

**MOURNING EPHEMERA OF VICTORIAN BRITAIN:
A SYMBOL OF WEALTH OR A CULTURAL PHENOMENA
THAT EXTENDED TO THE WORKING CLASSES**



'Be this then forever before us; be our first thought morning by morning to think of the resurrection; be our last night by night, the sleep of death, after which cometh the judgement.'

Edward Pusey, The Day of Judgement, 1839

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DD4991: Dissertation Project

Submitted as the final part of the Master of Arts in Antiques –
School of Art and Design & Performance

At the University of Central Lancashire

14th December 2018

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation was completed with the help from the following people and Institutions who I would like to thank most graciously

- **Whitby Museum** – For allowing me to view their collections and help with research in their own library
- **The National Trust, Quarry Bank Mill** – For allowing me a private viewing of their Mourning dress
- **Stockport Libraries** – For helping me to search through their reference library
- **Jill Newsham** – For constant support and encouragement throughout this dissertation
- **Karen Spafford** – For being my inspiration

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ABSTRACT

Mourning in Victorian Britain was a ritualistic process, ephemera for ladies such as black dresses, parasols, jewellery, handkerchiefs and other personal items were designed with specific purpose, to express the grief of the individual.

This dissertation aims to compare artefacts of ephemera by looking at class differences through the quality, design and value of each item.

Past research and social history suggest mourning ephemera was a status symbol relating to the wealthier classes of society, this research will address the question – did the mourning culture reach the poorest members of society, those who had very little to live on but who held the same beliefs as the wealthy?

Following the death of her beloved Prince Albert in 1861, Queen Victoria went into deep mourning for many years, her overwhelming grief was impressed onto the British public forcing the population to join the process along with their Queen. As the outpouring of grief grew so did the commercialization of mourning related items, black, a colour which, up to this time was said to reflect evil, represented the sorrow and grief of a nation.

Academics and historians alike refer to the era as ‘mourning culture’, but further research into the artefacts could suggest it wasn’t just a fashion but a way of life forged on superstition, belief and sentiment.

To research this dissertation, I will assess a sample of ladies mourning artefacts and attempt to form a comparison of quality and design to assess original ownership of the items and speculate if there was a difference in social and class status.

This dissertation will assist academics and collectors of mourning ephemera and could provide a clearer picture and further knowledge of the culture of mourning in Victorian Britain for antique professionals and historians.

INTRODUCTION

‘MOURNING EPHEMERA OF VICTORIAN BRITAIN: A SYMBOL OF WEALTH OR A CULTURAL PHENOMENA THAT EXTENDED TO THE WORKING CLASSES’

For many centuries trinkets and mourning jewellery have been commonplace in the commemoration of the passing of a loved one.

A lock of hair held within a locket or woven into a bracelet was a popular concept in the 18th century but from the mid to late 19th century the culture of mourning became an almost obsessive ritual of material creation proving a profitable business for undertakers, jewellers and department stores.

Previous research provides a view of the fashion influences on the design of mourning items, wealthier individuals followed the etiquette of mourning to withhold their social standing, spending excessively on clothing, the funeral and purchasing personal items to commemorate their loved ones.

‘In Britain by the middle of the nineteenth century, the overriding worry in the minds of the bereaved, particularly amongst the women, was the terror of being publicly shamed by their failure to carry through the etiquette of death correctly’. Taylor, L. (2009) p.15

As the lower classes did not have the financial capability to buy such luxurious items and provide expensive funerals, the question remains if it mattered equally to them to provide a ‘proper’ funeral and show respect for their loved ones, did they also attain to show their grief in the same public manner and own keepsakes of their departed family members.

This dissertation aims to take an alternative view of the influences on design and popularity of mourning items by researching the artefacts associated with the period, this will involve taking a close look at the

influences on design of ladies clothing, personal items and jewellery, by getting a clear picture of the materials and symbolism involved, the analysis will hopefully provide clues to suggest if belief and superstition throughout society provided an impact on the popularity of mourning ephemera, the research will also assess the possibility of the lower classes actively following the cultural etiquette of owning clothing and memorial items commemorating their loved ones.

Each chapter will focus on a sample of items –

- Ladies clothing and textiles
- Whitby jet and similar style jewellery
- High end jewellery, other jewellery and hairwork

Research to date has not revealed any relevant collections of mourning ephemera from the period, small collections of jewellery and single items held at British institutions and from previous exhibitions will be discussed in this dissertation, this could provide an opening in the field for academics to study mourning ephemera as a specific collection of artefacts which are linked by design and cultural beliefs. Using methods based on the ideas of Jules, D Prown (1982) 'material culture', a sample of artefacts will be assessed using three methods –

- Description
- Deduction
- Speculation

Along with qualitative open-ended interviews, the results will be analysed and form a comparative discussion in the last chapter of this dissertation.

RESEARCH METHODS

The aims of the research are to form an analysis of a sample of artefacts from the 19th century Victorian mourning period, these are items ranging from ladies' clothes and accessories, superior quality jewellery, hairwork jewellery, Whitby jet jewellery and other comparable items made from materials which attempted to copy Whitby jet.

The dissertation is addressing the question of class differences within the Victorian mourning period and therefore the approach to analysis is to use value-based methods which will focus on the design influences of the objects, the quality of the materials, the marketing and availability of the objects at the time, the original value and what they represented.

By examining the objects from an alternative perspective to address the question, I will be looking for sentimental, spiritual and aesthetic influences to attempt to open suggestions that the items incorporated symbolism or hidden messages within the design.

The method used for this dissertation is based on the ideas of Jules Prown's, 'material culture' (1982), by using 3 basic questions to form the analysis consisting of the following -

- 1.) Description – Analysing the objects materials, design and craftsmanship
- 2.) Deduction – Considering influences, value and original ownership
- 3.) Speculation – What did it represent, what were the influences, why was the object important to the owner and was it a symbol of wealth or sentiment.

“The fundamental purpose of the study of material culture is the quest for cultural belief systems, the pattern of belief of a particular group of people in a certain time and place.”

Prown, J. (1982) p.6

Alternative value-based models were considered, ideas suggested by Grant McCracken (1986), culture and consumption place a focus on how

individuals view phenomena through the cultural beliefs of society at the time and suggests that objects and behaviour become fashioned because of cultural epidemic.

“Fashion transfers cultural belief to consumer goods through advertising and behaviours of upstanding members of communities and individuals held in high esteem”.

McCracken, G. (1986) p.76

The model consists of a 3-way focus on –

- 1) Culturally constituted world – advertising and fashion influence – Consumer goods
- 2) Consumer goods influence – Possession ritual, exchange ritual, grooming ritual
- 3) Rituals influence – individual consumer

This model could be used for this dissertation but was not chosen as it does not fully address the question surrounding class differences within the cultural society or provide analysis of cheaper, accessible objects for those less fortunate.

Object-based methods were also considered for this study, Edward McClung Fleming, 1974, proposed a model suitable for artefact study focusing on the classification of objects this involves -

- 1.) Identification
- 2.) Evaluation – Compare with other objects
- 3.) Cultural analysis – Relationship to culture
- 4.) Interpretation – Values of present culture

Each of the 4 classifications involve 5 basic properties –

- 1.) History 2.) Material 3.) Construction 4.) Design 5.)

Function

This model presents the opportunity to answer the questions proposed in this study as it places a focus on comparison of similar objects and addresses cultural influences on the design and values of objects but

places a basic focus on culture itself and not the value of the item or the relationship with its owner.

“The artefacts made and used by people are not only a basic expression of that people, they are, like culture itself, a necessary means of man’s self - fulfilment”. Fleming, E. (1974) p.153

In addition to the proposed model of analysis the data recorded will be analysed using the help of qualitative, open ended interviews with participants who are experts or closely involved in collections of Victorian mourning items and the historical content connected with them.

Places to be visited include –

- Museums
- Stately homes
- Workhouses

The proposed visits are arranged to view a sample of items relevant to the research which will be discussed with curators to help form an analysis and address the research question.

A brief history of Victorian mourning fashion

During the reign of Queen Victoria fashion styles adapted with the times as did the design of popular items, the early romantic period 1837-1860 followed a softer approach to mourning but in the 1860's changes in fashions of the 'grand' period took on a sudden appearance of dark grandeur following the death of Prince Albert, Queen Victoria went into a deep mourning and pressed her grief onto not only her household but the whole of British society, where mourning etiquette was more structured for the wealthier classes in the romantic period, the grand period appeared to bring about a phenomena which reached out to the lowest classes.

'Queen Victoria in the seclusion of her widowhood at Windsor set an example to the rest of Britain. Even before Albert died, she had dutifully observed the rituals of death and mourning. Not only was black to be worn by her subjects but the jewellery which was allowed was strictly limited'. Luthi, A.L (2001) p.16

The only colour allowed in the Palace was black, Victoria's bombazine dresses became an example of fashion for every lady in mourning along with black silk, lace accessories and bulky Whitby jet jewellery which was carved into memorial designs of a single hand, flowers, wreaths, crosses and geometrical designs.

The previous style of dresses of the romantic period followed the crinoline fashions of the 1830's and 1840's, crinoline was a stiffened material made from horse hair woven with linen thread and dresses were characterised in style by their long, pointed angles and low pinched waists, and black bonnets and gloves were fashionable accessories, before the introduction of photography miniature portraits held with a piece of jewellery as a memorial and hand crafted items such as samplers were created by ladies in the household.



Figure 1: Mourning sampler c.1858

Source: artofmourning.com

The picture featured in fig. 1 is an example of a homemade sampler in memory of a beloved Father dated 1858, this is an example of personal memorial that was created by less wealthy individuals, the quality of the design and workmanship provides a clue as to the owner, wealthier ladies would have lessons in handcrafts and access to better quality threads.

'Historically, women in many cultures have had a central role in crafting objects to commemorate the dead, such as weaving shrouds, creating mourning clothes, crafting death masks, designing grave markers, stitching memorial samplers, creating hair jewellery, to name but a scant few'. Fowkes Tobin, B (2017) p.3

Mourning in the Victorian era was a duty carried out by the ladies of the household, it was expected of them as a matter of respect and Christian duty and proved their leadership and social standing as the head of the household, superstitious belief led the way to ritualistic actions such as, stopping clocks at the time of death, covering mirrors to stop spirits from getting trapped and ensuring the body was carried out headfirst so as not to beacon another family member to follow.

