

# Victorian Jewelry

Personal Adornment from the Age of Romance to the Age of Aesthetics

*S. Hand, Old Sacramento Living History Program, 2004 (Revised 2011).*

## Introduction.

This article was originally written using the expertise of several noted authors on Victorian Jewelry who are gratefully acknowledged at the end. These references treat more extensively of the subject than is the intention of this piece. Since the original



writing I have had further opportunity to extend my familiarity with jewelry of this period by viewing, handling and owning a number of pieces, learning from knowledgeable dealers who have graciously shared their years of professional learning with me in the process. Online displays and descriptions from reputable sources have also been informative.

The term "Victorian" is applied to jewelry produced not only in Queen Victoria's England, (although much was created there), which was made in Europe and America during the years of her reign from 1837 to her death in 1901. This article is a discussion of that jewelry which was worn by women and men during the years 1849 to 1870, which roughly corresponds to the Gold Rush, Civil

War and early railroad days in America. Because those people would have owned and cherished jewelry from earlier years some discussion of Georgian jewelry will be included. Styles from later periods will be mentioned, such as Art Nouveau, or "the cowboy era" only as a warning that these pieces would not have been available during that particular time period of interest to the Old Sacramento Living History Program re-enactors.

Jewelry is usually worn on a body clothed in the fashions of the day. These fashions are influenced by the current cultural influences and political issues of the times. Since jewelry must accommodate or serve the clothing, the styles change accordingly. In Europe the ruling families often set the tone and styles. This was certainly true of Queen Victoria as her life and marriage and for the last part of her reign, her mourning after the death of her husband, influenced her dress and adornment and that of the era that bears her name. The periods of Victorian fashion and jewelry can be divided into periods changing roughly every 20 years.

GEORGIAN PERIOD 1716-1837;

EARLY VICTORIAN PERIOD 1837-1860;

MID-VICTORIAN PERIOD 1860-1880;

LATE VICTORIAN PERIOD 1880-1901

Following and at times arising during and in reaction to prevailing preferences are the ART NOUVEAU PERIOD 1880-1914;

ARTS AND CRAFTS PERIOD 1890-1914;  
EDWARDIAN PERIOD 1901-1910( largely influenced by Queen Alexandra)ART  
DECO PERIOD 1920-1935  
RETRO PERIOD (WAR YEARS) 1935-1945 and the  
MODERN PERIOD post 1950s.

### **Georgian Period 1714-1830**

Georgian jewelry production began during the years Great Britain was being ruled by the four Georges. The Georgian period encompassed most of the eighteenth century into the first part of the nineteenth, through the upheavals of colonial expansions, the development of a British identity and the revolutions in France with the fall of that aristocracy and a rise of an influential middle and thriving merchant class built on trade.

These were times in which the solid stability of the aristocracy, in England as well as France, was threatened by the dissolution of fortunes and the departure of sons and daughters to make new wealth 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 and death tax structure from the pre-Georgian years acted progressively with each passage to the next generation to distribute more and more of the wealth stored up in palatial homes jewelry 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, including displaced colonials, 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. These sons and daughters with commoner or even colonial forebears brought liquid wealth through marriage into these families and saved many ancestral homes and estates. Their tastes and sense of style also influenced that of the aristocracy of which they became part. Many Georgian Britons from 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 and make new fortunes in these places.



### **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. Gold had not yet been discovered in America and it was rare and precious. The designs were intended to make the most opulent appearance and consequently were heavy in look although often hollow as in the pictured brooch with small turquoise beads and safety chain. The back is hollow showing how it was formed out of sheet gold and done in repousse. Late Georgian jewelry tended to be ostentatious. The purpose of most metal work was to support and display colored gems. Discoveries in Italy of Etruscan remains and in Egypt influenced late Georgian and early Victorian styles.

