

Victorian Jewelry

Personal Adornment from the Age of Romance to the Age of Aesthetics
S. Hand, Old Sacramento Living History Program, 2004

GEORGIAN PERIOD 1716-1860

EARLY VICTORIAN PERIOD 1837-1860

MID-VICTORIAN PERIOD 1860-1880

LATE VICTORIAN PERIOD 1880-1901

ART NOUVEAU PERIOD 1880-1914

ARTS AND CRAFTS PERIOD 1890-1914

EDWARDIAN PERIOD 1901-1910

ART DECO PERIOD 1920-1935

RETRO PERIOD (WAR YEARS) 1935-1945

MODERN PERIOD 1950s

Georgian Period 1714-1830



Because the Victorian era and the jewelry it produced grew out of and yet also stood in contrast and reaction to the tastes and fashions of the long era that just

preceded it, the Georgian era deserves mention in a discussion of Victorian personal adornment.

Georgian jewelry production began during the years Great Britain was being ruled by the four Georges, thus the term 'Georgian'. The Georgian period encompassed most of the eighteenth century into the first part of the nineteenth, through the upheavals of colonial populations, the development of a British identity and the revolutions in France.

These were times in which the solid stability of the aristocracy was threatened by the dissolution of fortunes and the departure of sons and daughters to make new ones in foreign lands not to mention the attacks on the nobility taking place just across the channel and the influence of Napoleon and the wars. Among other impacts, the inheritance tax structure from the preGeorgian years acted progressively with each passage to the next generation to distribute more and more of the wealth stored up in palatial homes and art collections to the crown

The merchant with his money made in speculation and trade was rising to challenge the right of the nobly born to run everything to their taste. However this rising class, self made, wealthy and often well educated desired the patina of the aristocracy as much as they challenged it. Many hoped to marry sons and daughters into the nobility in order to belong at least through marriage to noble houses and to see their children addressed as Lady or Sir or even Lord and these sons and daughters with commoner forebears brought liquid wealth through marriage into these families and saved many ancestral homes. They also influenced the style and tastes of the aristocracy of which they became part. Many Georgian Britons from both the noble houses as well as the merchants and many of the not yet wealthy left England and went to the Bahamas, the Americas, India and Australia to transplant much of British class sensibility and culture to these places but with money as the great class divider instead of birth.

Georgian Jewelry design

Into the first quarter of the nineteenth century. jewelry of the Georgian period was conservative, entirely handmade and consequently individualistic in design. It was heavy and in the late period tended to be ostentatious. There had long been rules as to how and where wealth was to be displayed. The time of day, marital status, wealth or degree of nobility and age all constrained a person's choice of clothing and jewelry. The wealthy merchant class could and did display their wealth through personal adornment in disregard of these "rules". This personal adornment in all of its variety is referred to broadly as jewelry. Both men and women of this period draped themselves in heavy and richly jeweled chains, rings, shoe buckles and hair ornaments, brooches and buttons. Gemstones and

precious metal were sewn into and onto the clothing in a display that some aristocratic British termed “vulgar” and “common”. Outside of London society, in the colonies such as America, they could wear it as they chose without such criticism. American women who had not grown up with all the rules and training in the decorum of personal adornment so dearly held by the British upper classes were often criticized for their lack of good taste and breeding because of the way they dressed and adorned their persons. The quality and design of the jewelry varied owing to the demand of the people at the time. Jewelry worn as an outward sign of wealth and worth did not always reflect good taste and design.

Jewelry settings were designed to display the flash and color of gemstones. They incorporated the rose cut diamonds and precious stones, both cabochon with deep smooth surfaces and the early forms of faceting which increased the showy effects of gemstones and of glass as well. The motif of this period especially in the late Georgian consisted greatly of inspirations from nature, including flowers, leaflets, insects, birds, feathers and ribbons. Due to the relative value of the precious metals and gemstones the same care and attention to detail would also be used to produce look alike items of glass and sometimes lesser metals that could be safely worn to show off the family jewels while the real item reposed safely in the family vault to be passed down as part of the next generation’s inheritance.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, glass was being made that contained enough minerals to make it hard and very refractive. The newer glass could withstand faceting and was produced in bright jewel colors, reds and blues and even clear glass and it had enough sparkle to closely resemble the real thing. Lesser quality stones could be artificially enhanced to look like their more valuable cousins and they also began to appear set into very convincing or even the actual precious metal fittings. . Because the glass or poorer quality stone was often glued into place sometimes with colored glues to enhance the color the jewelry was often referred to as “paste”. Unscrupulous jewelers or a gentleman needing quick money might substitute paste for a jewel or two in an heirloom set with no one the wiser until the piece was evaluated or broken up for new pieces.