The poorer members of society also held similar beliefs and superstitions and the threat of the 1832 anatomy act left them in tremendous fear of having to have a paupers' funeral or worse - to have their loved ones

dissected for medical research, the strong belief in judgment day forged the importance of giving family members a 'proper' funeral.

'In the case of the poor one is left wondering where the money comes from to pay for the luxury of grief'. Puckle, B (1926) p.66

Burial clubs were openly available to everyone, by paying in a small amount each week the lower classes could be sure that a basic funeral would be paid for in advance.

'It is in the highest, and again in the lowest grades of the social scale that mourning is insisted on with a rigour which is simply fanatical'. Puckle, B (1926) p.66

In the early years from 1837 until the 1860's, the 'romantic' period, fashion was influenced by the renaissance style, mourning jewellery before this era featured symbolism of magical influence and macabre messages, skulls and coffins featured strongly along with snakes and reptiles, the messages it sent across 'memento mori', was a reminder to people that they will die too.

The romantic period brought about the influence of gentle colour and gemstones which produced a simple, gentle sense of serenity and a memento of love combined with sentiment.



Figure 2: Serpent Mourning ring - Item M.169-1962
Gold and black glass mourning brooch.

Source: collections.vam.ac.uk



Figure 3 – Gold and black glass brooch - item M.40-1974

Source: collections.vam.ac.uk

An example of mourning jewellery from the romantic period features in fig. 2 a gold and black enamelled serpent ring with diamond eyes and worked hair, c.1846, the snake symbolised eternity.

Another example of this period featured in fig. 3 is a brooch made of black glass (French jet) mounted on gold with a back panel holding a lock of hair c.1830-1840.

Hair work jewellery was very popular in the romantic period, women were urged to learn the skills of weaving hair in the home, the following sample fig. 4 is a copy of an original pattern sheet, created for ladies to learn how to create their own hairwork trinkets.

‘In the context of mourning jewellery, hair was seen as a living extension of the departed individual’. Harmeyer, R. (2012) p.34



Figure 4 - Hairwork sample illustration

Source: joyjonesjewelry.com

The early Victorian jewellery which pre-dated 1854 when the hallmarking act was introduced, was made from either 18ct or 22ct gold and was generally handcrafted by skilled workman, these items would prove to be costly to the individual and would therefore have been available only to the wealthier classes, the ability to create jewellery within the home from a loved ones' hair would have been a typical pastime of the middle classes although the lowest classes could possibly have been taught to

create patterns by employers or relatives and had the ability to make their own, basic trinkets.

'The preservation of a lock of a loved ones' hair or its transformation into sentimental hairwork was a practice well-established by the nineteenth century'. Harmeyer, R
(2012) p.35

Hairwork jewellery will be discussed and analysed in chapter 3.

The dawning of the 'grand' period brought with it a darkness which spread across the nation, where the romantic era followed a gentle softness and involved some colour, the grand period was in essence a heavy, black and bold style, the nation grieved with Victoria following Prince Alberts death and mourning became a fashion in itself, department stores provided 'mourning departments', undertakers advertised funerals to suit all needs ranging from a basic coffin and horse drawn carriage to grand cortege featuring hired mourners, and horses adorned with black ostrich plumes.

Mourning stationery was available for the grieving family items such as – white cards with a black background embossed with symbols such as weeping willows or shrouded urns, gothic styled mounts were supplied to display cards in the home, and the stationery was provided with black sealing wax, black stamp boxes and mourning pens.

Ladies clothing changed with the latest fashion styles; crinoline was still used but bombazine became more popular and accessories were crafted from black lace and silks.

Bonnets and caps were replaced with black veils made of silk or lace.

The following images show the fashionable style of dress from the 1860's to 1880's, chapter 1 will focus on samples and analysis of clothing across the periods 1840 – 1890.



Figure 5 - Ladies mourning dress c.1860's

Source: hesitationwaltz.com



Figure 6 - Ladies mourning veil c.1860's

Source: 1860-1960.com

The original photograph which features in fig. 5 is of a lady wearing mourning dress typical of the 1860's, the dress has a full skirt, a buttoned-up collar and crepe edging around the sleeves and bottom of the skirt and a large crepe bow tied around the neckline. The picture which features in fig. 6 is a black straw layered silk veil, the veil is attached to a small cap, so it could be worn comfortably over the head.

To adorn the grand styles large pieces of jewellery made of Whitby jet and carved into symbolic memorial styles were the height of fashion, the Whitby jet industry grew with the call for this simple but elegant material which Queen Victoria endorsed as the only acceptable jewellery for ladies in mourning.



Figure 7 - Whitby jet teardrop necklace

Source: whamond.com

The brooch featured in fig. 7 is a black cameo style brooch carved of Whitby jet featuring a ladies' face adorned with flowers c.1860. The item featured in fig. 8 is a Whitby jet beaded necklace with a carved teardrop pendant c.1860.



Figure 8 - Whitby jet brooch c.1860's

Source: whamond.com

Following the Great exhibition of 1851 where Whitby jet was exhibited its popularity grew and where there had been two shops employing twenty-five people in 1832 by 1872 there were two-hundred shops employing fifteen hundred men, women and children. The bulky jewellery fitted with the grand fashions of the 1860's and 1870's, its natural colouring and simplicity made it ideal for mourning memento's.

Chapter 2 will focus more closely on Whitby jet samples and the industry between the 1850's and 1880's.

Sentimental Jewellery and Symbolism

Jewellery of high quality was made of gold in the early days of the grand period and involved sentimental and symbolic designs.

'Design in mourning jewellery received the same amount of attention as the splendid funeral occasions. Even the humblest pendants and brooches show some originality of design and there are many examples of fine craftsmanship'. (Cooper, D & Battershill, N, 1972) p.16



Figure 9 - Gold and enamel mourning locket c.1860's

Source: [art of mourning.com](http://artofmourning.com)

Classical designs, bold cameos and symbolic images of willow trees, urns and flowers which represented the sorrow of loss.



Figure 10 - Gold cameo mourning hair locket 1860's

Source: laurelleantiquejewellery.com

The item featured in fig. 9 is a gold locket with black enamel, the design features an urn, a ribbon and a wreath with the writing 'not lost but gone before', an example of gold sentimental jewellery of the grand period.

Another example of grand period cameos' features in fig. 10, an 18ct gold cameo with a locket back for placing a lock of hair, featuring an ivory-coloured image of a lady. c.1860's.

Although the designs were typical of the current fashions, they also contained personal sentiments that were only relevant to the wearer and which expressed their emotional state of mind to others, the items could be interpreted as a statement of social standing because of their quality and value, but they were also a warning to others that the wearer was

grieving and perhaps wanted time alone, the item could therefore be interpreted as a protective symbol of their fragile state.

In this instance in a time when only the wealthy could afford high-quality trinkets which allowed them the time to grieve, the poorer classes would have to cope with their inner emotions which continuing with the daily grind, this did not mean that they grieved any less but could not afford to express their emotions in public.

Chapter 3 of this dissertation will feature sentiment and symbolism in mourning jewellery with an analysis of some high - quality items.

Changes in Mourning Culture

The last quarter of the 19th century brought about a change in attitudes and fashion, society was growing tired of the darkness that the grand period endured, and the aesthetic period ensued bringing with it a bright, artistic flare.

The celebrations of Queen Victoria's silver jubilee in 1887 became a point of change, silver jewellery became available to all members of society following the abolishment of tax on gold and silver in 1890.

Following this trade in silver trinkets became available to most members of society.

'The most popular of all the inexpensive items of jewellery that flooded the market was the silver love brooch which was within the purse of all but the very poor'. Cooper, D & Battershill, N (1972) p.64

The brooches were designed to suit the sentiments of the individual and usually contained initials or a single name surrounded by symbols such as flowers and birds. The fashion in this era became influenced by the arts and crafts movement and the art nouveau style.

Ladies' dresses became more classical in style with a large bustle at the back, accessories such as parasols and lace gloves were popular additions to the ladies' daily dress, mourning clothing and accessories were still black, but veils were only worn at the funeral by this stage and

the additional decorative silver jewellery adorned with sapphires, diamonds and French jet produced a lighter, feminine style.



Figure 11 - Ladies mourning dress c.1880's

Source: 19thcenturyartofmourning.com



Fig. 12 – Lace mourning parasol c.1880's

Source: ladiesfromothercenturies.wordpress.com

The picture that features in fig. 11 is a typical mourning dress of the 1880's made from crape and silk with a large bustle, fitted waist and high collar.

The item in fig. 12 is a silk and lace parasol of the 1880's with an ebonised handle.

Textiles and ladies clothing will feature in chapter 1 of this dissertation.

The influence of the aesthetic and art nouveau styles can be seen in sentimental jewellery of the late Victorian era, where in the previous periods mourning jewellery was specific to the culture in colour and symbolism, jewellery in the aesthetic period was made with beauty and artistic style and could be worn to suit the occasion, whilst mourning jewellery held individual meaning it also adapted to culture and fashion and could be altered in detail by adding or removing locks of hair and pictures or altering lettering.

Chapter 3 of this dissertation will include a focus on sentimental jewellery and symbolism of various materials from solid gold to basic metals such as gold alloy and brass.

Collections

Collections of Victorian mourning ephemera are relatively rare in the modern age, people find the idea of hair jewellery distasteful and feel the emotional, morbidity of death and grief to be best avoided however, there are collections of singular items held with museums and galleries which help to provide an insight into the phenomena of mourning ephemera.

Most personal collections are housed within cabinets of curios or are part of an inherited family collection which are closely related to the owner.

This dissertation will investigate mourning ephemera as a complete collection of related items and could assist in the planning of future exhibitions or suggest a unique collection which involves social history of an era combined with antiques that are a sentimental, primary source, offering a complete picture of the mourning culture.

The metropolitan museum in New York held an exhibition in 2015 entitled – Death Becomes her, it featured ladies mourning items of clothing and accessories in Europe and America from 1815 – 1915.

The exhibition aimed to explore aesthetic development and cultural implications of mourning fashions whilst showing the progression of appropriate fabrics from crape to silks which altered with the current fashions and progress of manufacturing. Although this only related to textiles it could also be suggested that this applied to jewellery, the poor would wear personal trinkets similar in style, but hand crafted or made of cheaper, less durable materials which might have stood the test of time.

The research involved in this dissertation could offer a different focus on collections and how items are grouped, by creating a view of mourning culture as a historical era which was moulded by the artefacts that represent it, as opposed to the social history and culture of the time influencing the creation of the artefacts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The approach to researching materialism and culture relating to Victorian mourning ephemera begins with societal behaviour and the belief system which had an adverse effect on fashion and etiquette.

