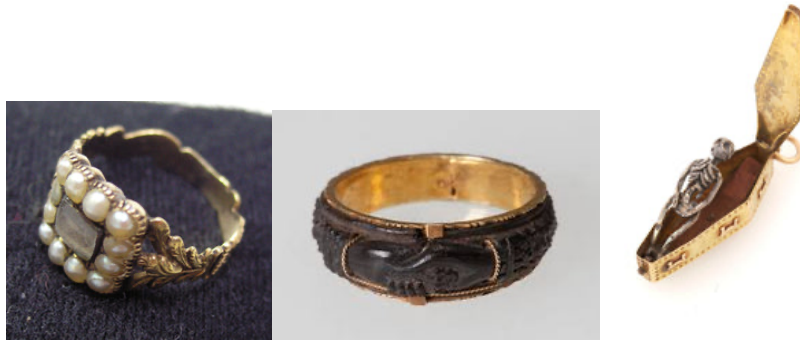


Mourning Jewellery in Milborne Port

What is mourning jewellery? It is jewellery that is worn by relatives in memory of a deceased loved one. Mourning rings have been established back as far as the 14th century, also during Tudor times, but mourning jewellery came to the fore in the Victorian era. The death rate was very high in this period; babies and young people died with great regularity, so almost every family would be grieving most of the time. Common causes of death were childbirth, disease and malnutrition.

Queen Victoria is a great example of taking grief to the extreme. Mourning jewellery became widely associated with the Victorians, even though it had been around long before Queen Victoria. This type of jewellery became commercialised, rather than invented during the Victorian era. Mourning rings were the most popular form of mourning jewellery worn; they were usually paid for by the family of the deceased. In most cases, the wealthier the family was, the more they would spend on elaborate designs. In many cases, mourning jewellery was given to close relatives of the deceased.



Mourning jewellery could be a ring (often worn by men), cufflinks, a brooch or locket, or other types of jewellery. Each of these could have the dead person's name and date of death inscribed. A small compartment would allow a piece of hair to be kept, or (as often seen in a locket), a photograph. Sometimes even a small replica of a coffin was used as a reminder of the mortality of the living.

Symbols and Motifs

Specific motifs and symbols could exist within mourning jewellery.

- Anchors were said to signify hope.
- Funeral urns and images of mourners weeping at gravesides were common Victorian symbols, as were weeping willows, winged cherubs, and clouds.
- Crosses worn as pendants were crafted in a variety of black materials as symbols of undying faith. Unlike the skulls and skeletons of the Middle Ages that portended a judgmental god, crosses and images of angels invoked the image of a tender, more forgiving father.
- Oak sprays, particularly those that displayed one empty acorn cup, were carved into mourning pieces.
- Flowers were often used, especially forget-me-nots and lily-of-the-valley, said to symbolise the tears of the Virgin Mary.
- Seed pearls represented tears of grief for any passing.

Mary Clothier's Mourning Ring

Local resident Mary Clothier*, has – and wears – a mourning brooch that belonged to her grandmother, Emily Day (née Standfield). She was the youngest of three sisters: Alice, Eliza and Emily. Alice married and moved to South Wales and died in childbirth aged 29. Eliza contracted tuberculosis in one leg and doctors advised that the leg should be amputated to save her life but her father (Mary's great-grandfather Charles Standfield) refused to allow it, so Eliza died aged 21. The brooch she has was inscribed with her name but the inscription has worn away due to excessive use; it is made of gold and contains a lock of her hair. The setting is surrounded with seed pearls. It was passed down to Mary when her grandmother died in 1972 at 93 years old.



Emily was born to Charles and Elizabeth Standfield. Charles was a cousin of the Standfield Tolpuddle Martyrs (1834), father Tom and son John. Emily married Harry Day, who had a plumbing and glazier business. He obtained the contract to put the first piped water into Milborne Port circa 1906.

