

AA Thornton

# The Sapphire

by Sally Thornton

"The living throne, the sapphire blaze,  
Where angels tremble while they gaze."  
Thomas Gray (1716-1771)

**S**apphire, the birthstone of September, is considered by many to be the most beautiful of all gemstones, so this is what I shall write about in this month's issue of Village Connect.

Sapphire is a member of the *corundum* family of gemstones and has been used in jewellery for thousands of years. It owes its often beautiful colour to trace elements such as a chromium, iron and titanium found within the stone.

Interestingly, *sapphire* has the same chemical composition as *ruby* and only these trace elements of colouring separate them. *Ruby* is the red variety of *corundum* and all other different coloured *corundum* is called *sapphire*. As such, *sapphire* can be found in a full spectral of colours such as green, brown, yellow, pink, violet, purple as well as the blue colours which tend to be associated with *sapphire*. A unique pinkish orange variety known as "padparadscha" shade from Sri Lanka often fetch higher prices than many of the finest blue *sapphires*.

Neither *sapphires* nor *rubies* were used in European jewellery until the trade routes of the Roman Empire allowed them to be brought in from India and Sri Lanka. The appreciation of *sapphires* grew over a period of time and, by the Middle Ages, it became established as the most prized gem symbolizing the tranquillity of the Heavens, bestowing peace and amiability upon the wearer.

*Sapphire* is known as the gem of the soul and of autumn. It is considered the most spiritual of all gems as it represents purity of the soul. This symbolism is understandable because it mirrors the blue of heaven. The Bible says the Throne of Heaven was made of *sapphires* and the clergy favoured the blue *sapphire* rings because the colour represented heaven. The Persians of earlier times thought that the earth rested on a giant *sapphire* whose pale blue reflection coloured the sky.

*Sapphires* are much more widely distributed over the Earth's crust than are *rubies* and for basic reasons of availability, the *sapphire* is less expensive than *ruby*. The very finest *sapphire* specimens, however, originate in the tiny state of Kashmir in the Himalayas and are the source of perhaps the world's most coveted blue *sapphires*. The deep velvety blue colour of these *sapphires* are often described as "cornflower blue". The first discoveries of this fine *sapphire*, in 1881, were made as the chance result of a landslide. With great difficulty and in very inhospitable conditions, these *sapphires* are recovered by hand from mines at an altitude of about 15,000 feet and, for the most of the year, the area is under snow. Although very few *sapphires* are coming out of this region today, the reputation of this source endures and is reflected in premium prices.

*Sapphires* also come from Burma which can sometimes rival their Kashmir counterparts. Thailand and Sri Lanka remain key sources,

whereas a more recent important source of dark *sapphires* come from Australia. These are by no means the only source of *sapphires* as they are also found in USA, Africa and Russia.

Some people think that the deeper the colour the more valuable the blue *sapphire*, whereas it is in fact the middle blues, the cornflower blue and the French blue stones, that command the highest prices.

When discussing colour I feel it is important to mention the heat treatment of *sapphires* (and also rubies). The heat treatment of gemstones, which is a major subject in its own right, has been with us for many years but applying this to *sapphires* has been comparatively recent. The effect of such treatment on *sapphires*, blue or other colours, is to deepen the colour and possibly improve the transparency. This enhances the beauty of the stone and, because it is permanent, is generally considered acceptable within the jewellery trade. As a potential customer you should therefore expect that most of the *sapphires* you see on display in jeweller's windows have been enhanced in this way. This may not initially be drawn to your attention by the jeweller and indeed it is more likely that they would immediately explain if a *sapphire* can be proven not to have been heat treated as such stones will always carry a premium in their price.

The Royal families of England and Scotland appreciated *sapphires* with two notable stones in the Crown Jewels. These are the Charles II sapphire, measuring 38 x 25mm, and the St. Edward's sapphire, which is reputed to have been worn by Edward the Confessor in 1042. However, when I think of the most memorable *sapphires* I always go to the sapphire and diamond ring that Prince Charles gave Lady Diana. Clearly I am not the only one who admired Lady Diana's ring as we at AA Thornton in Kettering regularly sell a traditional sapphire cluster ring which is very similar.

Today, the blue *sapphire* is one of the most wearable of colours and so remains very popular. Not only do we hold rings similar to Lady Diana's but also offer different cuts of stone set sapphire jewellery, some designed in yellow and white gold and in modern settings. We are also often asked by the discerning customer to supply loose sapphires for them to choose from and then with our assistance, design their own unique piece of jewellery to be fashioned in our workshop. If this is something you feel you would be interested

in, please don't hesitate to call in to us in the High Street where, together, we can design an item of jewellery unique to you and within your budget.

As always if you have enjoyed these thoughts and antidotes and want to find out more please visit our recently revamped website [www.aathorntonjeweller.com](http://www.aathorntonjeweller.com) where you will find other articles and information on jewellery. Alternatively, please do call in to see us at 1/7 High Street to ask us and pick up a copy of our booklet "A Guide to Colour".



This ring is very similar to the one given by Prince Charles to Lady Diana



Interesting contemporary bar set sapphire ring