an endless array of laws and norms governing funerals, burials, and grieving. The act of breaking the regulations implied that the violator was dishonouring the deceased or acting immorally. The importance of this outweighed any potential financial hardship for the underprivileged. Many would start saving early in life and give up other things in order to guarantee a decent funeral.

During the Victorian era, death was a common guest, and people started making plans for it at an early age. Death was a topic of open discussion.

As death approached, there was no ambiguity as to what the person wanted or what was expected of the family. The family knew in advance what type of coffin the dying wanted, where they wanted to be buried and what they wanted to wear. Women frequently made their own shrouds and would even include them in their wedding dowry. (Woodyard, 2014)

The Victorians felt that hair had a sacred quality because it contained something of the essence of the person. It also represented immortality because it had some impermanence. Everything from intricately crafted miniature jewellery scenes to braided chains holding watches and pendants to substantial framed works of memorial art were made from hair. 'Due to the popularity of memorial jewellery and artwork by the middle of the 1800s, England was importing 50 tonnes of hair each year to supplement those of the deceased.' (GIA, 2016)

Traditions and Emotions Associated with Mourning Jewellery

The 19th century saw a tight adherence to mourning traditions, with a strong emphasis placed on remembering the deceased. Hair jewellery had been used as a memento for generations, but it was at its height in the Victorian era. When photography was still in its infancy, hair jewellery provided a private and intimate method to honour loved ones. The dead person's hair was collected, woven into elaborate patterns, and frequently used to make several types of jewellery, including rings, brooches, and lockets.

Post-mortem photography gained popularity in the latter half of the 19th century. These images of the deceased were captured, sometimes staged to make it seem as though they were still alive. 'They were considered a method to honour and immortalise the person. There were also seen public expressions of grief, such as extravagant funeral processions and public sobbing.' (Grove, 2009)



Fig 17. A post mortem photograph of a couple and their deceased child. From ‘the truth behind Victorian post mortem photography’

It was customary for photographers to take pictures of the deceased; this costly service allowed families to cherish their loved ones' memories in a unique way, as pictured in fig 16.

Until the funeral, the deceased would be kept for viewing at the home. Flowers were arranged all over the body while it was there, both for aesthetic purposes and to cover up the decaying smell. Occasionally, the actual subject was obscured by the sheer number of flowers.

The Art of Hairwork

Hair work is frequently closely related to memento mori, both being used as a token of mortality, and throughout the second half of the 19th century, there was an upsurge in the use of hair as a mark of remembrance as well.

I will discuss four different types of intricate hair work that displays skill, by the artisan, patterns and decorations. Palette work, Gimp work, table work and dissolved hair work. In addition to their emotional impact, Victorian hair jewellery displayed an astounding level of skill. Intricate patterns and decorations were painstakingly woven by skilled artisans, who frequently encased the hair in glass or priceless metals such as gold. These sculptures frequently had pearls and gemstones as decorations, which added another level of creative beauty. These pieces' meticulous attention to detail was evidence of the commitment of both the jewellers and the people who ordered the jewellery.

When Prince Albert passed away in England in 1861, Queen Victoria ordered hairpieces as part of her grief. The royal jewellers, Garrard's, used Prince Albert's hair to create at least eight pieces of jewellery, one of which also contained hair from other members of the royal family. In turn, this contributed to the rise in popularity of funeral jewellery.



Fig 18. Queen Victoria's Mourning Brooch Containing Prince Albert's Hair, Royal Collection, Buckingham Palace

The methods employed to fashion beautiful objects out of hair varied, but they all exhibited a meticulous attention to detail. Palette work is a method that involves weaving hair into

designs and is typically used for jewellery and larger pieces such as framed artwork. A sheet was made by weaving or combining clean, flattened hair with a substance resembling sap. The sheet was then moulded into various shapes. That typically appears in jewellery under glass or on top of ivory.



Fig 19. Mid-19th century brooch created utilising palette work and Whitby Jet, brass, glass, gold wire, seed pearls, and human hair. The college of physicians of Philadelphia and the mutter museum 2017

The gimp work approach is well suited for memorial artwork, this can be seen in fig 19, the image of the wreath surrounding an ambrotype (which is a positive photograph on glass made by a variant of the wet plate collodion process) . Individual hair strands would be wrapped in loops over wire, and these tiny loops would be repeated many times over the wire. With time, care, and further twists, you could eventually create a long, twisted wire of hair loops that was ready for shaping.



