

Earlier this year I wrote about jewellery design and how inspiration from other art forms and artists has influenced the Jewellery we wear today. I will at some stage return to this theme to tell you more about some of the current exciting young designers, but this month I am heading off in a different direction to look at an item of Jewellery that has over the centuries been close to many hearts; The Locket.



Emerald, Sapphire, Topaz). What a truly wonderful romantic gesture.

Victoria herself was keen on lockets, giving many to her children and grandchildren with early photographs of the royal family showing this. In one of these photos, the 19 year old Princess Helena is seen wearing a locket on a ribbon close to her neck in the style fashionable at the time. So great was the influence of the royal family on fashion, that it became the custom for the groom to give lockets to bridesmaids at a wedding.

But what makes a locket so special? I have previously mentioned, when writing about beads, that they "are miniature bundles of secrets waiting to be revealed". This must be even more so as the secret is unique and hidden within the locket itself, placed there by the wearer or a loved one and worn close to the heart.

What did or do these lockets contain? Miniature paintings were initially popular which were generally superseded by photographs in the Victorian era. Personal mementos and snippets of hair from, which the expression *Lock of Hair* is possibly derived, have for many years been popular, but to be truthful we will never really know, as for many the contents were or are a secret.



Modern lockets can be found in a wide range of styles ranging from the traditional to the much more avant-garde. It is now common for them to be designed to take one or two photographs, but there are designs that can accommodate up to six, whilst some lockets are skeletal in design which allows the contents to be partially seen.

The fashion of wearing them on a short ribbon faded at the end of the Victorian era and was replaced by a longer chain. We in AA Thornton have been selling a wide variety of lockets quite probably since my grandfather set up shop 101 years ago. Recently one brand has developed the idea of combining a locket with charms and this is proving to be very popular as it is in tune with the current bead and charm renaissance.



The word Locket is thought to be traced back to the arrival of the Normans with William the Conqueror and is probably derived from the old French word *loquet* meaning lock or latch. It is very simply a pendant that opens to reveal a space to store small items.

It was however the Victorians that really embraced the locket as an item of jewellery, possibly because it pandered to their romantic and sentimental side. If you have the opportunity to see the painting "Charlie is my darling" by John Everett Millais the girl, who is waiting for her horse, is wearing a locket suspended closely around her neck on a coral coloured ribbon. Whilst we are mentioning romance and sentimentality and to divert slightly for a moment, the story goes that Sir William Palliser visited the artist in his studio where by chance caught sight of the half finished painting. He was so struck by the girl that he begged an introduction which was eventually granted and not long after they were married.



Lockets were traditionally oval and later heart shaped in design. They have ranged from plain, and sometimes with a glass back to keep the cost down, to highly intricate inlaid with enamel or set with stones. As previously mentioned, they were usually worn on a short ribbon close to the neck although occasionally they seem to have been pinned to a dress as a brooch. There are rare examples of some very beautiful and intricate lockets attached to bracelets or bangles, but wearing them in such a manner was not usual.

One of the best known early lockets is sometimes known as the Armada Jewel, as it was thought to have been given by Elizabeth I to her Vice Chamberlain of the Royal Household to commemorate the victory over the Spanish. This beautiful locket, which can now be seen in the V&A, is enamelled gold set with diamonds and rubies and encloses a miniature portrait of the queen. It is, like many works of Elizabethan art, full of politically motivated imagery sending out the message that the queen was herself serenely steering England and the protestant church through troubled times.



The idea of conveying intimacy was an important feature of early Victorian romantic jewellery which used cupids, arrows, keys, anchors and bows, often set with various gems. In the 1830s and 40s heart shaped lockets with floral decoration were set with a line of coloured stones. The initial letter of each stone spelled a message of intimacy such as REGARD (Ruby, Emerald, Garnet, Amethyst, Ruby, Diamond) or DEAREST (Diamond, Emerald, Amethyst, Ruby,



Lockets still retain an air of mystery and romance so will continue to be part of our jewellery wearing for many years to come. I have one very special locket given to me by my two children when they were only five which has a personal hand engraved message on the back. So my locket holds a special story which I will cherish forever.

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