

Having written about lockets last month I am now moving on to something I think many of us love; Earrings.



In ancient Egypt jewels were an important part of costume and worn by men, women and children, as well as adorning statues of gods and goddesses. One interesting example of this Egyptian Jewellery is a multi hooped earring which would have hung from a large hole in the earlobe. Recent X-ray photographs of mummies in the Cairo Museum show earlobes that are extremely elongated and deformed, which is put down to the repeated use of very heavy earrings.

But the use of such heavy earring was not the sole preserve of the ancient Egyptians.

By the beginning of the 18th Century earrings had become an essential form of adornment with the Girandole with its surmount and three stone drops being most popular. These large and heavy earrings remained in fashion for the next two hundred years and photographs of Queen Victoria in old age when she took out her earrings show that she had elongated earlobes.

Earrings have been worn since pre historic times and have evolved dramatically in shape, size and design since their origins. The earliest archaeological evidence of earrings dates from the 3rd millennium BC, but it seems likely that men and women would have used shells or polished pebbles to adorn their ears centuries earlier.

The idea of piercing the earlobe to insert a metallic ornament seems to have originated in the Orient and it is perhaps this that is the birthplace of the modern earring. Examples of these early earrings have been found with a tapered hoop design in Greece and Anatolia in the Minoan and Mycenaean period, but more elaborate articulated pendants have also been discovered.

I am sure it will come as no surprise to you that throughout the centuries ways of wearing such heavy earrings like the girandole were devised that caused less strain on the earlobe. These included holding them up with a secondary loop attached to a hook that was threaded through a ribbon secured to the hair, thus taking some of the weight.

But not all earrings were or are excessively heavy, nor were they solely worn by the ladies, as in the late 16th and early 17th centuries English courtiers adorned themselves with single pearl drop

earrings. A hundred and fifty years later similar earrings were worn by French officers, which was much to the amusement of the English who poked fun at them in a cartoon in 1786 despite the fact that the custom had become quite widespread in both France and Italy. The fashion has once again turned the full circle and in England in the 1970's young Englishmen were the first to wear a single earring!

The 1930's with the advent of the clip-on earring, sometimes also called an ear clip, saw a dramatic change in earring design and fashion. This new concept was a vast improvement over the previous screw fitting style enabling women to wear earrings without having their ear pierced and allowed the ornament to be worn on the lobe rather than as a drop. The popularity of the clip continued in to the 50s when pierced ears were definitely out of fashion to the extent that it was not unheard of for women who had already had their ears pierced to conceal the holes with clip on earrings. The Duchess of Windsor had a pair of frog ear-clips in gold and bright green enamel, whilst Salvador designed a pair of gold wing ear-clips signed 'Dali' in black enamel.

Since the 60s the ear clip has fallen out of favour and I had my ears pierced when I was at art school, which even by the standards of the time was quite late in ones life. I have however enjoyed wearing earrings ever since especially as a jewellery student designing them. This was always great fun with the objective to be as diverse as possible, working with different materials, such as enamel, wood and plastic. There is something magical about earrings; maybe it is the way they move with a life of their own!

Today there are many styles of earrings – chandeliers with multi level branches, drop style earrings usually set with a hanging gemstone. Hoops round, oval or square that run through the piercing of your ear and of course not forgetting the popular stud earring. To be honest there are just so many I could not even start to mention them all.

New jewellery designs continue to evolve every year and with no exception the bead bracelet continues to be forward thinking with design. Both the ever popular Trollbeads and Chamilia have extended their concept into earrings. The idea is the same as their bracelets and necklaces as

you start with the silver or gold earring fittings and then add or change the beads to suite you mood or style. For those who have not yet succumbed to the current bead renaissance be warned, it is not only fun but also somewhat addictive.



When I have written in the past about design I have mentioned the possibility of re working your existing Jewellery, so look in your jewellery box and perhaps there is a worn piece of jewellery that is beyond economical repair. With a bit of creative thinking it may be possible to use part of this in a pair of earrings that you can then enjoy.

Over the years I have collected a vast array of earrings but at the end of the day I feel you can never go wrong with the Classic diamond studs. This is a timeless style that can be worn everyday and for me personally a favourite. As long as the backs are secure and the setting checked, these diamond earrings should be worn and not buried in your jewellery box.

So I hope you have enjoyed this and share with me my love of earrings, as after all without them we feel naked.

**Sally Thornton, AA Thornton,
1/7 High Street, Kettering
Tel: 01536 513014
www.aathorntonjeweller.com**