There had long been rules even legislation( sumptuary laws) as to how and where and by

whom 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 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century merchant class could and did display their wealth through personal adornment in disregard of these societal rules and thus displayed their breeding (or lack of it) to those who made those rules. Personal adornment in all of its variety, buttons, attachments, hat and shoe adornment is included 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, enamels, glass beads, pearls and precious metal were sewn into and onto the clothing in a display that some, even aristocratic, British termed "vulgar" and "common, dandified." Outside of London society, in the colonies such as America, people could wear it as they chose without as much local criticism. American women, who may not have grown up immersed in the decorum of personal adornment so dearly held by the British upper classes, were often criticized by those stalwarts 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 and pocketbooks 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 designed to display the flash and color of gemstones incorporated the rose cut and old mine cut diamonds and natural pearls. This was a time lit only by sunshine and fire. Settings of precious stones made use of both cabochons with smooth domed surfaces which capture light deep within, 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 reflected nature, including highly realistic flowers, leaflets, insects, birds, feathers parts of the body, (especially eyes and hands) and ribbons. Due to the relative value of the precious metals and gemstones and the high risk of theft, 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.



A word about glass or paste is appropriate. Glass had been used for centuries in jewelry, in buttons and belts buckles and clasps especially in Europe. Pictured is a beautifully done Georgian paste brooch, not glued in but prong set. Bohemia was a common source of such glass in beads and faceted gems. By the middle of the nineteenth century, glass was being made that contained enough minerals to make it hard enough to cut instead of mold 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. Some sources say that it was called "paste" because the glass was often glued into place, sometimes with colored glues to enhance the colors. However it is more likely it got the name because in its creation the molten glass was extruded like pasta. A particularly excellent glass gem was called Strass after its inventor in the early 1800s. 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. Pearl look-alikes were well

made of luster coated glass beads. Because many of these paste pieces were so well made they took their place in jewelry boxes right along side the more expensive pieces and can be found today sometimes sold as gemstones. Glass, however, usually has bubbles and swirls and the facets wear down more. When chipped the fractures appear like a conch shell with concave lines. Also glass has different thermal properties from gemstones. It conducts heat faster and when held against a cheek feels warm while most gems remain cool.

Other ways of making fine jewelry at lower cost were also introduced. Lesser quality stones could be artificially enhanced with colored oil or heat and thin slices of real gems, often garnet, were glued to them to make doublets or triplets to look like their more valuable cousins and they also began to appear set into very convincing or even the actual precious metal fittings. Pinchbeck, an amalgam of copper and zinc, was named after its inventor, and he passed on the formula only to his son on his death in 1735. It gave its name to other gold substitutes, although its lack of weight for size is a tipoff. True pinchbeck is only Georgian. Electroplating and gold filled pieces also appeared during the Georgian period. Silver was gilt with mercury until the dangers for the makers became apparent and the process was discarded. Diamonds were usually set in silver applied over gold to enhance the light reflecting properties.

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 pleasures of the next.

### **Victorian Era 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, became queen of England at the age of eighteen. 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 she frequently made gifts of it. Her influence on design contributed greatly to the many styles that developed during her long reign.



The Victorian era is usually broken into 3 major periods. They can be 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 ó 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 to a specific period. Motifs and choices of gems may be said to be more typical of one period or another but may be found throughout. See below for some tips on circa dating. 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. A button would be saved as a brooch or a hatpin. Georgian and even pre-Georgian 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. Big Austrian, German and Swiss stomachers in silver, gilt and glass would be cut down for pendants by American immigrants who found putting aside country dress for American styles rendered them too bulky for use. Some of these pieces defy identification.

Clothing fashions had already begun to change from the styles of the late Georgian period, heavily influenced by the French court and the French revolution. For men the ornate enameled and jeweled buttons on everything from hats to waistcoats to shoes were set aside or made into pins for dress or hat. Jewelry, as pins and brooches and heavy jeweled necklaces, which had almost disappeared or become much less obvious when women's fashions were simpler and clung to the shape of the body began to return with the new styles in clothing. Waistlines dropped to make belts fashionable. The skirts again were wider, supported by many petticoats. Later when fashion dictated so many that the weight was in deed unhealthy, the hoop skirt came in to support 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 and hidden by her clothing. Jewelry changed to be proportional to the changes in dress.