Fig 20. Wreath surrounding an ambrotype, made from wood, glass, ambrotype, wire, straw flowers, paper, and human hair using gimp work, mid-19th century. ALAN KOLC

In Campbell's 1867 manual, which I discovered from reading Chris Woodyards 'The Victorian book of the dead', focuses mostly on another type, table work. Hair strands were spread out on the table and weighted with wire, wood, or lead. The table has a domed surface that resembles a little stool. The strands were then braided and, in accordance with Campbell's handbook, worked into a bewildering variety of patterns. 'There are lyres, anchors, hearts, bows, knots, leaves, and flowers. They could seem as thick earrings or a long necklace. There are brooches that feature entire cemeteries.' (Burgess 2018)

Dissolved hair work, a fourth method, was particularly popular in the 18th century. It was primarily used to represent letters or small funeral scenes. The hair was ground into a pigment and combined with gum arabic to produce a rich liquid that could be applied on ivory.



Fig 21. Farewell but not For Ever box, inscribed to Ann Woodd, who died in 1791, made with gold, Ivory, sandal wood, sepia, leather, satin, dissolved human hair, and woven hair, using dissolved hair sepia painting and palette work. EVI NUMEN The college of physicians of Philadelphia and the mutter museum 2017

Even though it required a great level of skill and attention to manufacture, hair work wasn't just the purview of skilled jewellers. Hair appears to have been a popular item for jewellers to sell, but it was also used in the homes of a certain class of ladies. There is some indication that women started practising the technique because they were afraid that dishonest jewellers

would take advantage of them by exchanging their loved ones' hair for thicker or more flexible strands.

In his preface for 'Self-Instruction in the Art of Hair Work, Dressing Hair, Making Curls, Switches, Braids and Hair Jewellery of Every Description.' Campbell says,

Persons wishing to preserve and weave into lasting mementos, the hair of a deceased father, mother, sister, brother, or child, can also enjoy the inexpressible advantage and satisfaction of knowing that the material of their own handiwork is the actual hair of the 'loved and gone.' No other work ever met with such an earnest demand as this treatise upon the art of Hair Braiding. (1867)

When World War I broke out, hair work lost some of its attractiveness. People were expected to either volunteer or make the largest financial contribution to the fight. That, in my opinion, effectively put an end to all the emotion, excessive mourning, and ceremonies.



Fig 22. Nosegay with border, 1860–1861, gilt gesso, wood, glass, paper, wire, and human hair employing gimp work, signed on the reverse by Mrs. William J. Smith, Brookline, New Hampshire. ALAN KOLC

Current Interest in Victorian mourning jewellery

The popularity of memorial hair jewellery peaked during the Victorian era, but in recent years, there has been a resurgence in interest in these artefacts. They are currently valued for their historical and artistic significance by museums and collectors. An example would be the Victoria and Albert museum in London, England. As a frequent visitor of the museum, over the years I've had the privilege to view some pieces.



Fig 23. Bow-shaped hair-work brooch made of gold and hair ca. 1840-ca. 1860 (made) © Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 2023

These objects served as a source of inspiration for contemporary craftspeople, who used it to design hair jewellery with a retro feel.

This oval locket is a common piece of Victorian jewellery created from the deceased person's hair.

The locket is fashioned of jet, a type of fossilised wood that is most frequently connected with the town of Whitby and is found on the Yorkshire coast. The meticulous Victorian code of mourning only allowed a few types of jewellery to be worn by mourners, and the demand for jet mourning jewellery ensured that the Whitby jet workshops thrived.

Victorian mourners, prominently women, frequently wore locket and rings that held a lock of the deceased's hair. As is the case above, these were frequently embellished with pearls to represent tears. Although we might now consider the practise macabre, hair preparation for mourning jewellery was a trade in the nineteenth century.



Fig 24. Human Hair Mourning Jewellery. BBC, 2014

Victorian memorial hair jewellery is an intriguing example of 19th-century culture and customs. It was a statement of love and loss that was both intensely personal and artistic. I believe these stunning pieces of jewellery captured the passion and skill of a bygone age as well as the remembrance of the deceased. These artefacts continue to serve as a constant reminder of the eternal quality of human passion and artistry as interest in them among modern audiences develops.

The Creation of Hair Jewellery

A wonderful form of artistic expression, hair jewellery combines sentimentality, workmanship, and the preservation of treasured memories. Its historical foundations in the Victorian era and ongoing applicability in the present underline its lasting significance. A profound emotional connection to and reverence for the deceased are evident in the creativity and elaborate decorations. Hair jewellery is a monument to the power of art in preserving our most priceless memories in a society where physical links to the past are prized.