*You can listen to Mary's oral history of her childhood and school life here:

<http://milborneporthistory.org.uk/milborne-port-oral-history-project/>

A little bit more context... Hugh Vincent

'I judged him to be a bachelor from the frayed condition of his linen, and he seemed to have sustained a good many bereavements; for he wore at least four mourning rings, besides a brooch representing a lady, under a weeping willow at a tomb with an urn on it. I noticed too that several rings and seals hung at his watch-chain, as if he were quite laden with the remembrances of dear departed friends.' - Description of Mr Wemmick in 'Great Expectations' by Charles Dickens.

Samuel Pepys, the famous diarist who died in 1703, left a list of people who were to be given mourning rings and mourning cloth when he died. Mourning cloth to be used to make mourning clothing, armband and hatbands, were given to relatives, servants and dependants. Also, 123 mourning rings were given to relatives, godchildren, servants and friends, plus former work colleagues from the Admiralty and the Navy Office and representatives from Cambridge and Oxford Universities. The mourning rings fell in three price ranges – 20 shillings, 15 shillings and 10 shillings. Some people received more than one ring. These rings must have been bought *en masse* from a jeweller as there were too many to have been specially produced and sized.

And this is a mourning ring of Charles 1st:



Local Discoveries

Mourning Ring One

A gold mourning ring dating from 1753. The ring's outside diameter is 21.6mm, the band's width is 3.3mm, its thickness is 2.1mm and it weighs 4.2g. The band is divided into five curvilinear scrolls, which contain a legend in gold, highlighted by black enamel. The legend reads WM BYSHOP OB:24 JULY.1753 AE:40, i.e. the ring commemorates a William Byshop who died on 24th July 1753, aged 40. The parish registers for Milborne Port record that a William Byshop married a Sara Hallet on 23rd October 1739. This ring presumably belonged to Sara, who either had it made or was presented with it after the death of her husband. On the inside of the band there is a maker's mark - IW - set within a simple rectangle. These initials are not uncommon, but perhaps refer to John Webber of Plymouth, who entered his name and mark at the assay office in 1724. A number of London goldsmiths who were operating at this date have the same initials.





William Byshop was also involved in 1747 in one of the many inconstancies involving parliamentary election returns in the 18th century; Byshop was Capital bailiff for Jeffery French and Michael Harvey against Thomas Medlycott and Charles Churchill. Initial victory went to French and Harvey but was overturned by the Sheriff of Ilchester at the County elections on the 31st June, resulting in Medlycott and Churchill being returned as members of Parliament in that year.

Byshop's wife, Sara, was the daughter of Edward Hallett, Sheriff of Somerset in 1741 and himself implicated in election fraud in that year! Follow this link to read more about him: <http://milborneporthistory.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/In-Search-of-Swatchford-for-website-March-2022.pdf>

The ring is in the reserve collections at the Somerset Heritage Centre where objects can be viewed by appointment.

Mourning Ring Two

An enamelled gold memorial ring. This ring with its monogram/cipher in gold wire beneath a faceted stone with foliate ornament of the shoulder in black enamel and decoration in black and white enamel on the underside of the bezel is a characteristic type of the late 17th and early 18th century. The stone is cracked.

Examples in the British Museum bear dated inscriptions from around 1690 to 1730.

The ring has been investigated by the Portable Antiquities Scheme and declared as probably dating post-1705.



This was a large ring. Could it have been the ring mentioned in the will of Mary Russell (see page 10), belonging to John Scott?



Below is a ring where the crystal is not cracked and the gold wire monogram/cipher is clearer and is mounted over woven hair.



Mourning Rings mentioned in Milborne Port wills

sourced by Valerie Jackson

(Please note that spelling and punctuation from the originals have been retained.)