The Upper classes of Victorian Britain were governed by social conduct and materialistic values which assisted in presenting them to the rest of society as suggested by Jalland, P (1996) p.19

‘The evangelical impulses of seriousness, piety, discipline and showed at their best in the upper ranks of society and became the basis for Victorian morality and Victorian values’.

Following behind with these values were the up-and-coming middle classes whose increasing wealth and status made them able to afford some luxuries which were only previously available to the wealthy, they were also influenced by the behaviours and societal etiquette of the upper class thus maintaining and accentuating certain fashions, beliefs and ritualistic actions.

As etiquette played a strong basis within mourning culture, the display of ephemera relating to death, combined with the sentiment such items expressed, resulted in a phenomenal process of behaviour which appeared to spread across the whole of society, at a time when the middle classes were able to follow the actions of the upper classes the lower classes also became influenced by such actions through a fear of being ridiculed or showing no sensitivity with regard to death.

Taylor, L (2009) p.17 writes of the pressures placed on grieving ladies to carry out mourning etiquette for fear of being publicly shamed and suggests that this applied to the lowest classes as much as the upper classes.

‘The class divisions of Victorian society showed up most starkly in their funerals’.

Mourning dress known as widows’ weeds, was readily available to the wealthy upper class and was within the budget of the middle class but

for the lower classes who had very little money to live on buying new clothes would have been an issue.

Puckle, B (1926) p.141 talks about the funeral of the Duke of Wellington in 1852, this was a grand occasion, the duke was given a state funeral as a man who loved and admired throughout Britain.

Puckle states –

‘During the procession the streets presented a remarkable sight; enormous crowds were assembled many hours before the ceremony. Both rich and poor were dressed in deep mourning’.

The question remains open with regards to how the poor were able to access clothing for such an occasion.

Manufacturing within the textile industry was vast at this time and offered the possibility of synthetic dyes becoming available to those of the lowest classes as stated by Foster & Christie (2013) p.1 –

‘From the middle of the 19th century, fashion garments for women, which had previously been restricted largely to the wealthy social classes, began to become much more widely accessible in society’.

Where mourning clothes were previously made exclusively for the specific purpose of mourning, processes which were evolving within the textile industry made it possible to adapt old, second-hand clothing and mass-produce clothing which was then sold at a lower cost.

Foster & Christie (2013) p.12 continue –

‘From the 1860’s the use of natural dyes diminished and were replaced by synthetic dyes which were of high purity and less expensive. These textiles became increasingly more available to the lower classes who had previously been restricted to simple, low-quality garments, or faded second hand goods’.

The ritual of wearing widow’ weeds was suggested to follow the belief that the colour black reflects the evil eye and showed society that this individual was in deep mourning and refrained from being involved in any frivolity.

As Puckle, B (1926) p.66 suggests –

‘The use of black for mourning garments is connected with the deep-routed dread of the return of the dead. It was believed that when cloaked or veiled in sable hue, human beings were invisible to the spirits thus free from any possibility of molestation’.

The clothing is also suggested to have provided a form of protection to the individual, shielding them from the rest of society.

The ephemera displayed with the dress, parasols, handkerchiefs and jewellery was a display of sentiment associated with the clothing and became a great show of the mourning culture in the grand period, 1860-1880, as Cooper & Battershill (1972) p.11 state –

‘The ritual which followed death became increasingly elaborate in the third quarter of the nineteenth century when mourning was carried to fantastic extremes, largely owing to the example set by Queen Victoria following the death of the Prince Consort in 1861’.

The funeral held the main emphasis following the death and undertakers provided packages to suit the various pockets of the mourners, prices which could range from £8 to £28 involved various aspects not just the coffin and hearse but a range of items such as horse plumes, outfits and accessories, mourning cards and black armbands.

As stated by Strange, J (2005) p.5 –

‘The expansion of the commercial cemetery was mirrored by a burgeoning industry in funeral and mourning paraphernalia, (clothing, jewellery, stationary, shrouds, plumes, horses and so on). At the heart of this consumer market was the undertaker whose perceived greed is best encapsulated in comparisons with the vampire’.

To make provision for the cost of the funeral it was commonplace for lower class families to join burial clubs, these clubs would take a payment of half a penny or one penny a week and upon the death of a loved one paid out for a low-price funeral package of around £10, this would generally include the loan of mourning clothes for up to four family members.

Richards & De Beaumont (2000) p.156 state –

‘To make provision for good funerals for themselves, many working-class people took out a form of insurance for which they paid a half penny or a penny per week into a ‘burial society’.

Whilst the cost of the funeral and possibly clothing was covered the family also accepted charitable donations which would help if a wage earner had died but also could have provided a little money to buy a memorial item such as a brooch or a locket in which to conceal a lock of hair.

Richards & De Beaumont continue –

‘In working class communities, friends and neighbours of the deceased were invited to an evening of music at a pub, where a collection would be taken to defray the high cost of funerals.

The pressure on the working classes to provide a funeral and show of grief was placed by the rest of society who looked on the lower classes with distaste, the lower classes themselves held a fear of facing a paupers’ funeral or worse still having the deceased taken away for medical research.

As suggested by Richmond, V (2013) p.129 –

‘The bereaved were expected to make some attempt at mourning dress, but this could be expensive, and the sums expended on it by the poor attracted criticism from wealthier observers.

Other possible sources for the poor came in the form of borrowing or hand making items in the home, from sewing and dying the possibilities of creating items were made possible with handy leaflets and instruction booklets.

Puckle, B (1926) p.66 states –

‘You may see the “impossible” performed a hundred times a year in any poor neighbourhood. Of course, there are pawnshops, ready-made clothes and cheap materials.

Mourning jewellery which the wealthier classes could purchase from specific establishments or quality jewellers was an item which became more available following the hallmark act 1854, cheaper low-grade metals combined with black enamel were used to create rings and brooches were available to the middle and working classes but most likely not to the poor unless they were able to gain ownership through the local pawnbroker.

Luthi, A (2001) p.18 suggests –

‘The hallmarking act of 1854 allowed lower-grade gold alloys to be used, whilst mass-production methods resulted in cheaper brooches and lockets, many of them with black enamel with the impersonal standardised lettering ‘In memory of’.

The majority of this jewellery was similar in style and quality and still exists today, these types of ephemera which did not hold personal sentiment or attachment could be pawned, borrowed or sold on following the end of the suggested mourning period.

Gere, C (1972) p.247 states –

‘Mourning etiquette was religiously observed by all classes of society and the demand for mourning jewellery was so great that it had to be mass-produced, which explains the somewhat ‘all-purpose’ look of some of the less expensive jewellery’.

Whitby jet jewellery which was favoured by Queen Victoria and suitable to wear with the heavy bombazine dresses of the grand period 1860-1880 was produced for the wealthier market and although there are many similar smaller pieces in the form of bar brooches, some items were intricately carved and were of high-quality making them valuable in comparison with the mass-produced low-grade gold items.

Muller, H (1994) p.14 states –

‘As the century progressed, fashions changed from the lightweight clothes of the regency period to the heavier and darker dresses which culminated in the voluminous crinoline of the 1850’s and 60’s. As always, fashion in jewellery followed and the fuller dresses required much larger jewellery to compliment them, for this jet was ideal.’

Hair work jewellery was popular across all classes of society and keeping a lock of hair from the deceased was considered a normal and important practice, ladies would learn how to make intricate items of jewellery with the use of instruction books, and these could be made with little or no cost.

Gere, C (1972) p.247 states –

‘Apart from jet, which was used for mourning jewellery of all kinds, the Victorians had a great preference for hair-work, a large quantity of which was produced by young ladies following the instructions in a monthly magazine or one of the booklets which were available.’

A book published by Mark Campbell in 1867 which was a self-help guide to making hair-work jewellery also showed how to create your own weaving tool for use in the home.

Stated in the prefix of the book Campbell, M (1867) p.1 are the words -

‘The great consumption and rapidly increasing demand for every description of hair goods, will make this work he now presents to the public, one of particular interest to all classes.’

The popularity for hand crafted mementoes was not limited to hair work jewellery but used for other types of textiles such as clothing, handkerchiefs and mourning samplers.

Fowkes Tobin, B (2017) p.3 suggests –

‘Mourning culture created, shared and used by women, particularly in the nineteenth century, include memorial samplers, post-mortem photographs, mourning stationery and condolence calls, all designed to deal with the personal grief and private loss’.

Artefacts relating to the culture of mourning represent all members of society through their craftsmanship and design but also the emotion and sentiment that went into the creation of the objects.

As death is something all had to face, rich and poor alike living in Victorian society, it can be suggested that even wealth could not make grief any easier to overcome and at times of dark emotion all classes wished to express the love they held for the deceased.

As the Victorian author Charles Dickens wrote in his novel ‘the old Curiosity shop’, following the death of the young, poor girl Nell, who was fondly thought of by all in her neighbourhood –

‘How is it that folks are nearly all in black today? I have seen a mourning ribbon or piece of crape on everyone’. p.541

Grief was and is a universal emotion which at this point in history became a phenomenal, materialistic fashion.

The following chapters will form an assessment of a sample of Victorian items and address the original ownership, the craftsmanship behind them and attempt to form a comparison between the upper, middle and lower classes mourning ephemera.

CHAPTER 1

WIDOWS WEEDS, ACCESSORIES AND TEXTILES

Dressing in widows' weeds was expected societal behaviour in the early 1830's but became a fashion statement amongst the upper classes as the nineteenth century progressed.

As suggested by Taylor, L (1983) p.90 –

'Mourning wear was considered so essential a part of a lady's wardrobe, that upper- class women were never without it'.

This fashion was closely followed by the middle classes who strived to be as prominent in society as their wealthier counterparts but it was also important to the working classes throughout the nineteenth century, their attempts to keep up appearances caused them great concern and at times left them without food just so that they could display the correct attire.

Taylor, L (1983) p.90 also states –

'During the 1850-90 period mourning became such a cult that hardly anyone dared defy it'.

The following dresses and accessories are samples which attempt to show a difference in quality and appearance of mourning ephemera across the classes, the dresses belonging to the wealthier ladies were tailor made using fine silks, lace and embroidery.

Examples of lower-class items involve the use of lower grade materials such as crepe, wool or make shift items created from pieces of cloth.



