

Mourning Jewellery in England, c. 1500 – 1800

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the historical importance and social function of memorial jewellery within the funerary and mourning cultures of early modern England. Mourning jewellery represented a particularly distinctive facet of mourning and funerary ritual and etiquette, and this study reveals the customary role which mourning jewellery grew to occupy, as a method for the memorialisation and commemoration of the dead, over the course of three centuries, c.1500-1800.

The thesis introduces and defines the broad parameters of the primary research, with a discussion of the source materials employed, including the creation of a database which analysed a large body of wills from Essex, Middlesex, and Surrey, as a means of understanding the place which mourning jewellery occupied within the funerary and remembrance strategies of early modern testators.

Beginning with the material objects themselves, the following two chapters provide a chronological overview of the jewellery itself, looking at what kinds of pieces were actually being produced and utilised, introducing form and fashions, and detailing evolving stylistic modes, conventions, and decorative motifs.

Placing these material markers within their proper social, cultural, and economic contexts offers a greater understanding of the customary function of mourning jewellery as a whole and the ways in which it was bequeathed and utilised as a means of mourning and commemorating the dead.

The fourth chapter offers an insight into the types of people who were typically giving and receiving mourning jewellery, and how the processes, functions, and relationships, which lay behind these exchanges, actually worked in practice.

The fifth chapter assesses the overall significance and widespread popular impact of mourning jewellery as a whole, both socially and over time, within the funerary provisions and customary remembrance strategies of testators and the bereaved.

The role, significance, and import of mourning jewellery fluctuated according to its employment; it lay within an intricate web of attachments and obligations, ritual and observance, mourning and memory.

The final part of the thesis ends by providing some insight into this process, looking at the ways in which mourning jewellery was used in practice and the prospective lifecycle of such objects. It also deals with thornier issues surrounding contemporary emotional responses towards death and loss, observing how mourning jewellery operated, why it was used, and whether it could provide any comfort for the bereaved.

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It is to the memory of my marvellous mother, however, that I dedicate this thesis.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

*Dear, beauteous death! the Jewel of the Just,
Shining nowhere, but in the dark;
What mysteries do lie beyond thy dust;
Could man outlook that mark!¹*
Henry Vaughan (1622-95)

Henry Vaughan may have envisioned death as a shining ‘Jewel’, whose mysteries, as yet, lay obscurely and indiscernibly beyond the bounds of mortal comprehension. However, thankfully for this study, the subtleties of other jewels associated with the dead lie much more readily within our grasp.

The fashion for the giving and wearing of mourning or memorial jewellery was to be a phenomenon which would grow and flourish over the course of several hundred years, supposedly reaching a peak cultural apogee during the age of Queen Victoria. The wills and testamentary bequests composed by thousands of men and women in the early modern period, coupled with the great wealth of surviving commemorative and material mementoes, all attest to the significance and prevalence of the custom by the seventeenth century at least, if not sometime before. As an increasingly accepted mode of expressing and articulating bereavement and sentiment, mourning jewellery would prove to be a notable and significant means of post-mortem remembrance and commemoration as the period progressed. This thesis will attempt to uncover and examine the chronological development of this custom, and the cultural and social context in which memorial jewellery was consumed.

This interesting trajectory, coupled with the distinct position which such jewellery occupied within the funerary and mourning customs of the day, makes it a particularly significant aspect of English mortuary custom and ritual. Indeed, in the spirit of Henry Vaughan, for the historian attempting to see beyond the ‘dust’, mourning jewellery opens a rare window into the world of the early modern individual; it serves to cast a little more light – and, certainly, a unique light at that - with which to illuminate the complex province of bereavement, mourning, and remembrance practices.

The last forty years or so have witnessed a flourishing literature of works concerned with how our ancestors died, and how the living dealt with brutally high death rates. Since the seminal publication of Philippe Ariès’ *The Hour of Our Death*,² British historians have

¹ Vaughan, H., ‘The World’, in, C. Ricks (ed.), *The Oxford Book of English Verse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 197.

² P. Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981).

Ariès’ review of the developments in Western attitudes towards death and dying, over the course of several centuries, provided a real impetus for those historians looking to create a social history of death. His work, however, has not been without its critics; several historians have expressed dissatisfaction with his *longue*

been especially innovative in their use of new source materials and new approaches in exploring the ways in which medieval and early modern men and women comprehended and encountered death and bereavement within their everyday lives.