1. Joshua Barrett Maltster of MP 10/11/1737 Wife Mary £5 + mourning ring £5 cistern pump, furnace brother James, father Caleb Wit Robert Noake, Rachel Noake
2. Mary Russell 26/1/1754 late of Bradford Abbas now of MP Son in law John Scott large mourning ring Edward Hallett of MP hosier and Goddard Hallett of MP carpenter £100 in trust, interest to dau Mary Scott (no intermeddling) until dau 21 then £50 balance of £50 to grandson Samuel Scott when 21
Granddaughter two best feather bedsteads, bolsters, curtains and valence and mourning ring, stone ring, six silver spoons, pewter, brass, chest of drawers, large looking glass, all linnen of every kind and sort, best brown silk gown Rest and residue to Edward and Goddard Hallett in trust for sole use of dau Mary
Executors Edward Hallett and Goddard Hallett Wit Sam ffoot, Ludwell Dampier 21/8/1758
3. Mary Scott MP 12/5/1788 widow of John Scott Linen Weaver Husband's bond 24/6/1744 Edward Hallett of MP hosier and Mary Hallett widow of Goddard Hallett £3800 for children Mary, Samuel and Russell Dau Mary £630 and two dealings, gardens, appurtenances late in the possession of Mary Hallett now William Baunton and Betty Hallett Son Samuel £1250 Son Russell £1250 Robert Scott late of MP Linen Weaver deceased father of late husband John Dwelling house and garden now held by Richard Hallett and now occupied by Mary Hallett as tenant Dau Mary Messuage or dwelling house wherein I now live with outhouses, garden and appurtenances, field, orchard called the paddock adjoining and if she continues unmarried after twelve months the same dwelling house viz The Little Parlour and the chamber over it with the closet thereto belonging and likewise the Garrett over the said chamber and use of the back kitchen when she might have occasion for it and likewise the use of the pantry under the stairs with the sole use of the little inclosed place at the upper end of the same pantry and a place in one of the outhouses for keeping her wood and coals and also one half of the garden that faces the said dwelling house viz that half which lies nearest the stable and woodhouse belonging to the said dwelling together with the common use of the pump and also full and free entry to pass and repass to and from the said several apartments and allotments at her

will and pleasure and also a liberty of walking in the yard and in the other part of the garden belonging the said dwelling house and likewise in the field adjoining thereto whenever she shall think proper Son Russell, son Samuel, Edward Hallett, William Newton of MP maltster, Thomas Arnold of MP hosier £50 for the Minister or pastor of the Congregation of Protestant dissenters towards pastor's better support and maintenance or alterations or repairs to the meeting house. Mr Francis Newton present pastor £10 Rest and residue to dau Mary ** £1600 Mary's child if she should have one Pew left hand side of the pulpit in the meeting house at MP. Any problems with the peaceable and quiet enjoyment of the pew £50 above to go to the pastor of the independent dissenters meeting house in Stallbridge Book to be kept to keep account of interest Rest and residue to dau Mary revoked - ill health and not married. £1600 to be invested for her instead Rev James Kirkup* of South Petherton and Rev William Blake of Crewkerne Son Samuel tenement or dwelling house with garden belonging in possession of Lawrence King who holds the same by lease of one life Son Russell house wherein I now dwell and out houses, garden and other appurtenances, field and orchard adjoining and £200 when 21, bed in hall chamber and furniture belonging to it, window curtains, chest of drawers in same chamber, chairs in chamber in which I now sleep, one pair of holland sheets, one pair fine dowlas sheets, three pairs of common dowlas sheets two pairs holland pillow cases, two pairs fine dowlas ones, four large and four small damask and _aper table cloths, six damask napkins all marked with letters MS, one silver pint cup, four silver table spoons, eight silver teaspoons and one pair silver sugar tongs, one silver punch ladle and enamelled punch bowl and **mourning ring** had on death of father and one on death of husband. All books in which I have written his name, two long ladders, Cyder mill and press Dau Mary leasehold estate in Bradford Abbas, after her death to Russell Wit to will and codicils William Highmore, R Batson, Mary Stephens, Samuel Foote, Mary Stephenson Probate granted to Mary Scott spinster niece sole executor
*Removed in Codicil 3.