Figure 13 - Ladies silk taffeta mourning dress

Source: National trust collections

Clothing for the upper classes was tailor made of the finest quality fabrics and styled to suit the latest fashion, even though there was a strict etiquette regarding mourning wear ladies' dresses were designed to show the wealth and status of the wearer.

The dress featured in fig. 13 is held within the national trust collection, it is a two - piece outfit which consists of a long skirt with sewn in waistband and a fitted bodice with button down front and high collar.

The whole outfit is made from silk taffeta with embroidered detail around the collar, the waist and sleeves, the end of the sleeves have a lace trim.

The outfit is typical if the aesthetic period and dates to the 1890's, it was tailor made by Mr G.V Hutton, a prominent tailor of ladies' fashions of the Mantel & Fur warehouse, Nottingham. This dress would have been commissioned by a lady of wealth and status, its exquisite detail and quality express a lady of high social standing, whilst the outfit was

designed with fashion and quality in mind this would have also held a sentimental purpose for the owner whilst in a time of grief.



Figure 14 - ladies silk mourning cape

Source: National trust collections

The ladies' mourning cape featured in fig. 14 is made predominantly from silk, it has a wide collar with rounded lapels which is trimmed with black ostrich feathers, it features embroidered detail of scrolling foliage, leaves and flower heads, tailor made by G.H Lea & co. Liverpool.

The style is typical of the grand period 1860 – 1880 and the detail used would suggest it was designed with the specific purpose of funeral attire, as it was tailor-made with such quality and precision it would have been commissioned by a lady of wealth.

The use of ostrich feathers provide evidence that this was designed following rules of funeral etiquette but influenced by the latest fashions.

The original owner would have commissioned this as a symbol of their status, but it also shows the sentiment involved by the use of the

symbols embroidered onto the fabric, this cape would have been an expensive purchase at the time and created for a specific individual.



Figure 15 - Ladies Black straw hat

Source: National trust collections

Hats were considered everyday wear to the Victorians so black mourning hats designed specifically to accompany mourning dress; the item featured in fig. 15 is a ladies' black straw hat this has been adorned with black satin and voile ribbons and features black feathers and sequins.

The design is quite simple and decorative but also relates to the mourning fashions, this hat could have been created by an independent hat maker or manufactured in a factory, whilst hats were common place in Victorian Britain and owned by even the poorest of ladies, the silks and crafted detail would suggest this would most likely belong to a middle - class lady, the original cost would have been reasonable to those of means, hats for wealthy ladies were created using lavish silks, black lace and feathers, these would be worn with a black lace veil underneath, the style of hats changed slightly throughout the Victorian period but mourning attire was suitably designed to reflect darkness.



Figure 16 – Black bonnet

Source: Ebay.co.uk

The lower - class ladies wore cotton hats known as mob caps which were usually white in colour, but these were also sometimes made with black fabric and would be suitable mourning attire, the bonnet featured in fig.16 is a basic cloth hat similar to a mob cap and would have been worn by lower-class, working ladies

Simply designed and made of cotton or a similar cheap fabric, the bonnet is attractive in style but basic in design and expresses an impression of durability as opposed to a symbol of fashion, these were typical of the basic style of clothing of the lower classes, the bonnet also has an attached ribbon and would be suitable mourning attire.



Figure 17 - Ladies silk and lace mourning parasol

Source: National trust collection

Accessories were just as important to Victorian ladies as the outfit, the item featured in fig. 17 is a ladies' mourning parasol made of silk taffeta, it has an ebonised handle with a crook shaped end with carved detail, the parasol is trimmed with black lace embroidered with forget me nots, the top of the parasol has a black ribbon attached.

The parasol has a very simple design featuring symbols of mourning combined with the current fashions, this is typical of the grand period 1860 – 1880 would have been manufactured and sold in department stores such as Jays mourning warehouse, or independent stores, the original cost would have been suited to those of a modest income and would have appealed to the middle classes.

The parasol represents a lady in mourning and is an adequate accessory for mourning ensemble, designed with a specific purpose and made of reasonably priced materials but using specific relevant detail, the working classes were unlikely to own such accessories.



Figure 18 – ladies crepe dress

Source: National trust collection

The silk and bombazine dresses worn by the wealthy were not available to the lower classes, they were expensive and unsuitable for the lifestyles of working women, as the poor still wanted to follow the rules of mourning etiquette and show their grief in public other types of material and cheaply made clothing adapted using dyes were the only option.

The dress featured in fig. 18 is a crepe dress typical of the grand period 1860 – 1880 in its style, it consists of a bodice which cover over the shoulders and comes to a point at the back, the sleeves are puffed and the skirt is gathered at the waist and consists of two layers of crepe, it has a front fastening of hook and eyes.

The dress is consistent of the fashion of the time but would have had little value due to its cheap fabric and lack of design quality, this would have been manufactured or handmade and owned by a working lady, maybe a lady in service and could have been borrowed or used repeatedly as and when required.

Influenced in style by current fashion but not designed with any symbolism of mourning this dress represents a lady with little means who wants to show society she is in mourning; it is merely a symbol of the mourning culture representative of the Victorian working woman.



Figure 19 – Original photograph of a working lady dressed in mourning attire

Source: www.flickr.com

Nineteenth century photography can assist with an accurate record of everyday people and show us examples of the textiles worn by ladies of the time, the photograph featured in fig. 19 shows a working lady in what can be described of makeshift mourning attire.

She is wearing a simple black wool mix dress which has a taffeta apron over the top and a simple black scarf over her head.

This suggests a lady in mourning as a taffeta apron was not the usual attire of the time, it appears the lady has used a basic piece of material to make an apron and adorned a black scarf to show her grief.

The style of the clothing suggests this photograph was taken during the grand period 1860 – 1880 and symbolises death amongst the lower classes.



Figure 20 – Ladies black silk handkerchief

Source: National trust collections

Accessories played an important accompaniment to mourning etiquette everyday items were made in black to play an essential role in the social display played by ladies, the item featured in fig. 20 is a handkerchief made of black silk, the edges have been frayed to form a frilled edge.

Handkerchiefs were mass produced by manufacturers and would have been relatively inexpensive to purchase, this handkerchief is made of a quality material but is very basic in design typical of the grand period 1860 - 1880, it would have been owned by a middle - class lady but could possibly have been available to the lower classes, pieces of cut off cloth would have been cheap and then adapted by the individual to form a mourning accessory.

The colour of the material represented mourning in view of the item being an everyday object, handkerchiefs for daily use were generally made of white cotton or lace so the black silk tells society the owner is grieving.

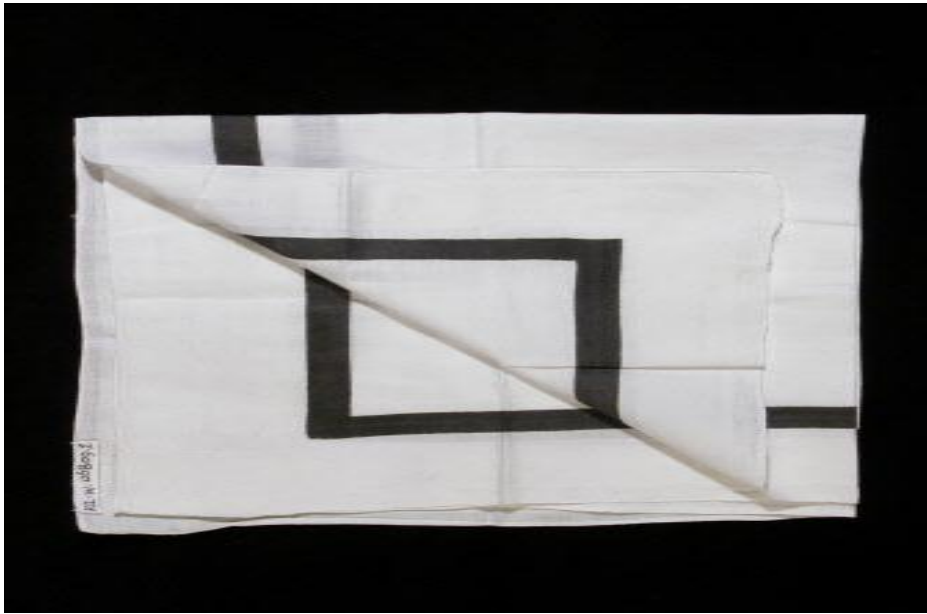


Figure 21 – Simple white cotton handkerchief with black border

Source: National trust collections

A common style of mourning handkerchief which is designed in the same way as mourning cards is featured in fig. 21.

This handkerchief is a simple white cotton piece of fabric with self-woven borders which have been over painted with a narrow black border.

This style of handkerchief was mass produced and would have been cheap to purchase it is typical of the grand period 1860 – 1880 but could have still been used until the end of the century, the simple design which represents mourning in its style could have been adapted in the home and would have been owned by either a middle – class individual or someone of the lower classes.

The black border symbolised mourning and would have shown society that the owner was grieving, this could have been an important item for someone who could not afford typical mourning attire.

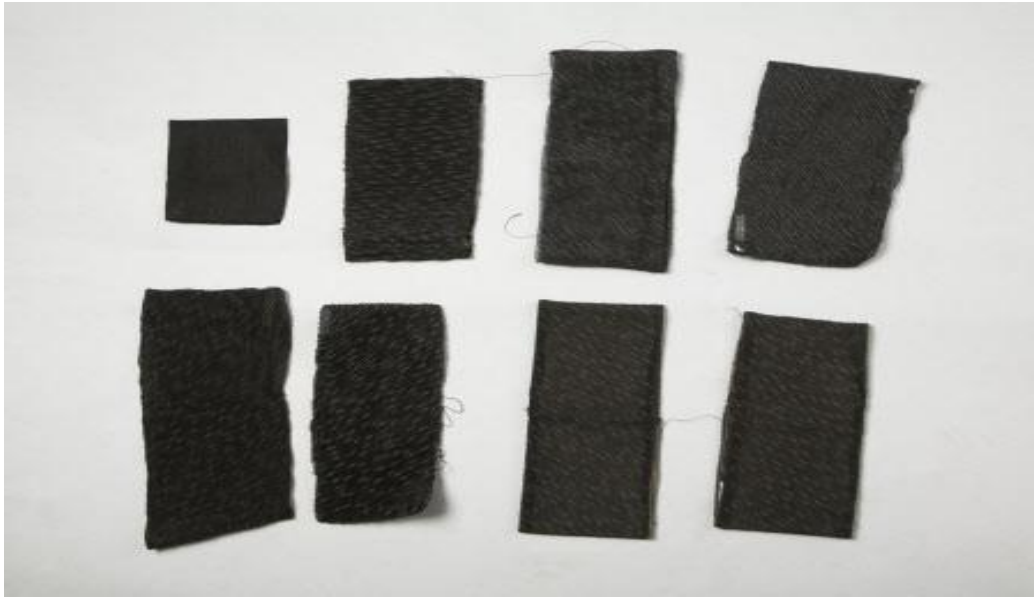


Figure 22 - Black crepe, hand stitched armbands

Source: National trust collections

As a sign of respect during the Victorian period armbands were worn by pall bearers, friends and neighbours of grieving relatives.

