

The Leader of

Which colour would you spontaneously associate with love and vivacity, passion and power? Red. It radiates warmth and a strong sense of vitality. Red is the colour of love, the colour of *Ruby*, the king of the gemstones and the birthstone of July.

Like many of the other Gemstones I have written about, rubies have been cherished since antiquity, indeed the word *ruby* comes from the Latin word *rubinus* meaning red.

In ancient India, *ruby* was highly valued for a variety of reasons. Mystics used *rubies* to stimulate spiritual creativity and religious devotion whilst healers believed that *rubies* could heal diseases of the heart and the blood. Soldiers wore *rubies* to staunch the blood of wounds received in battle and as a talisman against getting shot by arrows. The glowing colour of the *ruby* was likened to an enduring fire by the Hindus and it was thought its power was so great that if a *ruby* were placed in water, its inner heat could make the water boil.

Many of the Hindu beliefs about *rubies* were passed along the trade routes to Greek and Roman cultures. Ancient Greek women believed that wearing *ruby* could bring them love and physical beauty whilst many Roman nobles had intaglio rings carved out of *ruby* to protect their wealth and health.

Rubies were considered the wedding stone through the Middle Ages and early Renaissance period, as they were supposed to keep passion alive, promote lasting love and contentment in marriage. The *ruby* has also been associated with Royalty and Henry V wore a magnificent *ruby* at the crucial Battle of Agincourt where it certainly proved to be the stone of success for him.

Ruby like sapphire is part of the Corundum family and, technically speaking, a *ruby* is a red form of sapphire. It is chromium in the *ruby* crystals that gives the red colour whilst titanium in sapphires gives them a blue colour. The *ruby's* rich colour catches the eye with shades of red, from pinkish to purplish or brownish red, depending on the amount of chromium and iron content in the stone. You may, however, read that the best stones are described as "pigeon's blood" as it is this dark red colour that is most sought after and, therefore, most expensive. It is often said that in a *ruby* "colour is everything".

The Mogok mining region of Upper Burma is synonymous with the very finest gems of "pigeons blood" colour and remains the benchmark against which all other stones are measured. But *ruby* stones occurrence is worldwide and Thailand produces brownish red *rubies*, Afghanistan and Vietnam produce bright red stones whereas India, Australia and Russian *rubies* are dark, sometimes even opaque.

Rubies over three carats in size are very rare, so it is no wonder that such a *ruby* with hardly any inclusions achieves top prices at auctions, surpassing even those paid for diamonds in the same category. Its Sanskrit name "ratanayaka" means "the leader of precious stones" and is still quite appropriate.

However, throughout history many red gemstones have been confused with *rubies*. A famous example is the Black Prince's Ruby now in the

Precious Stones

by Sally Thornton

Imperial State Crown of England and part of the Crown Jewels since 1367. It was only discovered in the 19th Century that it is in fact a spinel. The "Timur Ruby" which was until 1851 thought to be the largest *ruby* in the world was greatly admired by Queen Victoria when displayed at the Great Exhibition but, like its cousin in the crown jewels, was also discovered to be a spinel.

It is still to this day easy to become confused as *ruby* is a term often misleadingly applied to other gems. For example "Australian or Cape Rubies" are in fact garnets whilst red tourmalines are sometimes called "Siberian Rubies" and "Brazilian Ruby" is a term used for Pink Topaz.

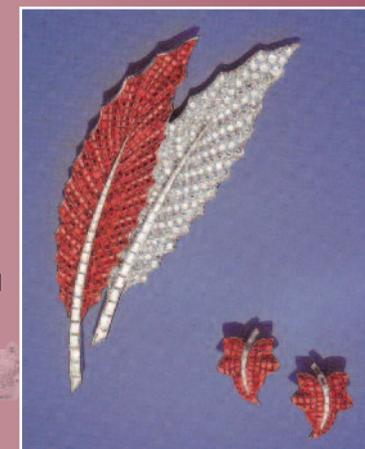
At the turn of the century, imitation rubies (and sapphires) were made of coloured glasses, usually called pastes. Garnet topped doublets were also used as imitations. These glass *rubies* are easily detected by the rolled edges of their facets and the shell like chips around the edge of the stone.

In 1902, Auguste Verneuil produced a synthetic *ruby* crystal which provided a new problem as detecting these synthetic stones is not easy. However, *rubies* often contain natural flaws that are hidden by using cuts such as the cushion cut mix with many small facets. Synthetic *ruby* is sufficiently flawless for a step cut to display the interior of the stone.

When a *ruby* contains fine needles or "silk" it is often cut in cabochon to display a star and is known as a star ruby. One of the world's greatest star rubies, the 100.3 carat De Long Star Ruby, was discovered in Burma in the 1930's and was stolen in 1964 from the American Museum of Natural History in what became known as the "Great Jewel Robbery". The thieves were inspired by a similar robbery seen in a film and lowered themselves into the museum through an open window and literally raked the stones out of their display cases. After making an easy getaway, their careless boasting soon led to their arrest, and the *ruby* was returned. Needless to say the security at the museum is considerably improved!

Rubies were also greatly admired by the Duchess of Windsor and remain popular to this day. *Ruby* is the most coveted of the coloured gemstones and continues to delight us either as a single stone or as perfect partner for diamonds. Today *ruby* jewellery is available in contemporary or traditional designs that are set to continue into this new century. We at AA Thornton in the High Street, Kettering, hold a varied range of *ruby* rings and pendants which are popular, not only in July but throughout the year, as the anniversary stone for either the 15th or the 40th year.

"The Ruby stole a spark from heaven above
To bring the July maiden untold love"



The Duchess of Windsor's ruby and diamond brooch and matching earrings sold at auction in Geneva in 1987 where the brooch alone fetched £709,000



The ruby and diamond necklace worn by the Duchess of Windsor at a New Year's Eve Party in 1949