Historians such as Clare Gittings,³ Ralph Houlbrooke,⁴ David Cressy,⁵ and Vanessa Harding,⁶ in particular, have all served to reveal how people up and down the social ladder contemplated, observed, negotiated, and experienced death, and its attendant ceremonies, across early modern England. There has been an exponential expansion in our understanding of the social and cultural experiences of death and dying, and the funerary and memorial customs prevalent during this period.⁷

More recently, a number of historians have also turned their attentions towards the role of material culture and the bequest of goods within the wills of early modern testators, as a means of understanding the use of objects in the formation and performance of commemorative and remembrance strategies. Clare Schen, for example, has analysed the “pious” and “non-pious” gift-giving of testators in Reformation London as a means of revealing the progress of Protestant ideas and practices, and the impact they had on the nature of community relations and parish life. She has particularly pointed to the way in which testators increasingly invested in different forms of commemoration, adapting to new pious expectations, and utilising more personal forms of remembrance through their wills.⁸

durée approach, and the sometimes sweeping generalisations and selective use of evidence, driven into an overarching conceptual framework of ‘mentalités’.

³ Her influential and ground breaking work, *Death, Burial and the Individual in Early Modern England*, first published in 1984, perhaps more so than other English work, owed much to the influence of Ariès. Paying particular attention to developments and changes in funeral rituals and attitudes towards death, she made imaginative use of probate accounts, in order to aid her argument for what she perceived as an ever increasing and influential sense of individualism during this period.

C. Gittings, *Death, Burial and the Individual in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 1988).

⁴ R. Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family in England, 1480-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

⁵ D. Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁶ V. Harding, *The Dead and the Living in Paris and London, 1500-1670* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

⁷ Other notable works within this branch of study include: P. C. Jupp and G. Howarth (eds.), *The Changing Face of Death: Historical Accounts of Death and Disposal* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997); N. Llewellyn, *The Art of Death: Visual Culture in the English Death Ritual, 1500-1800* (London: Reaktion, 1991); P. Marshall, *Beliefs and the Dead in Reformation England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); L. M. Becker, *Death and the Early Modern Englishwoman* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2003); P. C. Jupp and C. Gittings (eds.), *Death in England: An Illustrated History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999); J. Litten, *The English Way of Death: The Common Funeral Since 1450* (London: Robert Hale, 1991); S. Tarlow, *Ritual, Belief and the Dead in Early Modern Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); B. Gordon and P. Marshall (eds.), *The Place of the Dead: Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), to name but a few amongst an ever-growing corpus of work.

⁸ C. S. Schen, *Charity and Lay Piety in Reformation London, 1500-1620* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002).

Susan E. James, in focussing specifically on women's wills, has also looked to reveal the ways in which female testators emotionally invested in their belongings, and the role of "mnemonic bequests" in shaping identity and remembrance; most particularly she has looked to draw attention to the place of material culture, and the dynamic role it played in illuminating social interactions between the living and the dead.⁹

Catherine Richardson, in an approach most comparable to this study, has particularly looked to the social and affective meanings of jewellery for its early modern wearers, the way in which it was bequeathed, and the role it played in emotional relationships.¹⁰ More widely, she has looked to consider the "material culture of memory", using wills to explore the negotiation of personal relationships, the affective associations with goods, and the role of objects as "mnemonic vehicles" in the personal and communal processes of remembering.¹¹

What then is to be gained from the study of an accoutrement once fashioned to adorn the living whilst concurrently being utilised to mourn the dead? Moreover, what may be gained from the study of death and dying at all?

Death, as the final rite of passage, occupies a distinct position in the gamut of human experience; it is at once both extraordinary and everyday, singular yet also commonplace, loaded with meaning, and inescapably inevitable. It is at just such stressful junctures and crisis points in the life-cycle that communities, individuals, and cultures tend to reveal a great deal about themselves and their belief systems.¹² As Gordon and Marshall have pointed out, remembrance and commemorative strategies are remarkably "reflective" of the social, religious, cultural, and economic relations and workings of contemporary society.¹³ Thus, the study of how people in the past "articulated and enacted" their responses to death, dying, and the dead, may further provide a "poignant and revealing

⁹ Susan E. James, *Women's Voices in Tudor Wills, 1485-1603: Authority, Influence and Material Culture* (Routledge, 2015) [Bookshelf Online].

¹⁰ Richardson, C., "'As my whole trust is in him': Jewelry and the Quality of Early Modern Relationships", in B. Mirabella (ed.), *Ornamentalism: The Art of Renaissance Accessories* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), pp. 182-201.