The items in fig. 22 are a set of mourning armbands made of black crepe, these have been cut and self-lined with simple hand stitching.

Armbands were lent to relatives by undertakers as part of the funeral package, but lower classes would wear these as part of their mourning attire if other clothes were not available to them. Simple to make and low in cost these armbands were a popular accessory which were basic in design but a symbol of death to those in observance.

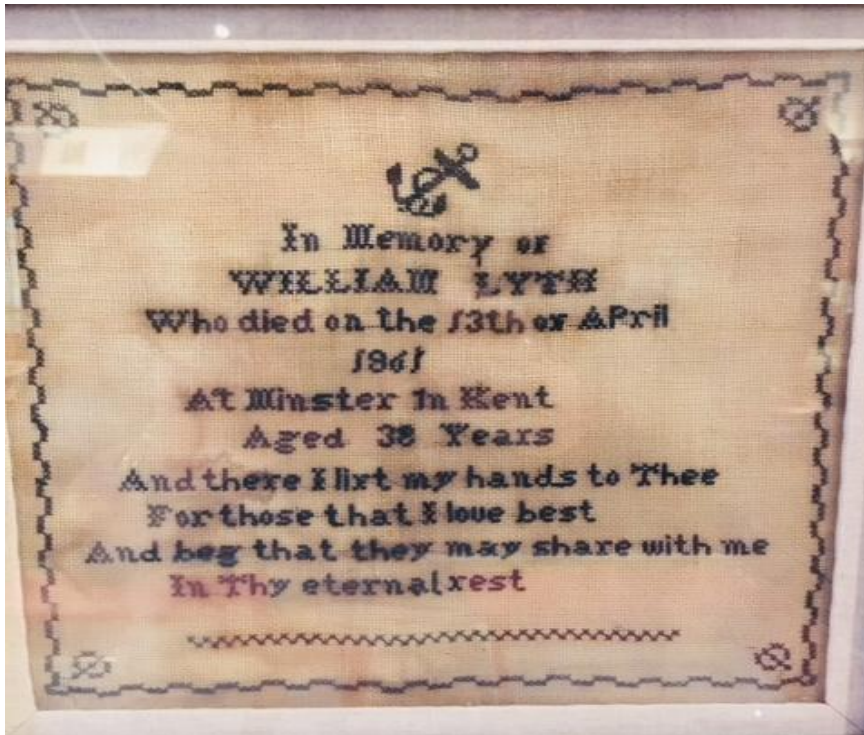


Figure 23 - Hand crafted mourning sampler

Source: Whitby museum collection

Hand crafted items were a cheap and popular way of creating a memorial to the deceased and ladies in Britain would create objects as a keep safe.

The item featured in fig. 23 is a sampler in memorial of William Lyth who died aged 38 in 1861.

Created using a simple piece of fabric which has been designed using black thread.

The framed item currently on display at the Whitby museum is an example of the type of needlework taught to girls and young ladies within the home, middle class ladies would make items such as these samplers as a past time but working - class ladies were able to hand craft objects in memory of their deceased relatives at very little cost.

Items like this were very much a symbol of sentiment and appealed to all classes, they represented a display of personal grief and loving memory.

SUMMARY

To the wealthier classes of Victorian Britain mourning etiquette was expected behaviour with the involvement of sentiment and fashion, it was also an act of self-protection, a way of hiding from society for a short time whilst dealing with the pain of grief.

As the wealth of the middle class increased, they too provided a show of mourning in the public eye. The fine clothes featured in this chapter provide an example of the cost involved in mourning but also shows a comparable difference between textiles available across the classes and the effort which was made by the lower/working classes who wished to be involved in the mourning culture and show their respect and public grief in much the same way.

Class differences can be readily identified through the quality, design of the individual items.

CHAPTER 2

WHITBY JET

The Whitby jet industry became increasingly popular following the great exhibition of 1851 where the material and its qualities were exhibited to the nation, items created from the product, which were handcrafted by skilled workers made it costly to the buyer but popular within the upper - class society.

As Muller, H (1987) p.50 suggests –

‘Because they were hand carved, jet articles were never cheap, it was partly the high price of jet jewellery that made it vulnerable to competition from cheaper imitations.’

The dark black/brown colouring and lightweight substance which could be carved into intricate but bulky jewellery made it the ideal material for use in the creation of mourning jewellery, the properties of jet were also said at this time to ‘reflect the evil eye’.

As stated by Kendall, H.P (1926) p.10 –

‘The use of jet to ward off the evil eye has persisted from early times, and is still retained in Northern Spain, where the children wear jet beads, in accordance with old custom and superstition’.

Following the death of Prince Albert, Queen Victoria insisted on only jet jewellery being worn by herself and her household, society followed her lead and the jewellery became the most fashionable accompaniment to the styles of mourning attire worn during the ‘grand period’, 1860-1880.



Figure 24 - Carved jet cameo brooch

Source: Personal collection

Cameo brooches were a very popular style of jewellery in the grand period and featured often in mourning ephemera, the brooch featured in fig. 24 is an intricately carved jet cameo brooch featuring the face and shoulders of a lady, the hair and facial features are beautifully detailed, the edge is carved with beaded detail and the back is mounted with a brass plate and pin.

The brooch measures 5 cm tall and is crafted from a thick, heavy piece of jet and would have been skilfully crafted by an experienced worker, because of the quality and skill which went into the design of the brooch and the excellent quality of the piece of jet the brooch would have been costly to buy at the time and could have been commissioned by the family of the lady featured, this item would have been owned by someone of the upper classes and not only represents grief but also wealth, it is in keeping with the fashions of the time and shows sentiment and is symbolic of mourning.



Figure 25 - Whitby jet geometric bracelet

Source: W. Hammond collections

Whitby jet could be carved and shaped into intricate designs, the material is durable yet lightweight and an excellent substance for carving into pieces of jewellery which stand the test of time, so many quality pieces still exist today and can be quite costly. The bracelet featured in fig. 25 is double banded and consists of square pieces of jet which have been carved into geometric shapes which are then threaded onto an elasticated band, this simple design creates elegance and shows good craftsmanship.

The design which is based on examples of work by Christopher Dresser which involves simple, straight lines of symmetry which create a balanced, clean image, unique of its time and most likely created by a skilled craftsman. This bracelet would have been expensive when first sold and owned by a lady of means, it represents quality and a show of grief combined with wealth and a strong fashion sense.



Figure 26 - Whitby jet bracelet

Source: W. Hammond collections

Geometric designs were quite common amongst items of jet, the durability of the material made it possible to create elegant lines and moulded styles which were solid and durable, the bracelet featured in fig. 27 which is similar to the bracelet in fig. 26 in design but alternatively has a central feature square held with two claw shaped pieces, a style which is common in wrist watches, this would have been created by a skilled craftsman and been costly to purchase.

The bracelet is a statement of quality; style combined with wealth and would have been owned by a lady of means who wished to present herself as a lady in mourning whilst keeping within the realms of fashion and good taste.



Figure 27 - Whitby jet bar brooch

Source: W. Hammond collections

Most Whitby jet jewellery was created with precision but designs altered with the ability of the craftsman, smaller more delicate pieces of the material were given to less experienced craftsman who would attempt to create basic designs and small items of jewellery which would be less costly to the individual but still represent an item of mourning. The brooch featured in fig. 27 is a multi - faceted bar brooch which has been deeply carved to create an intricate design, both ends have been carved with fine detail, the brooch is quite delicate and only measures just 4 cm in length.

These bar brooches were very common but would still be too expensive for those on a low wage, these brooches were typically owned by the middle- class ladies who wanted to keep within the current fashion, the basic designs were influenced by the more intricate pieces and created a picture of mourning in a simple but effective manner.

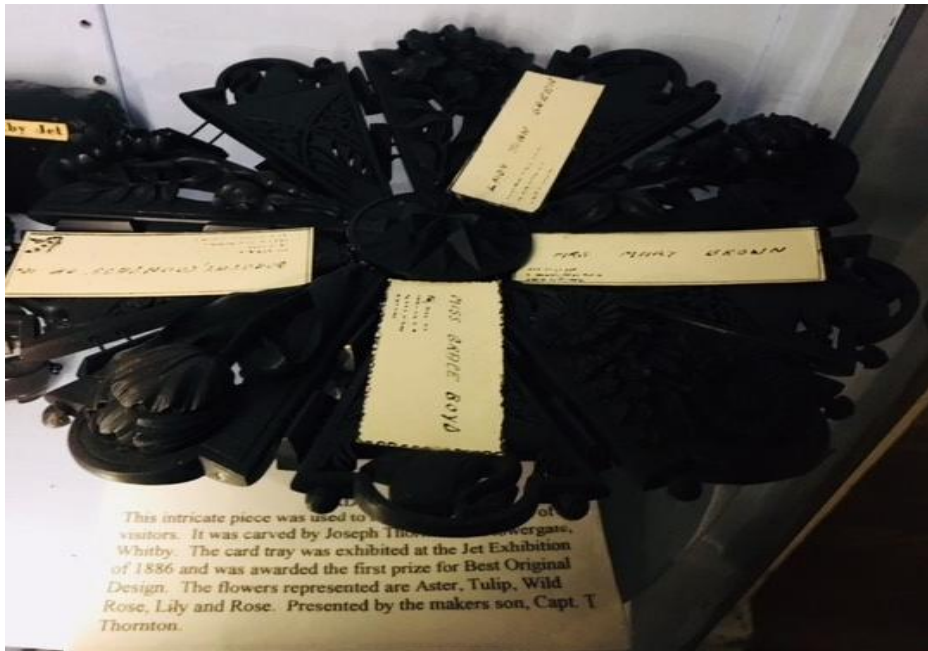


Figure 28- Calling card tray

Source: Whitby museum

It was not only jewellery that was created from Whitby jet and although it was common in the creation of mourning items, it was also a craft which received awards and some pieces were created just for show, the item featured in fig. 28 is a calling card tray, the design which is almost tazza shaped and expertly carved from a large piece of jet was created with the specific purpose of holding calling cards, each section is expertly carved into sections featuring floral designs with a central circular star design piece which held the card in place.

