

“No happier wife and mother in the land  
Than she with emerald shining on her hand”

by Sally Thornton

Now that we are well and truly into spring what could be more appropriate than the birthstone for May which is the mesmerizing green *Emerald*.

For centuries, *Green* has been the colour of beauty and constant love. To the Egyptians the emerald was a symbol of fertility and life, the reproductive force of nature, whilst in ancient Rome green was the colour of Venus. To quote Pliny the Elder who referred to them as *Smaragdus*: “So soothing is the mellow green colour. No other colour is more agreeable”.

Emeralds have been known since 3500BC when they were being traded in Babylon and most probably came from what legend has called Cleopatra’s mines. The Egyptians greatly valued emeralds and engraved them for use as ring stones. The emerald has also long been associated with eyesight and it was said that Nero, who suffered from bad eyesight, used sliced emerald to lengthen his vision while watching the gladiators in the arena.

Like *Aquamarine*, which I wrote about in March, *Emerald* is a member of the *Beryl* family. It is one of the most highly prized of all gems and the finest quality is the colour of velvety grass green. Emerald’s green colour results from trace chromium, the same element that produces *Ruby*. Flawless emeralds are very rare, so the flaws or inclusions have come to serve almost as “fingerprints”. Typically, these inclusions resemble mossy growths are often referred to as “Jardins” whilst flawless emeralds are immediately viewed with suspicion.

Techniques to enhance colour and reduce the visibility of inclusions are frequently used the most common of which is *Oiling*, where the stone is soaked in oil to fill any cracks and seal the fine pores in the surface of the gem. This practise of oiling goes back to the early Greeks, who boiled the emerald in oil, and its modern day equivalent is accepted by the jewellery industry since it is actually good for the stone in light of its fragile nature.

You will need to take care of your emerald jewellery as removing this oil will end up giving the stone a matt appearance in which the inclusions are more easily visible. Avoid contact with any degreasing agent, including make up remover, and always take off your emerald rings before you do any washing up. If you want to clean them, a soft brush and luke warm water or even a damp cloth are advisable. Also, do avoid prolonged exposure to very strong sunlight, heat or dry conditions such as safety deposit boxes. If you are in any doubt, please come and visit us in the High Street in Kettering where I or one of my colleagues will be able to offer advice and our goldsmith will be able to clean and polish your jewellery for you.

I have mentioned earlier that emeralds are fragile by nature. Although a hard stone, emerald is brittle and will chip easily so special care should be given in wearing and handling. You may notice that emerald rings are

Emerald & Diamond brooch c1825 showing fine Mughal carving of early 1600s may have been brought back from India by Robert Clive and later purchased by the Duke of Northumberland.

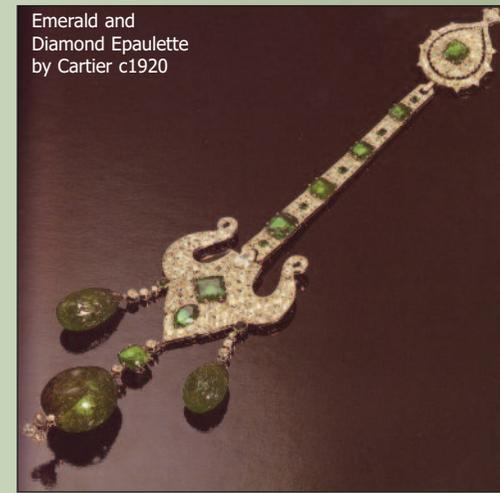
often set in a cluster surrounded by diamonds, which not only looks spectacular but such a setting is designed to protect the emerald. In general, I don’t advise that emerald rings are worn for everyday use but if in doubt please don’t hesitate to call in and discuss this with me.

The finest emeralds are found in Colombia, in Chivor and Muzo where they occur in veins within dark shales and limestones. This source was mined by the ancient indigenous civilizations and was the origin of large emeralds that came into Europe and Asia during the 16th century, after the Spanish conquest. In about 1830, emeralds were discovered in the Ural Mountains in Russia and some fine emeralds have been mined at Sandawana in Zimbabwe, Kitwe in Zambia and Swat in Pakistan. However, few emeralds can match the colour of the best Colombian stones.

Due to the popularity and high value of emeralds, synthetic copies from the USA were first produced in 1937 and appear very similar to the natural crystals. So do be cautious when tempted by a bargain, especially if it is not from a jeweller that you feel comfortable with.

There are many notable emeralds but one collection that has a fascinating history are those that were given by Napoleon to his Empress Josephine, famous for her exquisite taste in jewellery and captured in a portrait shortly before their divorce. Allegedly these made their way to Scandinavia and were given to Princess Märtha of Sweden, possibly by her mother Princess Ingeborg, when she married Crown Prince Olav of Norway in 1929. Princess Märtha took them with her in 1940 when she fled

Emerald and Diamond Epaulette by Cartier c1920



firstly to Sweden and then to the USA with instruction to sell them if needed. It seems they were not sold and returned with the Princess in 1945, but since then have been broken up and remodeled several times so little of the Empresses original style remains.

Large emeralds of top quality are rare which means that the price of such emeralds may be higher than that of a diamond of the same weight. How large ‘your’ emerald ends up will depend on your personal taste, and on your budget.

*Who first beholds the light of day  
In Spring’s sweet flow’ry month of May,  
And wears an emerald all her life,  
Shall be a loved and happy wife.*

Emerald & Diamond Tiara made in 1820 for the Duchesse d’Angoulême daughter of Louis XV