It might be surprising to discover that the most exquisite hairpieces were made on such basic supports as hats or bandboxes, and that even a decanter was adequate to build a variety of little hair crafts. On occasion, a bandbox's bottom portion was turned upside down, or a hat's brim was perched on top of another object. In either scenario, a flat table was created, and in its centre a tiny circular hole was cut out that was just big enough for a finger. Before using it, pieces of paper were adhered over the rough edges of the hole punched in the top of the hat or the bandbox.

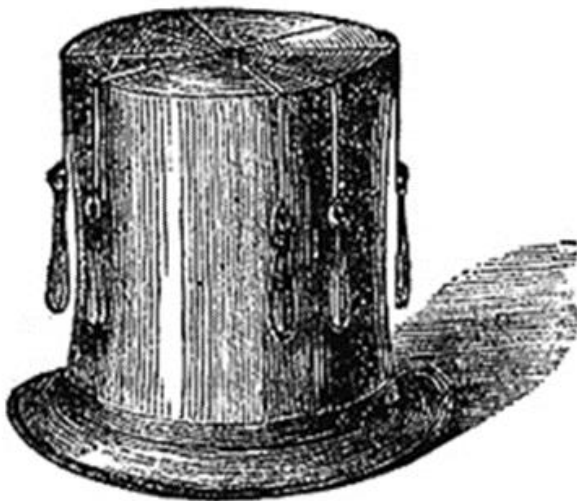


Fig 25. Top hat with bobbin weights for hair weaving. Image courtesy of *Victoriana Magazine*

<http://www.victoriana.com/Jewelry/victorian-hair-jewelry.html>

A wooden cramp that was screwed into a table's protruding edge or a mantelpiece's corner was another type of frame. A circular piece of white paper was taped over the table and a hole was cut in it that matched the hole in the table, whether this contraption, a hat, or a bandbox was used as the frame. Additionally, freestanding frames were employed, with the smallest and lightest ones being the most common.



Fig 26. Table with bobbin weights for table-worked hair. Image courtesy of Victoriana Magazine

<http://www.victoriana.com/Jewelry/victorian-hair-jewelry.html>

The main requirement for a braided table was that every portion of it be completely smooth, as the slightest amount of roughness would shred the hair and ruin the evenness and beauty of the work. A braiding table was inexpensive to build.

There were two different types of braiding tables; the first, or "ladies' table," stood close to four feet tall while the second stood approximately thirty-two or thirty-three inches high. The latter table was favoured because it gave the worker more control over the task at hand, even if standing was more tiring than sitting. Additionally, because of the smaller braiding table, sitting women's garments interfered with and disrupted the weights and their corresponding strands.



Fig 27. Table with bobbin weights for table-worked hair Image courtesy of Victoriana Magazine. <http://www.victoriana.com/Jewelry/victorian-hair-jewelry.html>

For lockets and broches, the creator's artistic talent, inventiveness, and practise were more important in this form of hair work than any set guidelines. Ivory, similar to that used by miniature painters, short hair lengths (between two and four inches), thread, and gum dragon are all that are needed to work these. Tools required were a fine-edged penknife, a pair of delicate scissors with fine, sharp tips, a few pencils, a fine, long pin, and a palette.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Victorian mourning jewellery serves as a bitter representation of the many ways in which society dealt with bereavement in the nineteenth century. As covered in this thesis these artefacts memorialise the departed while also providing insight into the intricate interplay between life, death, and remembering in Victorian society, as evidenced by their symbolic designs, material use, and growing cultural meaning. As we reflect on these elaborate mementos, we obtain a better grasp of the emotional and cultural environment that shaped the Victorian era, reminding us that even in the midst of loss, human expression and remembering remain enduring parts of the human experience.

Through this thesis I have learned that Victorian mourning jewellery, with its blend of artistry and passion, stands out as an intriguing monument to the era's changing attitudes regarding mortality and memorial. The precise workmanship demonstrated in these pieces, together with the varied range of materials used, highlight the societal shift in how people dealt with bereavement. These objects were more than just adornments; they were significant means of expressing grief and connecting with the deceased. Examining Victorian mourning jewellery allows us to explore not only the aesthetics of the time period, but also the layers of emotion and social structures woven into each piece, resulting in a sophisticated tapestry of Victorian mourning rituals. As we reflect on this fascinating element of history, we are prompted to contemplate how we, too, handle loss, as well as the ongoing function of material culture in preserving memories over generations. On further thought, I would have liked to delve deeper and discussed more in depth Queen Victoria and her background.

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