The tray was designed by Joseph Thornton, he won 1st prize at the 1886 Jet exhibition for he expert design and quality of the piece.

The item if purchased would have been very costly to the individual and would have been owned by a wealthy lady who wished to own the tray for placing calling cards whilst receiving visitors when in mourning, the flowers featured in the design are tulips, lilies and roses, these flowers are synonymous with symbols of mourning and the item represents a household in grief but also gives a representation of wealth.

JET IMMITATIONS

The popularity of jet jewellery encouraged the production of similar style items made from cheaper materials which were more accessible to the lower classes, plastics such as vulcanite and gutta percha could be moulded into the same style jewellery as jet but sold at much lower prices.

As stated by Kendall, H (1936) p.27 –

‘Further imitations of jet were placed upon the market, vulcanite being the chief substitute, as it could be moulded and cheaply produced, besides being indistinguishable from jet when new’.



Figure 29 - Vulcanite bracelet

Source: [Art of mourning.com](http://Artofmourning.com)

Items which were created as jet imitations were designed with similar styles to jet jewellery, as the jet bracelets were created using geometric designs and common symbols, items made of vulcanite were moulded into a style to make them look like jet jewellery.

The bracelet featured in fig. 29 is a vulcanite bracelet which consists of separate pieces of shaped oval links which are threaded onto an elasticated band, each disk has been moulded into different designs including symbols of love such as heart and anchor and also flowers which represent loss, the bracelet does have a sense of quality in the design and symbolism, but the material was cheap and could be mass produced.

This item would have been owned by a middle- class lady, it represents sorrow and mourning and would be readily available to purchase in the event of sudden loss, these items were available in high street stores such as Jay's mourning warehouse, London.



Figure 30 - Vulcanite brooches

Source: Personal collection

Vulcanite jewellery was a very popular alternative to Whitby jet because it could be mass produced and a large quantity of styles and designs were produced with the influence of design coming from the jet industry.

The brooches featured in fig. 30 look very similar to jet from a distance but on closer inspection it can be assessed that the designs featured have been moulded and not carved also the material is smooth in appearance and feels like a plastic substance whereas jet is cold to the touch and feels rough on the reverse side.

The rectangular shaped brooch features a leaf design, and the bar brooch features a half-moon, and a forget me not flower, symbols which represented mourning but were not created as a show of wealth.

These brooches were relatively cheap, mass produced and easily accessible in high street stores, they would have been owned by middle class ladies or possibly lower-class ladies if they were able to access funds for funeral attire.



Figure 31 - Vulcanite bar brooches

Source: Personal collection

Bar brooches were very popular items of mourning jewellery, they were black in colour which was in fitting with mourning etiquette and during the grand period they sat comfortably with the style of dresses at the time, large, bulky jewellery was required to express emotion, something which the Victorians normally kept hidden.

The brooches featured in fig. 31 are basic bar brooches made from vulcanite with moulded designs, the top brooch with deep cut lines is influenced by the style of carved jet brooches, the other brooch has a moulded floral design at the ends also similar to the jet bar brooches.

These brooches were relatively cheap, and mass produced, they would have been owned by middle class or lower-class ladies as a representation of grief.



Figure 32 - Bog oak bracelet

Source: Rubylane.com

Imitation jewellery was also created from other plastic material such as gutta percha but a common material which was produced in Ireland was bog oak, a wooden substance which was dark - brown in colour but had a similar appearance to Whitby jet, it could also be carved into jewellery.

The bracelet featured in fig. 32 is a bracelet made of circular sections of bog oak which have intricate carved designs featuring shamrocks and flowers and attached with an elasticated band.

The designs were influenced by jet jewellery and were intricately carved in a similar fashion, these pieces of jewellery are not as common as vulcanite jewellery and would have been owned by middle class or lower - class ladies as a symbol of grief, these might not have been particularly expensive at the time of production as the material was cheap but not common, the carving could be done in the home and the ability taught by relatives of carpenters or other such craftsman.

SUMMARY

The growth of the Whitby jet industry in the 1860's was influenced by current fashion and the recommendation of Queen Victoria, as the material was well suited to the design of mourning jewellery and the fashion of the grand period it was most popular among the wealthy and middle classes this was because of the excellent craftsmanship and cost of each individual piece.

Jet jewellery was considered a symbol of wealth but also a symbol of mourning which went on to influence the popularity of imitation jewellery.

Vulcanite, gutta percha, French jet and bog oak were all attributed as materials which were suitable to express sentiment and grief along with the influence of current fashion in jewellery making and because of their lower costs were items that were available to the lower classes.

CHAPTER 3

SENTIMENTAL MOURNING JEWELLERY

Mourning jewellery which was a popular concept in the Georgian era became a common way of expressing grief and sentiment in the entire Victorian period, styles of jewellery changed with fashion eras to suit clothing from early romantic style jewellery made of gold and containing secret messages of love and soft in design to bold, dark jewellery giving strong statements of grief and then towards the end of the nineteenth century becoming petite and delicate with aesthetic influence.

Gere, C (1972) p.251 writes of Victorian mourning jewellery styles –

‘Many pieces of Victorian jewellery are adapted to accommodate miniatures, even photographs in the later years, locks of hair and other memorabilia, the locket which opens is the most common example of this type of jewel, but there are a number of bracelets which have central bosses which open’.

Quality pieces of jewellery were made of gold until the 1880's and often had black enamelling, some pieces contained gemstones which would spell out messages using the first initial of each stone, seed pearls were a very popular stone used in mourning brooches, jewellery of this nature was costly, it was a symbol of wealth and sentiment.

The adaptability of mourning jewellery made it popular in fashion culture as items could be produced in a similar style and then tailored to meet individual needs by adding lettering, locks of hair and photographs.

Popular London jewellers such as John Brogden of Covent Garden and Alfred Shuff of Great Marlborough Street were known for their distinct designs which were adapted to meet the needs of the customer.

The drawing which features in fig. 33 comes from an album collection of designs created by John Brogden, it features a gold ring with a black enamel centre containing entwined initials.

Customers would choose from a selection of designs which would then be adapted to suit their requirements.

These pieces of jewellery would have been costly to purchase and were limited to the wealthier classes as a symbol of social standing, quality and grief within the public eye, they also provided the grieving families with a lasting memorial to their loved one.

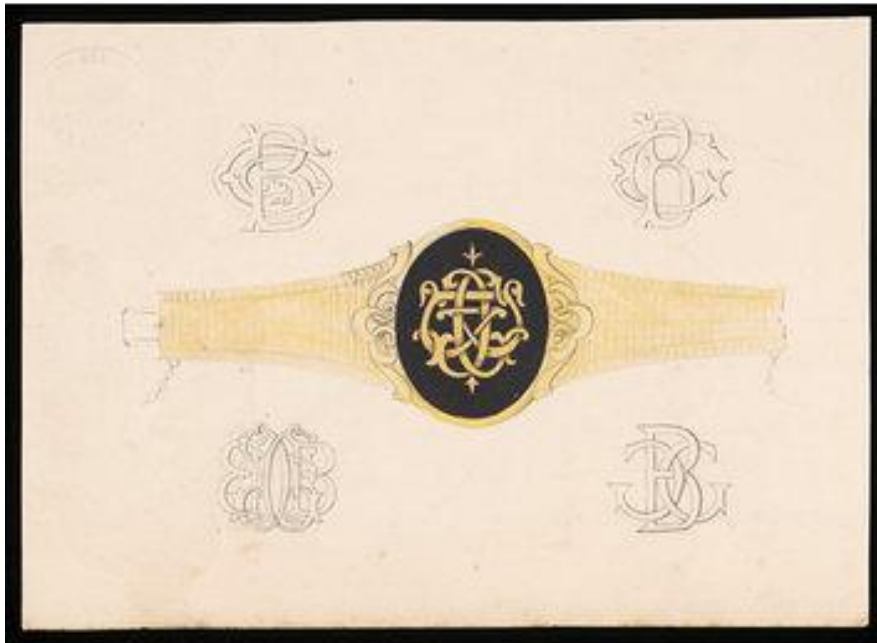


Figure 33 - John Brogden design

Source: V & A collections



Figure 34 - Gold mourning ring

Source: V&A collections

The style of jewellery created by John Brogden and other high - class jewellery makers was commonplace as it could easily be copied by other makers of jewellery, rings with enamel and lettering were very popular, the ring which features in fig. 34 is made of gold with a central panel of black enamel and enamelled design which travels around the edges of the ring, the central cartouche contains the letters 'AEI' taken from the Greek word 'Always'.

This design is a personal, sentimental item created for a specific individual but could relate to any lost relative, the quality of the materials would make it a costly item purchased by a wealthier member of society to create the image of grief and social status.

The ring is influenced by popular - design of the 1860's which feature coded lettering.



Figure 35 - Gold enamel locket

Source: V & A collection

Locketts were a very popular item which were used to represent mourning, based on simple elegant designs they could be adapted with the use of enamels and lettering and had the internal facility to hold locks of hair, the locket which features in fig. 35 is made of solid gold with a black enamel face, the centre features initials created by tiny diamonds, the locket opens to a central glazed interior which holds a lock of hair.

This beautifully designed item which is influenced by other high - end jewellery of the 1860's would have been a costly item, adapted to suit the sentiment required by the individual, it expresses the wearers social status but also their everlasting grief for their lost loved one, intertwined initials represent eternal love.



Figure 36 - Gold, seed pearl brooch

Source: National trust collections

Mourning brooches were common items which differed in style but had similar features to rings and lockets, the item features in fig. 36 shows an example of a bar brooch, it is made of high quality gold with a black enamelled face, the brooch has been shaped in a design which has a religious context featuring a combination of a star and crosses, the centre is decorated with a star design which contains seven tiny seed pearls. Typical of the style of brooches in the 1860's, many featured seed pearls and represented the individuals' grief but also created a display of fashionable taste and quality.

These brooches were commonplace and would be worn mostly by the middle classes, they would have been of a reasonable cost due to the simplicity of design, they were also very small 3- 4cm in length however this brooch is made of gold and such items would not have been within the reach of the lower classes.