Except for ball gowns, the low necklines and puffed and bouffant sleeves disappeared. Shoulder seams moved down onto the arms. Victorian bodices and waists were tight. They were smooth and provided an excellent background for buttons and shoulder brooches 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 or blouses lending themselves to long necklaces. Sleeves changed almost from year to year in the 1840s and 50s. They became fuller and shorter allowing the use of multiple wide 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 or mesh, hinged bangles or gold chain, pearls, and gemstones or woven of hair with gold fittings. These would be worn in pairs and multiples. Victoria was fond of charm bracelets which in later years became very popular sporting souvenirs, cameos, locketts and coins.

Locketts were much-loved accessories during the Victorian era in keeping with the romantic motifs 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. Locketts were worn not just on necklaces but also as multiple charms on a bracelet, a pin or even a ring. Rings were important and Victoria was known to wear one on each finger. Brooches and lace pins but not watch pins, (a later stock item) were extremely popular and were worn in a variety of ways by the Victorian woman. They were worn on the shoulder, but also at the neck, waist, in the hair, hats, and on ribbons as necklaces and bracelets. Earrings were popular throughout the era with exceptions only for a few years during the 1840's and 1890's, when bonnet styles and ribbons made them difficult to wear. A number of women's magazines such as Harper's are on line now. Godeys and Petersons are available bound into books from Amazon and each month's edition has a discussion of the latest in fashion clothing and jewelry. Jeanenne Bell starts each one of her chapters in her Collecting Victorian Jewelry with examples and descriptions of each period's fashions.

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. The increased availability of gold and silver from America and gem mines in India and Australia put more jewelry in the jewelers storefronts. Gutta Percha extracted from a Malayan tree resin appeared in 1842 and along with vulcanite processed from the rubber tree were the first early forms of moldable and durable materials. These were followed later by celluloid and bakelite, the latter two not in the periods of interest to us. Tortoise shell and horn also provided moldable lightweight jewelry which was enhanced with gold and silver and called Pique.

The broad introduction of gas light into homes in mid and late Victorian times significantly affected jewelry as what softly glowed in candle light died or became garish in the brighter gaslight. The selection of gemstones, the cuts and the settings all evolved. Instead of being individually and uniquely handcrafted of sheet and wire or melted and molded in hand crafted molds, new technology and stamping machines allowed metal pieces to be stamped out and molded many at a time. Though less expensive to make and therefore more accessible, the quality no longer depended on the individual goldsmith or gemsetter, quality jewelry could be created to a standard that could be repeated. Old heavy pieces could be cut down and put together with other lighter pieces for a new modern look. 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 at large.

Fine jewelry in the Victorian era denoted more than just wealth. While it still tended to reflect social standing and status, it also was used to convey a message about the refinement or the sentiments of giver or 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 any women past a certain age or in mourning. 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 those jeweled buttons, shoes and brooches. The usual jewelry worn by men in the Victorian era consisted in stickpins, lapel pins, watches with their attendant keys, chains and fobs, and rings. Occasionally one might still see a jeweled walking stick along with the gold or carved ones. In America, however, one group of men, the gamblers, continued to flash their gains in heavy chains, diamond cufflinks and buttons.

### **The Jewelry of the Early Years of the Victorian Era “The Romantic Period” (1837 to 1860)**



The art and fashions of the early years of this part 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 her. Jewelry was decorated with intricate engraving, delicate enamel work, and serpentine designs. In the early Victorian era, diamonds and pearls were rare and expensive. The first diamond mines were opened in South Africa in the 1870s and so mid century diamonds were available only to the rich. With few exceptions they were alluvial and faceted in rose cuts or old mine or squared off cushion cuts. Round fully faceted diamonds were for Late Victorians when diamonds were put to work cutting diamonds and a true round shape could be attained. But there were many alternatives accessible to the middle class. Jewelry could often be accented with seed pearls, set in jewelry instead of stitched in with horse hair as in the period previously, small turquoise beads from trade with Turkey though most was Persian in origin, a pale blue without matrix. Amber and ivory and pink coral were carved and set. Garnets continued to be popular, more often faceted, both red and green, the red a deeper color than would be popular later when the Bohemian pyrope, a clearer and more fiery red to red brown appeared. The standards, natural pearls, rubies, sapphires, emeralds and amethysts along with topazes continued to be popular. Unlike today where the faceting requires light coming through a stone many colored stones were foiled or enclosed on the back, the pooling of light deep in the stone the goal. Today foiling or closed backs mark a faux stone. Likewise faceted stones were collet or bezel, or claw set. Gems or stones and the way they are set into into a piece of jewelry can be major clues to determining its dating. 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, bright blue (heat treated) topaz, tanzanite were not used by early Victorian jewelers.