The stage is now set for the emergence of a new period which would embrace the innovations of the one generation and reshape them for the tastes and realities of the next.

Victorian Period 1837-1900 An Overview



Just barely into the second quarter of the nineteenth century, in 1837, Victoria, a descendent of the Georges through her father and of German Saxe Coburg through her mother became queen of England at the age of eighteen and this event ushered in a new and clearly different period that is now called the Victorian era. When she came to the throne, there was a fervent hope that the young Queen would revitalize the fashion world. Although she had been greatly sheltered during her childhood Victoria loved jewelry, and her influence contributed greatly to the many styles that developed during her reign.

Like the Georgian era that preceded it, the Victorian era covered a long period of time and consequently it is usually broken into 3 major periods. They are called early, middle and late but to characterize them they are also described as the *romantic*, the *grand* and the *aesthetic*. Many styles in clothing and personal adornment came in and went out of fashion but all can still be said to be "Victorian". Transitions were not usually clear or abrupt – several styles coexisted at once, as tastes slowly changed. The Art Nouveau era, to give an example, overlaps the time period for Victorian jewelry but has a unique and very recognizable style. Like a dress made by a woman who moved into wearing the larger skirts of the 1850s but retained her favorite high full sleeves of ten years before on the same dress, some pieces of jewelry can be illustrative of two styles at once and that can create some confusion in dating a piece. Family suites of jewelry from the previous generation would be broken apart or combined with newer pieces melding the styles of both periods. Large pieces would be cut down or simplified for a different use, part of a brooch resurrected as a ring for instance. Georgian and even preGeorgian pieces were preserved and worn, for who would not wear at least a piece or two of a beloved grandmother's jewelry or just have it as a keepsake in keeping with the sentimentality of the early Victorian era especially.



Clothing fashions had already begun to turn away from the styles of the late Georgian period, heavily influenced by the French court and the French revolution. Clothing styles had become anti aristocratic and some said immoral, eschewing the ornate and heavily decorated clothing for simpler dresses that had clung to the body. Jewelry which had also almost disappeared or become much less obvious, began to return with the new styles in clothing. Now, the skirts again were wider, supported in early years by many petticoats in styles that displayed the richness and patterns of the fabrics now made more affordable and

available through the technological advances of mills and sewing machines. The woman's apparent shape and proportions were altered by her clothing. Jewelry design changed to be proportional and appropriate to the changes in dress.

Victorian bodices and waists were tight. They were smooth and provided an excellent background for buttons and shoulder broaches and Chatelaines with chains that hung down from shoulder or waist to carry items such as sewing needs or pencils and watches and fobs. Necklines were high or had lace collars that required the use of pins, clips and brooches. Or they were open over white chemisettes lending themselves to long necklaces. Sleeves changed almost from year to year in the 1840s and 50s. They became full and shorter allowing the use of multiple bracelets which were worn at once to cover arms bared by the changes in sleeves or worn over fine lace undersleeves and mitts. Up until the last quarter of the 19th century, the most popular style for bracelets were those of 1" or more in width, either solid hinged bangles of gold chain, pearls, and gemstones or woven of hair with gold fittings. Earrings were popular throughout the era with exceptions only for a few years during the 1840's and 1890's, when bonnet ribbons made them difficult to wear.

The spread of the empire and the calmer more peaceful times encouraged trade under Victoria and this brought access to the products and the art work, crafts and gemstones of faraway places such as the Orient and India. Mechanical and technical advances allowed mass production in both fabrics and metal work including jewelry. Gutta Percha appeared in 1842 from a Malayan tree resin and along with vulcanite processed from the rubber tree were the first early forms of moldable and durable materials.

Jewelry was being worn in abundance by everyone but it had undergone a change. Instead of being individually crafted of sheet and wire, pieces could be stamped out and molded. Many designs could be turned out one just as well made as the last. Though less expensive to make and therefore more available settings would be set with gemstones as well as glass. The quality no longer depended on the individual goldsmith or gemsetter. And rather than individual unique pieces, quality jewelry could be created to a standard that could be repeated. The new availability of jewelry for the first time to the average middle-class consumer in turn fuelled the demand and an explosion of personal adornment hit society.