¹¹ Richardson, C., "'Make you a cloak of it and weare it for my sake': Material Culture and Commemoration in Early Modern English Towns", in M. Penman (ed.), *Monuments and Monumentality Across Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Proceedings of the 2011 Stirling Conference* (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2013), pp. 68-78.

¹² For example, Harding has discussed how the study of the "practices surrounding death and burial" can offer previously unforeseen insights into the history of "urban culture and experience". Her study illuminates how the "material reality of death" actively played a role in "shaping urban community and culture", elucidating the "structures and relations of historical societies". Harding, *Dead and the Living*, pp. 1-13. Marshall, meanwhile, has looked at mortuary culture as a means of studying the "social history of early modern English religion" and assessing the impact of the Reformation "as an agent of social and cultural transformation". Marshall, *Beliefs and the Dead*, pp. 1-5.

¹³ Gordon and Marshall (eds.), *Place of the Dead*, p. 16.

point of entry” into deeper understandings of how such societies operated and functioned on a broader level.¹⁴

The study of mourning jewellery is justifiable and important in its own right. Yet, as Vanessa Harding has also noted, where death impinged upon the lives of early modern individuals, inevitably, so too did the customs and practices surrounding the mode and nature of funeral ritual and mourning rites. Particularly in towns and cities, where death rates were often alarmingly high, such practices assumed a notable and often depressingly frequent role in the everyday lives of their citizens; they formed a “significant element in the cultural repertoire of these societies”, repeated and executed, as they were, day after day.¹⁵ Hence, to understand any facet of mortuary practice or mourning ritual, is also to uncover a little more of the customary lives lived by the inhabitants of early modern England.

The study of mourning jewellery will not only shine a clearer light on what was obviously a custom of some significance within early modern mourning ritual, but it also reveals more about early modern England as a whole. As J.S.W. Helt has noted, understanding mortuary customs is also a means of understanding the wider cultural history of early modern England.¹⁶

Studying Mourning Jewellery: The Rationale

Certainly, when considering any historical topic, one must always keep in mind the ‘bigger picture’ but, first and foremost, this is a study of the customary development of mourning jewellery over the course of a three-hundred-year period. At first glance, such a subject may seem unduly narrow in theme and import, but this would be to do the topic a great disservice. It would be misleading to claim that every funeral in early modern England was marked by the distribution of a mass of mourning rings, or that every individual who came to draw up their will made provision for a vast array of jewels and trinkets to be handed out to bereaved friends and relatives. However, what this thesis will show is that mourning jewellery, from rather unremarkable and indeterminate beginnings, evolved and flourished to become a conventional and exceedingly pervasive constituent of early modern mourning practice into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Not only did the distribution of mourning rings become a visible material marker of a ‘decent’ and meet funeral, but the vogue and fashion for mourning jewellery also provided an outlet for individuals to contrive what was often a highly personal and

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁵ Harding, *Dead and the Living*, pp. 3, 13.

¹⁶ Helt, J. S.W., ‘Women, Memory and Will-Making in Elizabethan England’, in, Gordon and Marshall (eds.), *Place of the Dead*, p. 189.

aesthetic accoutrement of commemoration and regard. Mourning and memorial jewellery was possessed of a unique capacity through which status hierarchies were affirmed, social relationships were acknowledged, and emotional and familial ties were marked out. The role, significance, and importance of mourning jewellery fluctuated according to its usage; it sat in amongst a complex web of connections and relationships, ritual and observance, commemoration and memory. In turn, the strands of this web were interwoven and coloured by economic, religious, societal, and cultural conditions and events.

The period under study and the broad chronological perspective was purposely chosen to cover the ‘green shoots’ and the eventual flowering of the custom. It will be argued here that there was an identifiable evolution and growth of mourning jewellery, c.1500-1800, and that changes in the nature and utilisation of mourning jewellery reflect broader societal trends and currents. Furthermore, though the giving, receiving, and use of mourning jewellery was certainly a distinct feature of funerary and mourning practice, the approach taken here provides a fresh perspective on early modern English remembrance, memorial and commemorative conventions as a whole. It looks at the ways in which testators utilised mourning jewellery, how it was bequeathed, and why it was used as a token of post-mortem remembrance.

Unsurprisingly, mourning jewellery – though somewhat unduly, at times, regarded or dismissed as merely a curious facet of English mortuary custom – has already attracted the attention of several prominent historians engaged in the study of death and dying.¹⁷ However, although considered and discussed, this rather specialised province has seldom been the chief focus of historians. Consequently, the historiography of the subject of mourning jewellery – as a sufficient topic in its own right, rather than as a mere footnote – is disappointingly sparse.