Figure 37 - Gold 'In memory of' locket

Source: Rubylane.com

Brooches prior to the 1860's were influenced by earlier romantic styles and were more decorative, the item featured in fig. 37 is made of gold and has a scrolled rococo style edging, the front has a black enamelled face and gold lettering which reads 'in memory of', the centre features a cameo style forget me not which is surrounded with a border of pearls.

The brooch was made in 1841 and was created for a specific individual as the reverse side holds the inscription 'James Edwards obt 17 mar:1841, it also contains a lock of hair within a compartment inside the back of the brooch.

The design is influenced by sentiment and represents the grief of the wearer, this brooch also displays wealth and would have been owned by a lady of means, jewellery of this type was not within the reach of the lower classes in the early Victorian era as prior to 1854 only 15ct gold was used in jewellery making, cheaper reproductions were available.



Figure 38 - Gold tone enamel bar brooch

Source: Personal collection

Following the introduction of cheaper alloy metals within the production of jewellery making mourning items became widely produced made in similar styles to high end jewellery but created with cheaper, but still attractive materials.

The bar brooch which features in fig. 38 is similar in style to the gold brooch featured in fig.36 but is made of a gold alloy metal, it has a black enamel front, a central star design and is decorated with tiny seed pearl, the brooch measures just 4cm in length but is attractive and representative of mourning jewellery of the 1860's.

Brooches of this style would be popular within the middle classes as they would be reasonably priced, in style with the latest fashion and still represent social status, influenced by gold mourning jewellery of the time this brooch expresses grief and a sense of fashion for the wearer.



Figure 39 - Brass French Jet ring

Source: Personal collection

Towards the latter part of the nineteenth century the introduction of cheaper metal alloys, alternative materials and a change in fashion styles mourning jewellery became less of a statement of grief and became more adaptable to fashionable style.

The earlier influences of religious context and coded messages became less popular, the aesthetic movement was based on art and creativity, the item which features in fig. 39 is a mourning ring dated to the 1890's, it is made of a brass/copper alloy which has been expertly carved to create a long panel 6cm long which covers most of the finger, the centre holds a large French jet glass stone which is surrounded with beaded detail.

French jet which was a shiny black glass type material became a popular alternative to Whitby jet because of its low cost and attractive appearance, this ring was influenced in design by art nouveau style jewellery and other decorative items.

It represents grief with the use of the large central stone but also gives a sense of fashion and style, this item would have been available to the middle classes but unlikely to be owned by members of the lower classes

HAIRWORK JEWELLERY

Whilst most quality made mourning locket contained compartments for locks of hair it was commonplace to create jewellery made of woven hair taken from the deceased, the Victorians considered this to be a way of keeping their loved one close, some hair work jewellery was designed by well renowned London jewellers such as Alfred Shuff of Great Marlborough street, who also created basic designs which could be adapted to meet the individuals' requirements.

Not all hairwork jewellery was expensively tailored as creating plaited bracelets and other such items was a skill learned in the home and was a form of memorial that the lower classes did have access to.



Figure 40 - Gold hairwork locket

Source: artofmourning.com

The design of gold jewellery combined with hairwork was an idea influenced by sentiment and fashionable design, the item featured in fig. 40 is a gold locket with black enamel and an empty front cartouche which can be engraved to suit the individual, the locket is attached to a chain of woven strands of hair which has gold ended connections, the

chain would have been created from the hair of the deceased and the empty cartouche filled with initials or a message of memorial, created around 1870-80 this item would have been owned by either a wealthy class or middle class lady, the quality of the locket gives a show of wealth but also includes the sentiment related to grieving and loss, the hairwork represents the need to keep a part of the departed close to the grieving family member.



Figure 41 - Hairwork bracelet

Source: artofmourning.com

In a similar fashion to the chain featured in fig. 40, the item in fig. 41 is a hairwork bracelet which has been woven from the deceased lock of hair and has a central clasp made of a copper alloy metal, made around 1860 this bracelet would have been simple to produce and easy to make within the home, the design was influenced patterns created from hairwork experts such as Mark Campbell and Alfred Shuff whose designs could be copied by the individual from following drawings and simple instructions.

Bracelets of this simplicity would have been owned by either the middle classes or the lower classes, they were cheap to produce, fashionable in design and involved a large amount of sentiment.



Figure 42 - Basic hairwork bracelet

Source: Rubylane.com

The elasticity of hair as a material made it suitable for creating items to wear that did not require any form of metal attachment, the item which features in fig. 42 is a very simple bracelet or hair tie that is woven entirely of hair and has been shaped into an attractive floral design at the front, the bracelet has been created from plaiting together several braids.

This item was virtually cost free if the individual had the skills to create themselves, but the design is influenced by fashion and sentiment, the flower at the centre is a forget me not which represents mourning, this would have either belonged to a middle class or lower class lady.



Figure 43 - Hairwork bracelet

Source: National trust collections

The bracelet which features in fig. 42 is similar in its creation to fig. 43 but instead it has been woven into four separate tubes of hair which are then attached with a metal clasp, hanging from the clasp are two small metal pendants which are attached to some finer strands of hair.

This bracelet has been woven in a creative manner perhaps by an individual who has practised in the art of hairwork, it would have been very cheap to produce but with the use of metal attachments it was likely to belong to a middle – class lady, however, the examples of hairwork express the simplicity and low cost of producing such items which would suggest their availability to all members of society.

These types of mourning jewellery represent loss through sentimental attachment and are not influenced by materialism in mourning.

Summary

Jewellery of high quality was a symbol of wealth and social status among the upper classes, the ability to design basic styles which could be adapted to suit the situation or emotion of the individual created a materialistic part of the mourning culture, adapting lockets, rings and bracelets into items suitable for the period of personal mourning gave an image of sentimental attachment and proved to be a lasting memorial to lost loved ones.

Fashion was always an important influence on style and design, this can be seen when analysing items from across the whole Victorian era, the increasing popularity of hairwork jewellery and relevant instruction manuals gave rise to the popularity in personal, sentimental jewellery which was available to all members of society.

Mass production of less expensive jewellery made items more accessible to the lower – classes even though it was obvious that the quality was poor it made the lower – classes feel more involved in mourning etiquette and allowed them to express their grief and own trinkets of sentiment as a memorial to their lost loved ones.

DISCUSSION

The research for this dissertation was carried out by analysing a sample of various Victorian mourning related items inclusive of textiles and jewellery, these items were made from a variety of materials ranging from high-quality bespoke pieces to mass produced cheaper materials and handmade items.

The methods used provided an appropriate evaluation of the items by using the theory of description, deduction and speculation, it was possible to form a comparison of items according to possible class differences, the findings offer a contrast in original value and ownership.

By visiting museums and researching books, journals and primary sources and examining the social history of the mourning ephemera, a conclusion was determined with comparable results in answer to the proposed dissertation question – **‘Was mourning ephemera a symbol of wealth or did the phenomena extend to the lower classes?’**.

The wealthier classes of Victorian Britain took their social role in society seriously and carried the rules of mourning etiquette to the extremes, the ephemera they owned was of high-quality and expressed their wealth.

The ritualistic process of the mourning culture was influenced by superstition and spiritual belief which became shrouded with confusion following the theories of evolution devised by Charles Darwin, Darwin’s theory posed doubts towards the belief of God and an afterlife leaving people in fear of what death could bring, his theory was then compromised with the rise of spiritualism and the possibilities of contacting the dead.

The result of this was a society in turmoil, holding onto a desperate belief in carrying out the proper etiquette rituals to ensure their loved ones a safe passage to the other side, an influx of trinkets and memorials were created to enable the grieving individual to hold onto a piece of their loved one and create an everlasting tribute to celebrate their life

For the lower classes who were also influenced by the same belief systems it became even more important, they did not want to be ridiculed in public and accused of having no empathy towards their own

deceased relatives, this resulted in the culture of mourning on a grand scale which did appear to be represented by all members of society.

Mourning ephemera was of great importance to members of Victorian society, in particular the ladies, mourning etiquette was expected behaviour in the early nineteenth century and signified respect, the colour black which represented spiritual darkness and signified death, grief and reflection of evil, it provided a form of protection to the mourner warning others to approach with caution and treat the grieving individual with respect and sympathy, household manuals expressed exactly how ladies should dress as Hartley, F (1876) p.32 states –

'For deep mourning the dress should be of bombazine, paramatta cloth, decaïne, berge or merino made up over black lining.

The shawl or cloak must be of plain black, without border or trimming, the bonnet should be of crepe, made perfectly plain.

Black crepe collar and sleeves, and black boots and gloves.

The items analysed in chapter one provide an example of some of the textiles worn by Victorian ladies, fig. 13 represents tailor made dresses commissioned for the wealthy, however, the items worn by the wealthier classes do not exactly follow these rules as fashion dictated a sense of style to be combined with the black cloth, these items of clothing which were individually commissioned came with matching accessories, hats, gloves, shawls and handkerchiefs all made to the highest quality with a view of symbolising, wealth, status and good taste combined with a vision of grief.

The middle classes relied on clothing that was affordable and usually mass produced, fig. 18 shows a basic dress crepe dress which a middle class lady would have worn, they were designed to imitate clothing which was tailor made and followed the latest fashion styles, the lower classes relied on second hand or hand - made clothing, they would sometimes create their own outfits using dyed cloth and black accessories.

As the class system became more difficult to define following the rise of middle-class society, individual values and personal income moulded the social status of the lady, the working classes were earning a regular income and could attain items from pawnbrokers and second - hand

sellers whilst the lowest of all classes who lived in slums or workhouses could barely afford to eat let alone buy clothing and accessories.

Beaujot, A (2012) p.4 talks of the middle - class lady and fashion –

‘Middle-class women took symbols originally associated with the aristocracy and modified them to help make their class position real through consumption.’

Beaujot, A (2012) p.4 also goes on to state –

‘Middle-class women could not afford to have their gloves made to fit their particular hands, so they bought gloves ready-made. Similarly, middle-class parasols were typically made of cotton rather than silk.’

Fashion could be suggested as one influence of the mourning culture but combined with superstitious beliefs, religious conflict and symbolic ideals it was also from 1860 onwards a behaviour encouraged by the public grieving of Queen Victoria.

Jalland, P (1996) p.21 states –

‘The evangelical model of the good Christian death was widely disseminated through evangelical journals and tracts, which intended primarily to provide spiritual edification and example – to save souls by showing people how to live and die well.’

The focus of materialism in mourning falls to the undertaker who was certain to benefit from the entire phenomena and did his utmost to encourage society by creating a show of grief through material objects and grand funerals.