Fine jewelry in the Victorian era denoted more than just wealth. It was intended to reflect social standing and status as well as convey a message about the dignity and refinement of the wearer. There were still rigid rules to determine what jewelry was deemed "appropriate". In Europe, only the simplest of jewelry was worn by young, unmarried women - crosses, pearls, chains, and mourning

jewelry while married women "of a certain age" were the only ones deemed appropriate wearers of diamonds and gems. However gemstones that sparkled were considered in poor taste for women past a certain age. It does not appear that similar rules applied to men however their personal adornment in the Victorian era was much less prominent than during the Georgian with the loss of jeweled buttons, shoes and brooches. The usual jewelry worn by men in the Victorian era consisted in stickpins, watches with their attendant keys, chains and fobs and rings. Occasionally one might still see a jeweled walking stick.

The Jewelry of the early years of the Victorian Era “The Romantic Period” (1837 to 1860)

The early years of the era were described as romantic or sentimental and reflected the youth and courtship and marriage of the young queen.

The Romantic Period was a time of marital bliss and joyous family life for the young Queen. The jewels of the period reflected a feeling of confident tranquility. Gold ornaments were decorated with intricate engraving, delicate enamel work, and serpentine designs. The jewels were often accented with seed pearls, small turquoise beads and pink coral. The favorite pieces of jewelry were love tokens, mementoes, and souvenirs of travel or events. Jewelry had had an amulet feel in the 18th century and this persisted in several ways.

In 1848 Victoria and Albert bought a Scottish manor house called Balmoral in Scotland. Scottish influenced jewelry as well as tartan clothing began to appear and remained popular until 1860 after Albert's death. The 19th Century Scottish brooches incorporate the foot of the grouse (a game bird) set into gold or silver. Some were set with Cairngorm's. This stone is most commonly a tea colored transparent stone which is a quartz found in the Highlands. Authentic Cairngorms are no longer available and citrine or smoky quartz are commonly substituted.

Queen Victoria loved Scotland and all things Scottish. Her pride in her Stuart ancestry and the popularity of Sir Walter Scott's novels made Scottish jewelry a fashionable accessory. Jewelry set with Scottish agate was popular throughout England until the death of Albert in 1861. .

Stones were valued for their meaning and even endowed with magical properties. Coral for instance was considered to be protective against evil and disease and children wore necklaces and bracelets of the pinkish red material. Locketts were much-loved accessories during the Victorian era and were made of every type of material. . (Locketts were sometimes worn under the clothing to

protect a sentimental keepsake inside from public eyes and also unfortunately for us, the eye of the camera.) They often held painted miniatures and (in later years) small photographs, as well as locks of hair. Lockettes were worn not just as necklaces but also as multiple charms on a bracelet, a pin or even a ring. Victoria loved rings and would wear many at a time sometimes on every finger at once.

Brooches were extremely popular and were worn in a variety of ways by the Victorian woman. They were worn on the shoulder, of course, but also at the neck, waist, in the hair, and on ribbons as necklaces and bracelets and often in clusters. They were not all made of precious metals as the design was often as important as the material of which they were made. In addition to silver, gold, and base metals, enamels, Tortoiseshell, Mother-of-Pearl, and shell, and stone were used. Even a rock hard mud from volcanic lava was carved into cameos and intaglios and sold as souvenirs from places such as Pompeii. Platinum and silver jewelry was not much used until the Edwardian years and almost all gold was yellow or rose gold



Most of the Romantic Period preceded the gold strikes in California, Australia and South Africa; thus, gold was in scarce supply. The jewelers of the day worked the precious metal into thin sheets and fine wires from which they created large, puffy jewels that were light in weight. The goal was to get the most look from the least amount of metal.. The early gold Victorian pieces were all 18 to 22 karat. Following the Stamp Act of 1854, gold content was standardized at 9, 12, or 15 karats, and required to be hallmarked and stamped as such. Non-gold metals used in costume jewelry were either pinchbeck (83 parts copper and 17 parts zinc), mercury gilt which gave a golden color, or electric gilt. Other popular metals of the time included silver backed by gold and rolled gold plate. Whenever diamonds were to be set, they were invariably set in white metal so as to enhance their intrinsic beauty. Vermeil which is gold plated over silver was popular in the 18th century but when it was recognized that the mercury used in its manufacture was dangerous it was no longer employed in jewelry. It is not found in jewelry again until the mid 1900s when a safer manufacturing process was discovered and it is found again often in reproductions of Victorian jewelry.

