

Victoria's accessories

Have you ever thought how nice it would be to wear an extracted wisdom tooth on a gold chain around your neck? According to the BDA's Head of Museum Services, **Rachel Bairsto**, memorial jewellery featuring teeth became popular in the nineteenth century.



On the death of Prince Albert in 1861, Queen Victoria went into mourning and the practice of mourning, or memorial, jewellery became an unmistakable and intricate part of life in Victorian Britain. It became customary for women to mourn for up to two years after the death of a loved one.

There were three stages to the mourning process and only after the first stage was completed, after one year, could mourning jewellery be worn. An industry developed to supply women with appropriate clothing and accessories, including mourning dresses, capes, mantles, hosiery, gloves and jewellery.

Objects intimately connected with the dead person were often incorporated into the jewellery. A common example was hair, which was intricately woven into a knot design for brooches.

Wearing mourning jewellery began as a simple way of keeping a loved one close by and developed into an elaborate art. Teeth were often included, such as this adult incisor set in a gold pendant (1).

With high infant mortality rates in Britain's industrialising cities, infant mourning jewellery was common. This gold pin brooch with two baby teeth set on a gold chain is one example (2).

Queen Victoria was also known to use jewellery to commemorate events in her life. For example, her eldest daughter's first milk tooth was incorporated in a piece.

Hair, teeth, claws and other animal parts were often made into elaborate pieces. Prince Albert used to present his wife with love tokens from hunting trips. They were often an ornate piece of jewellery containing stags' teeth. This signet ring (3) contains a deer's tooth and this pendant contains a boar's tooth (4).

**'WEARING MOURNING JEWELLERY
BEGAN AS A SIMPLE WAY
OF KEEPING A LOVED ONE
CLOSE BY AND DEVELOPED
INTO AN ELABORATE ART.'**