Retailers of clothing and jewellery most certainly encouraged the materialistic side of the mourning culture but could not be considered a direct influence of the start of the phenomena they were merely a product of cause and effect which became magnified on a grand scale through the consumer, the wealthy used it to promote themselves within society, the middle-classes used it to promote their new found position and financial status and the lower classes attempted to follow suit through fear of public humiliation and because they wanted to be involved in the rituals mourning etiquette just to be recognised as a respectable individual.

The ephemera items which have been described in chapter one show the difference in quality but a similarity in style and appearance which suggests to us that mourning textiles were available to all members of society, these clothes represented a group of individuals and expressed their deepest feelings and emotions, they spoke of a society with deep seated beliefs in a time of confusion, fear and faith concerning the afterlife and the day of judgement.

As these belief systems and rules of etiquette subsided towards the end of the nineteenth century so too did the need for mourning ephemera.

Lutz, D (2015) p.5 states –

‘Most aspects of Victorian relic culture disappeared after the great war. As belief in an afterlife became less and less common, as death became increasingly a medical problem, to be dealt with by science and hospitals, and as the fear of death became so overwhelming that death was something to be denied, the dead body was often treated as an object of loathing.’

The Whitby jet industry which became almost an institution of its time, reaching its peak in the grand period 1860-1880, created objects which emphasised the spiritual darkness of Victorian Britain, they produced an abundance of mourning relics which are still popular amongst collectors of the modern day, fig.24 and fig.27 give examples of the intricacy involved in carving jet jewellery. The quality of the material, which is durable enough to withstand the test of time and remains in its original condition and the craftsmanship which went into carving individual pieces of jewellery was the creative influence of a successful industry of historical context.

Ward, G (2008) p.309 suggests –

‘Much of the success of the Whitby jet industry was due to the Victorian obsession with mourning, particularly after the deaths of Arthur Wellesley 1st Duke of Wellington in 1852, and Prince Albert Prince Consort of England, in 1861.’

As the industry was encouraged by the material culture of mourning, so the decline of the industry towards the end of the nineteenth century was influenced by the introduction of mass - produced cheaper ephemera which appealed to the lower classes of society.

As Ward, G (2008) p.309 suggests –

‘When mourning ceased to be fashionable the industry declined with it. Excessive competition had given rise to poor standards of workmanship and the use of soft, inferior jet that gave products a bad reputation.’

The original high-quality Whitby jet items like some of the ones featured in chapter two, which are still in existence today can sell for high prices in the current market but some of the substitute items also featured in chapter two, figs. 30 and 31 for example, were originally cheap to produce but can also be very collectable in today's market due to their representation of Victorian mourning culture, influences of design and symbolism in jewellery.

Dresser, C (1873) p.3 states –

‘The most fragile material often endures for a long period of time, the most incorrosible silver and gold rarely escape the ruthless hand of the destroyer’.

Items crafted of vulcanite and bog oak which would originally have belonged to the middle and lower classes now appeal to collectors and traders alike. Items such as the calling card tray which features in fig.38, were designed for show, this piece which won an award for its designer Joseph Thornton in 1886, was created with a view of attracting wealthier individuals and was a design showpiece of superior quality.

Other jet items were also made with design creativity in mind, the geometric bracelet fig. 25 in chapter two is an example of jet jewellery which was created with the influence of the popular designer Christopher Dresser, his 1873 book ‘The principles of decorative design’, was a major influence for jewellers and silversmiths, as the owner of the Linthorpe pottery in Middleborough and keen visitor of the Yorkshire area his designs were a large influence on jet craftsmanship.

Jackson, L (2007) p.10 suggests –

‘Christopher Dresser paved the way for the professionalization of modern design originally, trained as a botanist, Dresser was fascinated by the geometrical qualities of plants and plant growth, and approached pattern design in a quasi-scientific way’.

These natural, balanced features created within the design of an object offer simplicity, a reflection of balance and with their simplicity of lines

were easy for craftsman to replicate and produce jet jewellery which was attractive but plain which was suitable to adorn the widows' weeds without creating a show of adornment.

As current fashion and popular design were a strong influence on mourning ephemera so too was symbolism, this had played an important part in design throughout history almost like a hidden language which was understood across the classes of Victorian Britain, it represented superstitious belief, sentiment and even romance.

Commonly used in mourning jewellery were symbols such as flowers, clasped hands and urns with the addition of gemstones which held supposed healing powers to assist in the grieving process.

As Luthi, A (2001) p.11 suggests –

'The old superstitions about the magic properties of gems were revived when the language of stones became a great passion of the early nineteenth century.'

This passion for gems was still common in the early reign of Queen Victoria and was an influential part of the romantic period, typical gems of this time used in all kinds of jewellery inclusive of mourning were seed pearls, rubies, emeralds, garnets and amethysts.

Symbolism was included in all types of mourning ephemera whether it was high end jewellery or mass - produced cheaper items, therefore, most of this jewellery did not suggest a symbol of wealth but an integral part in the personal beliefs of Victorian society.

Mourning jewellery of high quality was designed to give the impression of a wealthy individual, but it also gave the wearer the opportunity to express their grief and love for the dearly departed, figs. 35 and 37 are examples of this.

Although many pieces were based on a common design they could be adapted to add personal meaning, this was also possible with cheaper, mass – produced jewellery by adding the initials of the deceased or locks of hair.

Renowned jewellers of the nineteenth century who produced expensive mourning jewellery became influential to others who could copy their designs and then adapt them.

The design examples by John Brogden which feature in fig. 33 of chapter three, show the basic ideas and simplicity of mourning rings, Brogden who was a goldsmith and master in filigree decoration was based in Covent Garden and commissioned jewellery for the wealthy, Antoni Forrer, an artist in hairwork commissioned similar high- end pieces of mourning jewellery by appointment to the Queen.

The mourning jewellery created by such renowned jewellers was first and foremost a symbol of wealth but also a representation of excellent craftsmanship and quality materials.

A further influence of symbolic mourning jewellery was the renowned architect and designer, Augustus Pugin, well known for his love and creation of gothic revival, he created bespoke pieces of jewellery in the gothic style featuring, religious symbols, stained glass and dark enamels, some of which he exhibited in the Great Exhibition of 1851.



Figure 44 - Enamelled Cross pendant - A. Pugin

Source: V & A Collections

The pendant featured in fig. 44 is an example of gothic style jewellery designed by Augustus Pugin in 1843, the necklace consists of 19 enamelled quatrefoils set with garnets, the pendant is decorated in the

same manner but is also set with 4 small pearls surmounted with fleur-de-lis, the stones used are typical of the 1840's style of sentimental, romantic jewellery.

Hairwork design which was an art within itself which could be taught within the home, the American Mark Campbell who released a fully illustrated instruction manual for creating hairwork jewellery provided the opportunity for ladies of all classes to produce items made from the hair of their loved ones, as hair is a durable incorrosible material cherished trinkets of the Victorian era are still in existence such as the items featured in chapter three and exist in their original condition, these items can be highly collectable and popular.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation aimed to assess class differences within the mourning culture of Victorian Britain, by forming a thorough investigation into the influences of the culture and the objects which formed a collection of mourning ephemera, this dissertation provides a contribution to academic research by giving an in depth insight into items of Victoriana which represent the nineteenth century mourning culture, by bringing the items together as a complete collection, it explores the influences of the design and materialistic values of mourning ephemera.

Where previous research has been explored from a strictly fashionable point of view, this dissertation explores gaps in academia by focusing on alternative influences on the culture and the popularity of items created with the specific purpose of mourning with a perspective of class differences within society.

Points to consider when summarising a conclusion are firstly that mourning culture and artefacts connected with rituals of mourning were in no way a Victorian creation, mourning etiquette, widows weeds and mourning jewellery were regarded as much in the eighteenth century when rich or poor it was a tradition to don black crepe immediately following the death of a close relative, although this was not necessarily done with fashion in mind, the lowest classes would often make their own funeral clothes using textiles found in the home such as curtains.

It was during the Victorian period when the influence of a change in fashionable styles and the increase in the wealth of the middle classes that the etiquette for carrying out mourning in a spectacular fashion led to the obsessive desire for black clothing and accessories and related trinkets which became a cult that spread through the whole of society.

The death of Prince Albert and the behaviour of Queen Victoria did appear to have a major influence over the popularity of mourning ephemera giving the wealthier classes the opportunity to express themselves and reveal their fortune in a very public manner, this then led to the mass production of ephemera, a result of consumerism which exists within any kind of fashion revolution or cultural obsession.

The combination of influences inclusive of superstition, religious and spiritual conflict, traditional rules of etiquette, fashion, materialism and consumerism brought on by an expanding industrial society all relate to the popularity of a variety of artefacts and textiles which ranged in value from handmade and cheaply produced items to expensive high - quality items and textiles which collectively represent a period in history with specific design influences.

Mourning ephemera cannot be considered merely a symbol of wealth, all items which constituted objects of Victorian mourning provide an insight into a cultural representation of an entire nation in an era of spiritual revolution which was followed and contributed too by all member of society from the poorest to the wealthiest.

FURTHER RESEARCH

As the focus of this dissertation has taken its influences from spiritual and superstitious beliefs within the Victorian mourning culture and the collection of artefacts which were created to represent loss, bereavement and lasting memorials, further research could be taken from an alternative approach by looking at the popular design of gothic revival within the Victorian era.

The Gothic revival which represented medieval Christian values and pushed the Victorians into a society of monarchy and conservatism, the

religious context combined with structural design typical of the Middle Ages which contained bright stained glass but also held dark features reminiscent of a powerful, all seeing God who punished the wicked, became representative of the Victorian way of life.

Palmgren & Holloway (2005) p.2 suggest –

‘The Middle Ages provided the Victorians with a common imagery that they used in everything that could be argued about, bought or sold’.

By taking an in depth look into gothic design inclusive of jewellery design, household items such as candlesticks, other metal wares, mirrors and furniture and forming a comparison with the design structure of mourning ephemera a connection could be formed between the influences of mourning culture and Gothic revival.

Lutz, (2015) p.10 discusses Victorian death culture –

‘Romantic and Gothic constructions of ‘The beautiful death’, A notion steeped in secular individualism, fomented a belief in the importance of the memory of the individual and the faith that their possessions could serve to keep some part of them enlivened’.

The works of Victorian designers such as Augustus Pugin, John Ruskin, William Burges and William Morris could provide comparative design patterns and techniques which were combined with Christian and aesthetic values like those used in the creation of mourning ephemera and the dark veil which appeared to lie over the central part of the Victorian era.

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