Hair Jewelry, another fashion (which some people find disturbing) that is highly identified with the Victorian era is jewelry made from hair. Although it was done in Georgian times it was so congruent with the sentimentality of the early Victorian period that it became very widespread. Many pieces of jewelry were made to incorporate locks of hair, either as love tokens or as mementos from deceased loved ones. The hair is placed inside a crystal, sometimes just a curl, or woven. Sometimes, elaborate designs or pictures were made out of the hair. In addition,

the hair was woven into coils and threads and woven designs and used to make chains, rings, crosses, bracelets and earrings - virtually every type of jewelry, some very complex in the weaving techniques used. Hair weaving was done by men and women and was not an uncommon parlor activity. Much attention was paid to treating it and sorting and weaving it by techniques not unlike needle lace. Not all hair that was used was human as some techniques were better adapted to the coarser strands of horsehair.

Woven pieces could be sent to goldsmiths who would fashion fittings for them. They would cost as much as a new dress or shawl and were frequently given as sentimental gifts to loved ones. Hair was also taken from a deceased child or spouse and put into mourning jewelry which became commonly worn after Prince Albert died in the 1860s.

The Art of Victorian Jewelry Design

Naturalistic and floral motifs were common. Unlike the Art Nouveau period that followed however these motifs were usually rendered naturalistically. Realistic flowers with botanical details clearly rendered to allow identification were created instead of abstracted elements of the flower, leaf or bird.

Leaves, insects, flowers, vines, and birds and their feathers were molded, stamped and carved into jewels and mountings. The motifs also included a great amount of symbolic imagery. Both **sentimentality and symbolism** were important elements of Early Victorian design. There was a resurgence of Gothic and medieval designs as early Victorians looked back to an earlier period for inspiration.

Religious symbols were mainstays of jewelry design in both the Georgian and Victorian eras, They were not just from the Christian symbology such as crosses, doves and angels but also from more ancient sources that were being re discovered as old jewelry was found in archeological sites. Ivy, dragons, Greek letters and figures from mythology were widely used.

The snake surprisingly to us today was a very popular motif. **Snakes in their coils**, were symbols of eternity and of commitment. This was taken, from the Germanic/Scandinavian traditions rather than the Christian associations which equate the snake or serpent with sneakiness and evil. Snakes wrapped around parts of the body as rings, bracelets, and necklaces. Brooches and watch fobs and stickpins showed the sinuous draping of serpents often holding or guarding a pearl or other precious gem. Queen Victoria's engagement ring from Prince Albert was in the form of a serpent..

Symbology and sentimentality was taken to such an extreme that very intimate messages were spelled out in jewelry that could be read, like books if one knew the vocabulary, with the design and choice of elements telling of the giver's feelings or hopes.

A Vocabulary of Symbolism:

Ivy = **F**riendship, fidelity, or marriage

Fern = **F**ascination

Bluebells = **C**onstancy

Forget Me Nots = **R**emembrance

Salamanders, Lizards = **P**assionate Love (it was believed the animals could survive fire) Arrows = **L**ove (Cupid's arrows)

Crowned Heart = **L**ove Triumphant

Dogs = **F**idelity

Butterfly = **S**oul

Doves = **D**omesticity

Daisy = **I**nnocence

Harp = **I**reland or **C**onstant Love

Lilac = **F**irst feelings of Love

Mistletoe = **A** kiss

Clasped Hands = **F**riendship or **L**asting Love

Musical Instruments = **H**armony

Flaming Heart = **P**assionate Love

Fly = **H**umility, Like the snake this symbol changed over time. In Elizabethan times, the fly who could go anywhere and observe everything without being noticed was used to denote the possession of wisdom based on hidden or obscure knowledge.

Wishbone = **W**ish and **H**ope. The shamrock and horse shoe as symbols of Luck and indeed the concept of adventurism and luck came into popularity in the next major period, Edwardian.