Much of the work concerning mourning jewellery has come from those based in disciplines from outside the realm of history - art historians,¹⁸ social anthropologists,¹⁹ jewellery and metal design specialists,²⁰ discerning jewellery collectors,²¹ and museum

¹⁷ See particularly: Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family* (chapters 8 and 9); Cressy, D., ‘Death and the Social Order: The Funerary Preferences of Elizabethan Gentlemen’, *Continuity and Change*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (1989), pp. 99-119; Gittings, *Death, Burial and the Individual*; Harding, *Dead and the Living*, (chapter 8).

¹⁸ Pointon, Marcia, ‘Jewellery in Eighteenth-Century England’, in *Consumers and Luxury: Consumer Culture in Europe, 1650-1850*, ed. M. Berg and H. Clifford (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), pp. 120-168; R. Marshall and G. Dalglish (eds.), *The Art of Jewellery in Scotland* (Edinburgh: HMSO, 1991), (chapter 3); N. Llewellyn, *The Art of Death*.

¹⁹ E. Hallam and J. Hockey, *Death, Memory and Material Culture* (Oxford: Berg, 2001).

²⁰ One of the leading experts in the field of English jewellery history, is the independent art historian, Diana Scarisbrick (for further works see bibliography); D. Scarisbrick, *Rings: Symbols of Wealth, Power and Affection* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993); D. Scarisbrick and M. Henig (eds.), *Finger Rings* (Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 2003); S. Nehama, *In Death Lamented: The Tradition of Anglo-American Mourning Jewelry* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 2012).

curators and keepers of applied art and metalwork collections²² have all provided the great majority of the literature which does exist for the topic.

Probably the two major printed overviews of extensive collections of mourning rings, have been provided firstly by O. M. Dalton, who compiled a catalogue of the Franks Bequest, a collection of finger rings in the British Museum, which includes well over 300 examples of mourning, memorial and posy rings;²³ the other is the privately printed catalogue of memorial rings contained in the Crisp Collection, a collection of 1025 rings dating from the reign of Charles II to William IV; this work not only describes each ring in detail, but also provides further biographical information or the accompanying will, sometimes even the funeral epitaph, of the individual commemorated where such information could be traced.²⁴

As a result of this rather specialist literature, much of the work to date has been largely descriptive, and has tended to place a great deal of emphasis upon the fashioning and appearance of the pieces themselves. The vast majority of such works have concentrated, predominantly, upon design styles and decoration, on the materials used, and, generally, on the aesthetic and physical qualities of the jewellery itself. Whilst understanding the material and visual traits of mourning and memorial jewellery is, obviously, an important aid to understanding the genre as a whole, the physical objects need to be placed back into their contemporary contexts and understood as part of a broader historical narrative. In order to build a more rounded picture and to try and comprehend the role of mourning jewellery as an accepted constituent of early modern mourning custom and practice, we must observe the historical *context* in which such jewellery was produced, exchanged, and utilised.

Thesis Outline

The overarching aim of this study is to analyse and understand what kind of role jewellery occupied as a method for the memorialisation and commemoration of the

²¹ J. Evans, *A History of Jewellery 1100-1870* (London: Faber and Faber, 1970); A. L. Luthi, *Sentimental Jewellery: Antique jewels of love and sorrow* (Buckinghamshire: Shire Publications, 2007); 'Art of Mourning: A Resource for Memorial, Mourning, Sentimental Jewellery and Art': <http://artofmourning.com/>, accessed October, 2013; M. DeLorme, *Mourning Art and Jewelry* (Atglen: Schiffer Publishing, 2004).

²² S. Bury, *An Introduction to Sentimental Jewellery* (London: HMSO, 1985); S. Bury, *Jewellery Summary Catalogue* (London: V&A Museum, 1982); C. Oman, *British Rings, 800-1914* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1974); Oman, C., 'Mourning Rings', *Apollo*, Vol. 43 (1946), pp. 71-3; C. Oman, *Victoria and Albert Museum: Catalogue of Rings, 1930* (Ipswich: Anglia Publishing, 1993); T. Murdoch (ed.), *Treasures and Trinkets: Jewellery in London from pre-Roman times to the present day* (London: Museum of London, 1991).

²³ O. M. Dalton, *Franks Bequest: Catalogue of the Finger Rings, Early Christian, Byzantine, Teutonic, Mediaeval and Later...* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1912).