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. The 19th Century Scottish brooches typically incorporate the thistle or the foot of the grouse (a game bird) set into gold or silver. Some were set with cairngorm. This stone is most commonly a tea colored transparent 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 agates and jaspers (Scottish pebbles) were popular throughout England and America but declined after the death of Albert in 1861.

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 as necklaces, in hair ornaments, rings, bracelets and pins through out the Victorian era and became larger and more ornate during the 1860s. Older cameos were very commonly done with themes from mythology 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 well and some buildings referring to the biblical story of Rebecca who met her future husband when she fulfilled a prophesy --thus a marriage made in heaven. Cameos could be carved in one color in black shell or onyx or lava stone from Pompeii or molded from gutta percha or horn. They were initially in hard stone( banded agate or sardonyx, carnelian and malachite), coral or mother of pearl but later came to be most common in pink shell. The early Victorian cameos as well as those from earlier periods had classical noses and hairstyles and were hand carved and regarded as gems in their own right. Later cameo figures developed thicker bodies and many were turned out in indifferent quality for the tourist trade. Late Victorians preferred the female head and later actual portraiture. The pert upturned nose, necklaces with embedded stones and more modern hairstyles mark later cameos than our period of interest. Modern cameos are often done with a sandblasting tool instead of gouges and if examined closely will reveal a dappled appearance similar to freshly fallen snow and referred to as FFS. Intaglios are cameos in reverse with the sculpture below the surface of the stone instead of on top and were often done in hardstone. Many survive as stick pins and rings.

Victorian jewelry 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. Platinum ,white gold 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 continued to work the precious metal into thin sheets and fine wires from which they created large, puffy jewels that were light



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in weight. The goal was to get the most look from the least amount of metal. Like the Georgian and earlier pieces, the early solid gold Victorian pieces were all 18 to 24 karat. Following the Stamp Act of 1854 in England, lower gold content was allowed to be sold as gold and standardized at 9, 12, or 15 karats, and required to be hallmarked and stamped as such. Not all pieces were stamped but if you see a karat marking less than 18 you know the piece probably dates from after 1854. Non-gold metals used in costume jewelry were either òpinchbeckö, mercury gilt which gave a golden color, or electric gilt/plate. 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 18<sup>th</sup> 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. A vermeil piece is usually stamped with the silver content and would not be from this period.

Hair Jewelry, (which some people find disturbing) is highly identified with the Victorian era and 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 at that time. Many types 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 into patterns and braids. 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. 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 bobbin lace. Not all hair that was used was human as some techniques were better adapted to the coarser strands of horsehair. Finished pieces could be sent to goldsmiths who would fashion fittings for them. Completed 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.

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

Early Victorian jewelry incorporated light, delicate designs on shiny surfaces with elaborate engraving. These eventually evolved into the heavier designs that have come to mean Victorian. The Mid-Victorian period displayed bolder, and brighter jewelry, for both day and evening wear. Day jewelry consisted of classical motifs made of small mosaics, sea shells, agate, jasper and amethyst. Cameos especially of feminine figures continued to be popular and were acceptable even for late mourning. Two popular design types that predominated in the Victorian period were Cannelille and Repousse. These were found from early through late Victorian periods but are usually earlier in this period. Cannelille( Fr.embroidery) 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. Some are backed with plates to give a solid look to the piece. Diamonds and other sparkling colored faceted gems were the rage for evening wear. 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 and used to surface or edge pieces. These decorative textures were referred to as Etruscan-- and then came the discovery of buried Troy and King Priam's golden horde in the 1860s. The increased availability of gold led to the return of solid pieces with enameled tracery without gemstones. Florentine and matte (or dead gold) surfaces came to be in demand.