Roses = many meanings, depending of the type of bloom and color. (One book of the era lists 35 different meanings for different roses).

Specific gems could have specific meanings, for instance:

Pearls = **T**ears

Amethyst = **D**evotion

Diamond = **C**onstancy

Emerald = **H**ope

Ruby = **P**assion

Gems were used as a type of **code to spell out words**. The first letter of the gems' names would stand for letters. In this way, a piece set with a Diamond, Emerald, Amethyst, and Ruby (in that order) would spell the word "DEAR". Other examples of this "code" can be found spelling out: Regard, Fidelity, Gratitude, Ever Thine, Baby, Mother, and individual names. This practice went on in various countries. A piece of code jewelry could be spelled out in various languages, and this can make deciphering the code of a specific piece now out of context quite tricky

In the early Victorian era, Diamonds and Pearls were rare and expensive. The first diamond mines in South Africa in the 1870s and so mid century were available only to the rich. But there were many alternatives available to the middle class such as: Amethysts, Opals, Turquoise, and Freshwater, baroque and seed pearls. These are often found in examples of Victorian jewelry.

Gems or stones set into a piece of jewelry can be major clues to determining a date. It's either a reproduction or a "married" piece when you find one with a gem that "wrong" in a piece of Victorian jewelry. Alexandrites, tourmalines, hematite, blue heat treated topaz, tanzanite were not used by early Victorian jewelers.

Stones Commonly Found in Victorian Jewelry:

Agate especially dendritic and later
Scotch banded agate

Diamond

Onyx

Glass, especially glass pearls

Carnelian

Amber

Coral

Garnet (both red and green colors)

Emerald

Opal

Peridot especially in late period

Ruby

Sapphire

Pearls (seed, baroque, freshwater,
natural, and blister)

Topaz (**NOT the bright blue colors**)

Turquoise

Victoria loved Opals and frequently gave them as gifts but until the 1880s was unable to overcome the bad reputation that Opals had acquired. Opals gained the reputation for bringing bad luck to anyone who wore it, other than as a birthstone. There are two theories as to why this belief became common -1, The French jewelry industry created and spread this rumor to damage the Opal trade. Most Opals



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came from Australia, an English territory and were considered a threat to gems that came from France or French territories. Or 2, it arose from a Sir Walter Scott novel from the early 19th century and popular at the time where wearing of opal was associated with bad luck.

Some materials other than gold Commonly Found in Victorian Jewelry:

Pinchbeck is a copper and zinc look alike to gold that was made for a short time in the 18th century and the process lost when its inventor died in 1732. Today fine pieces can have almost the same value as a gold piece.

Rolled Gold or Gold Fill

Gold plated over sterling Silver (vermeil)

Enamels

Cameos (stone, shell, lava, and gem carved)

Bog Oak

Jet

Gutta percha, a hardened tree resin

Ivory

Petra dura

Micro-mosaic (of very small tesserae)

Cut Steel

Tortoiseshell

Human Hair



, **Mid-Victorian or Grand Period 1860-1885**

Early Victorian jewelry incorporated light, delicate designs with elaborate engraving. These eventually evolved into the heavier, more conservative designs that have come to mean Victorian. The Mid-Victorian period displayed bolder, and brighter jewelry, introducing both day and evening wear. Day jewelry consisted of classical motifs made of small mosaics, sea shells, agate, jasper and amethyst. Diamonds and other sparkling colorless faceted gems were the rage for evening wear. The pieces were set in highly detailed Etruscan frames made entirely by hand...The discovery of archeological sites in Italy also brought to light examples of old jewelry, that utilized small balls of metal individually clustered together and called granulation. These decorative textures were referred to as Etruscan. Two popular design types that originated in the Victorian period were Cannatille and Repousse. Cannatille jewelry utilized twisted strands of gold wire wound into elaborate designs which were attached to stamped designs. Repousse, on the other hand, was identifiable for its solid forms with raised and fluted edges that gave the piece its characteristic massive quality.

Antique cameos had been rediscovered in the early 1800s and several schools with influential sponsors such as the pope and Napoleon endeavored to resurrect the art of stone and shell cutting. Cameos were very popular through out the Victorian era and became larger and more ornate during the 1860s. Although the head in profile remained a prominent design many cameos featured scenes, the most common of which was called Rebecca at the well and usually depicted a girl and a bridge. Cameos could be carved in one color in black shell or onyx or lava or molded from gutta percha or horn. These were very appropriate for mourning jewelry and might be incorporated into a locket with a compartment for a coil or lock of hair.

