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Mourning jewellery

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Mourning, or memorial, jewellery has been worn since the Middle Ages, but became particularly popular during the nineteenth century.

At the death of Prince Albert, Queen Victoria went into mourning and the practice 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 broaches. 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. 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.

Queen Victoria was also known to use

jewellery for commemorating events in her life. For example, her eldest daughter's first milk tooth was incorporated in a piece of jewellery. Hair, teeth, claws and other animal parts were often incorporated 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 contains a deer's tooth and the pendant contains a boar's tooth.

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