Just as Victoria's tastes influenced the court dress of the day, so did she dictate the fashions of the masses - with disastrous results for the jewelry trade in the latter years of her reign and it dominated most of the 60s and 70s. Following the death of her mother and then of Prince Albert in 1861 she went into full mourning and never left until she died in 1901. America and the British empire took its cue from the British court. The wearing of glittery jewelry during the day fell rapidly out of fashion. Mourning jewelry became extensively worn by men and women.



Mourning jewelry and clothing of the Mid Victorian era followed a strict protocol initially set by the court. Mostly it was the women who demonstrated the grief of the family. Widowers were expected to remarry and return to normal living quickly. Women in early mourning withdrew and often did not socialize for over a year. There were rules that regulated the length of time to wear black-- depending on the closeness of the relationship to the deceased. Rules also specified 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, such as Jet, Onyx, Gutta Percha, French Jet (a lustrous black glass), and Bog Oak were commonly used for mourning jewelry because of their flat black appearance. ( pictured is a mid Victorian bog oak pin) .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, brown, mauve, or purple and striped patterns in these colors were allowed back into the wardrobe. Garnet, cut steel, amethysts, moss agate and marcasite were acceptable in half mourning. Seed pearls in mourning jewelry symbolized tears. Hair jewelry abounded. 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 followed by wars in Europe and in America with great loss of life.

The effect of Victoria's growing moral severity, withdrawal from court life 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.

### **Late Victorian or Aesthetic Period 1885-1900**

Although jewelry from this period is not appropriate for Old Sacramento Living History accuracy much of it survives, is affordable and rightfully is called Victorian. It is mentioned here so that the differences can be illustrated. In the late 1800's, the period of Gibson girls, cowboys, the wild west and the bicycle and early automobile all influenced clothing and adornment. 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. Again, fashions changed and a desire for softer, more feminine colors and practicality in clothing and jewelry. High necks, draped bosoms and white blouses on working girls called for simple pins and necklaces of long chains. The bar pin, plain or ornate, is a mainstay of this period. It is not found in portraiture of the early or mid Victorian years. Watch pins in art nouveau or art deco designs attached watches to bodices for the teacher, nurse and business girl.

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. Gas light was brighter than candle and darker stones did not fare as well. Emerald gave way to peridot, and ruby to tourmaline. Bohemian garnets, a lighter more fiery color with hints of sherry came into vogue in the late 80s and 90s. 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 had 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 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 19<sup>th</sup> century and popular at the time where wearing of opal was associated with bad luck.

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.

Art Deco and Art nouveau jewelry from famous studios began to appear along with the bolder and plainer jewelry of the late 70s and arises during this period as a reaction to the overdone ðGrandö period. Swirling organic designs with inspirations from nature rather than the realism itself was in vogue.

### **The Art of Victorian Jewelry Design**

Representational naturalistic and floral motifs were common in all three periods. Except for styles of the Art Nouveau period these motifs were usually rendered in full detail.

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. (This Pietra dura piece shows daisies, a rose and a forget me not). Both sentimentality and symbolism were important elements of Early Victorian design. (more on this below) There was a resurgence of Gothic and medieval designs as early Victorians looked back to an earlier period for inspiration. Like the language of flowers, popular during this time gemstones were assigned meaning and even

endowed with alleged magical properties. Coral for instance was considered to be protective against evil and disease and pictures show children with necklaces and bracelets of the pinkish red material.

Another tremendous influence on Victorian design 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.

Micro-mosaics and Pietra 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.) Pietra Dura designs are made by inlaying pieces of hard stone in glass, goldstone( a type of glass) or other solid media 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.

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 locket, 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.

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. Broaches 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.