Just as Victoria's tastes influenced the aristocracy of the day, so did that aristocracy dictate the fashions of the masses - with disastrous results for the jewelry trade in the latter years of her reign. Following the death of her mother and then of Prince Albert in 1861, the wearing of glittery jewelry during the day fell rapidly out of fashion. The mourning jewelry became more in demand than ever. The Queen, herself, never wore anything but full mourning attire until her own death in 1901.

Mourning jewelry and clothing of the Mid Victorian era followed a strict protocol. There were rules that regulated the length of time to wear black and exactly when color would be reintroduced into a person's wardrobe. (It invited public censure if one didn't adhere to these guidelines.) The jewelry allowed under these rules followed the color rules. Black materials, Jet, Onyx, Gutta Percha, French Jet, and Bog Oak were



commonly used for mourning jewelry because of their flat black appearance. Faceted stones were not worn until color returned to the clothing. . After a year of full mourning (requiring all black jewelry and clothing), half-mourning colors such as gray, mauve, or purple were allowed back into the wardrobe. Garnet, cut steel, amethysts, moss agate and marcasite were acceptable in half mourning. Some women were never long out of half mourning as disease swept through Britain and the Eastern Seaboard of the United States in the early and mid 1800s.

The effect of Victoria's growing moral severity and pompous conservatism nearly bankrupted some of the finest jewelers of the time. A group of them eventually appealed to Princess Alexandra, the young wife of soon-to-be King Edward, to help reverse the trend by consenting to be seen in public wearing lavish pieces of the day. Edward and Alexandra had a significant impact on the fashions and jewelry of the late Victorian period which blossomed into the Edwardian period. She was very fond of pearls, multiple strands of large pearls and he of peridot, turquoise and diamonds. Edward also liked horseracing and horse shoes and whips and stirrups encrusted in pearls and diamonds began to appear and these themes gradually began to mark the jewelry as Edwardian rather than Victorian.

Another tremendous influence on Victorian design, and perhaps the most significant, was the *opening of trade relations with Japan in 1853*. By the 1860's numerous examples of Japanese craftsmanship inundated the English community and soon the "Japonaise" style was incorporated into every form of design from jewelry, clothing and fabric to paintings, furniture, decorative arts and even architecture. Well into the next century, Japanese motifs - stylized fans, naturalistic themes (flowers, cattail weeds), dragons and insects - were expressed in jewelry using the ancient Japanese enameling and metal inlay techniques of Shakudo, Shibuichi and Satsuma.

.New discoveries, new ideas, and current events were reflected in the jewelry of the time. Discoveries from the ancient sites of Herculaneum, Pompeii, Egypt, Greece, and Absyssia created a demand for jewelry created in their ancient designs. Egyptian Scarabs and Sphinxes were popular design elements. **Micro-mosaics** and **Petra Dura** mosaics also became fashionable after these styles were discovered in ancient ruins. To create these treasures, tiny stone or glass tiles called tesserae were arranged into a setting and polished. In the best Micro-mosaics, up to 1,400 **tesserae** are used to a square inch. Landscape, architectural, and portraiture scenes were created using this method and are very detailed and fragile. (Avoid buying damaged pieces - they are extremely difficult to repair.) Pieta Dura designs are made by inlaying pieces of hard stone to create a scene or design. The pieces used are



much larger than those in Micro-mosaics and the designs are usually simpler. Newer examples of both of these techniques are still being made but the quality is lower - the tesserae are larger, cruder, and don't lie in their settings as smoothly as older examples.

Late Victorian or Aesthetic Period 1885-1900

In the late 1800's, Darwin's controversial theories on evolution and new botanical discoveries created a demand for jewelry made to look like animals or insects. Ladies would secure pieces of lace to their ensemble with a multitude of these small pins made to look like butterflies, houseflies, beetles, etc. Animal designs, for instance, monkeys or peacocks were fashioned into jewels. There was a greater sense of social responsibility and an even more liberated woman emerged during the 1880's. Again, fashions changed and a desire for softer, more feminine colors in jewelry. Fancy colored sapphires became the stone of choice, in addition to peridot and spinel. Diamonds gained greater popularity due to their bright sparkle and increased availability. . This is about the very first time the Suffragettes began the concept of linking wedding ring expenditure to salary.

By the 1870's, new discoveries of silver (like the Comstock mine in Nevada in 1859) had reduced the cost of this precious metal and silver jewelry became more affordable. An infinite variety of beautifully engraved bangle bracelets, intricate monogram and name brooches, sentimental lockets, and other whimsical jewels were created to serve a growing middle market. Many of these silver baubles express sentimental themes and reflect a sense of whimsy that is common to the late Victorian era. Art Deco and Art nouveau jewelry from famous studios began to appear along with the bolder and plainer jewelry of the late 70s

Victorian Era - Misc Notes on Jewelry Dating

Though not all-inclusive, the following characteristics should help the collector of antique jewelry identify authentic early Victorian pieces.

In England, the gold content laws were changed in the mid-1800's to standardize gold at 9, 12, and 15 karats. (Up until then the term "gold" meant 18 - 22 karat.) At this same time, laws made it mandatory that hallmarks be applied to show gold content. Any piece of gold jewelry marked 9 k was not made before 1854.

Some gilt pieces will have bases of silver and the silver hallmarks will be visible and can be used to date the piece.

Platinum was not used much before the 1870s as it was too hard to cut until the diamond saws became available. The cool look of this metal was well adapted to the art deco styles.

The use of stones will help date a piece of jewelry. Different gemstones such as Ceylon Sapphires, and Alexandrites became available only in the late Victorian period. The more highly faceted stones with 58 or more facets indicate a later date and while the old table cut or rose cut diamonds or other stones with smaller top surfaces and fewer facets suggest Georgian or early Victorian some were made up to the mid Victorian era.

Glass can be found as original mountings and does not detract now or then from the value of many old pieces. It could be carved, pearlized, faceted and cabochon. A 10 power loupe will usually reveal the bubbles and cracks common to glass. Highly refractive glass was available from Germany, Italy and Czechoslovakia and became wide spread even in quality jewelry beginning from the Georgian times and came into America with European women from the 1840s on. Even some of the fakes such as Soude emerald which used green glue to provide green color to colored doublets help date the jewelry as coming from this period.

Look at the fittings. Brooches with pins that fasten with C shaped clasps are more likely to be nineteenth century or older. Tube or trombone clasps are later 1890s, and the safety clasp is 20th century. If the pin tip is visible from the front of the pin it is usually a mid to late Victorian rather than Edwardian piece. Earrings were short fishhooks until the dangle earring became popular in the early Victorian years but as the dangles became popular in the early 40s the wires became longer and thinner. Unfortunately these are rarely original. Screw posts are also late Victorian, but screw backs did not appear until about 1907.

Some books on old jewelry show examples of old jewelry refitted with the newer screw back. In the late 1840s the hair styles and bonnets covered the ears and a small disc shaped ear ring on a post was found then and again in the 1890s the dangles were less likely to be made for the same reason.



Afterward - Rebecca at the Well

The image of a woman drawing water from a well is a Victorian symbol of love drawn from the story of Rebecca in Genesis 24.

The patriarch Abraham sends a servant back to his native Mesopotamia to find a wife for Abraham's son Isaac:

¹² And he said, O Jehovah, the God of my master Abraham, send me, I pray thee, good speed this day, and show kindness unto my master Abraham.

¹³ Behold, I am standing by the fountain of water. And the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water.

¹⁴ And let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink. And she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also. Let the same be she that thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac. And thereby shall I know that thou hast showed kindness unto my master.

¹⁵ And it came to pass, before he had done speaking, that, behold, Rebekah came out, who was born to Bethuel the son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, with her pitcher upon her shoulder.

¹⁶ And the damsel was very fair to look upon, a virgin, neither had any man known her. And she went down to the fountain, and filled her pitcher, and came up.

¹⁷ And the servant ran to meet her, and said, Give me to drink, I pray thee, a little water from thy pitcher.

¹⁸ And she said, Drink, my lord. And she hastened, and let down her pitcher upon her hand, and gave him drink.

¹⁹ And when she had done giving him drink, she said, I will draw for thy camels also, until they have done drinking.

-- (Authorized Standard Version)

The image thus implies that the marriage is a "match made in heaven".