Ivy, Friendship, fidelity, or marriage,	Salamanders, Lizards = Passionate Love (it was believed the animals could survive fire),	Flaming Heart, Passionate Love
Fern, Fascination,	Doves, Domesticity	Arrows, Love (Cupid's arrows) Crowned Heart (claddagh) = Love Triumphant
Bluebells, Constancy	Wishbone, Wish and Hope.	
Forget Me Nots, Remembrance,	Dogs, fidelity	Empty glove clasped in a hand, Loss of a loved one
Mistletoe = A kiss,	Butterfly, soul	
, Lilac, First feelings of Love,	Fly = humility or knowledge of secrets	Clasped Hands, Friendship or Lasting Love
Daisy, Innocence,	Serpent, eternal love	

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

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.

**Specific gems could have specific meanings, for instance:**

Pearls = Tears, Amethyst = Devotion, Diamond = Constancy, Emerald = Hope, Ruby = Passion

Gems were used as a 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 quite tricky.

**Miscellaneous Notes on Dating Jewelry from 1840-1870.**

Though not all-inclusive, the following characteristics should help the collector of

antique jewelry identify likely early to mid Victorian pieces. As mentioned above styles changed gradually and many persisted through out the years. Dating is approximate and is often referred to as "circa" dating. A date will be given with a small c in front(c1850).

**Metals.** Yellow or rose gold dominated. 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 ó 24 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 likely 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. Vermeil, made by gold plating silver does show the silver marks and most vermeil is 1880s or later.

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.

Silver and white gold tend to be more common in late Victorian period and beyond although silver was used even in ancient times and other tips may have to guide your selection of silver pieces such as design, gemstone or fittings.



Married pieces can be daunting as old Georgian buttons, or pins may have been set into newer frames. It can be fun to find one of these, a tip off may be a filed off button loop on the back or a piece mounted into an obvious frame.

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. Tourmalines, colored sapphires, bright blue( heat treated) topazes are all late Victorian or more recent. Opals were used but were more common in 1880s. Opal glass was used widely.

The darker red garnets characterize early and mid Victorian and older. The pyrope garnet or bohemian garnet is lighter colored with brown tones and is late Victorian. Turquoise was pale blue without the matrix pattern found in stones from southwestern American mines. .

Banded agate and scotch pebbles are good mid Victorian stones as is moss agate.

Cameos are discussed above but eschew ones with tipped up noses, wearing pony tails or modern hair cuts, necklaces with stones. The finest ones are highly detailed and well cut. Lava cameos( which look like, and actually are, hardened mud) are our period as are most hardstones. Look for glued on parts, resin or plastic. Shell will feel gritty to the



tooth as do real pearls, cultured or natural, while glass or coated glass will not. Cultured pearls did not appear until 1910 so all pearls from this period are natural although many are freshwater, from river oysters which were very plentiful. The

difference between a cultured pearl and a natural one requires X-ray examination.

The more highly faceted diamonds with 58 or more facets indicate a later date and while the old table cut, natural or baroque 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. There is now a company marketing Victorian looking reproductions using silver over gold mountings with baroque( inaccurately called rose)cut diamonds coming out of India. A tip off is that they are often black rhodium plated. Foiled or closed back stones were common from Georgian through mid Victorian and do not always indicate rhinestones which are usually still foiled on the back.

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. A very acceptable opal glass was available in Georgian times. 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. Don't be dismayed to find synthetic stones. Synthetic rubies became available in the late 1850s. Other gemstones were synthesized before the turn of the century.

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 late 19<sup>th</sup> -20<sup>th</sup> century. If the pin tip is visible from the front of the pin it is usually a Victorian rather than an Edwardian piece. Many pieces have been repaired with modern fittings. You should be able to see the repairs or welds where the new parts were attached. You should avoid buying ones that are poorly



done. Earrings were short fishhooks exiting directly off the top 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. Posts came in Late Victorian period. Screw posts are also late Victorian, but screw backs did not appear until about 1907. Many of the older earrings have had screw backs put on as the trend moved away from pierced ears. Here the 10 foot rule of appearance will ruefully have to serve. 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.



Bracelets were worn in multiples and often in pairs, as shown in the picture-a pair of Pique bangles. In early to mid Victorian they are usually an inch wide or so. Hinged, and garter styles appeared especially after 1860s. Victorian hands were small so try on a

bracelet you intend to buy. Chain and expansion and charm bracelets and narrow bangles came in with simpler styles of the 80s and 90s and later.

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