²⁴ B. Marsh (ed.), *Memorial Rings: Charles the Second to William the Fourth, in the Possession of Frederick Arthur Crisp* (Grove Park Press, 1908).

deceased, and how, over the course of three centuries, its form and function developed and changed during this time.

The analysis will involve looking at five main areas: namely, the form the jewellery tended to take; how and why mourning jewellery was produced, given, and used; the role it played within the commemorative practices and funerary customs of society at that time; how widespread the custom was; and where it fitted, overall, in the wider processes of grief, mourning, and commemoration of the deceased.

Research Methodology: The Wills

This thesis is based not only upon the study of the jewellery itself – which is discussed in greater detail in Chapters 2 and 3 – but also on the analysis of data collected from a body of sampled wills from testators of the South-East.²⁵ Covering the entire period, c.1500-1800, the sampled probate material is comprised of three main parts: wills from Essex, Surrey, and Middlesex.

The first set of wills, which span the *entire* period under study, relate to the parish of Earls Colne, in Essex; this historic parish lies ten miles from Colchester, and around forty miles north east of the city of London, with a population that fluctuated between 500 and 1,200 persons.²⁶ These wills have been transcribed and published as part of the wider *Earls Colne Project Online*, spearheaded by Alan Macfarlane, which sought to use parish records and other materials held by local archives, in order to *reconstruct* the historical community of Earls Colne.²⁷ All of the wills – which have been transcribed and chronologically listed by date of *creation* (rather than the year in which probate was granted) – have been consulted for the period 1500 to 1800, totalling 472 (not including codicils).²⁸ The wills relate either to the inhabitants or those owning property in Earls Colne, or people who left bequests which mention the parish; a small number were proved at the PCC or Consistory

²⁵ Though, technically, ‘testament’ originally referred only to personal estate (excluding real estate i.e. heritable property), the terms ‘will’ and ‘testament’ have both been used interchangeably throughout this study.

²⁶ For more information relating to the geography and general makeup of the parish, see: A. Macfarlane, *A Guide to English Historical Records* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 16-19; *Introduction to the Parish*: <http://linux02.lib.cam.ac.uk/earlscolne/intro/index.htm#intro>.

²⁷ The wills – as well as other local records, which fall into four main categories: ‘Church’, ‘State’, ‘Estate’, and ‘Personal’, and which relate to the parish of Earls Colne, spanning a period from c.1375 - 1854 – have all been transcribed and published as part of the *Earls Colne Project Online*. <http://linux02.lib.cam.ac.uk/earlscolne/>.

²⁸ The entire body of wills (which span a period from 1490-1856) can be found categorised under: *Church Records: Documents of Record Concerning Testaments*. <http://linux02.lib.cam.ac.uk/earlscolne/probate/index.htm#2300005>.

of the Bishop of London, though the vast majority of wills made by residents of Earls Colne were proved at the Archdeaconry Court of Colchester.²⁹

This concentrated spotlight will help to illuminate precisely how well-established and prevalent the custom became, not just in this one small southern English locality, but also serving as a representative microcosm of how the custom may have typically operated in other parish communities across early modern England. One other considerable benefit of using the Earls Colne material, lies in the opportunity for record linkage; thus, in several instances, where a testator made a bequest of mourning jewellery, it is sometimes possible to also trace the shared connections and subsequent wills of the recipients. This allows for some observations to be made as to how interpersonal relationships and social obligations may have operated in shaping and dictating the testamentary bequests and remembrance strategies within and between family and community networks.

Additionally, making use of the digitised probate materials available on *Ancestry*, the wills of testators from the counties of Middlesex and Surrey have also been sampled and analysed. This data comes from a collection of probate materials – *London, England, Wills and Probate, 1507-1858* – which contains scanned and digitised copies of original wills held by the London Metropolitan Archives.³⁰ They do not include wills proved in the PCC, but, rather, wills that have survived in records from seven separate church courts below the level of the Prerogative Courts.³¹ Unfortunately, the database of these wills means that it is not possible to limit the search facility to a particular church court in which probate was granted. Instead, the sampling procedure was such that wills were located by searching by county – either ‘Middlesex’ or ‘Surrey’ - which was imputed into the ‘Keyword’ function box of the search form; the probate year was also assigned, and all legible wills relating to that year were recorded.³² The sample was based upon the study of over 3000 wills probated from 1605 to 1805, which were examined at twenty-year intervals.³³ This was made up of 2020 wills for those testators from Middlesex and 1159 wills made by Surrey

²⁹ For greater background detail concerning the locating and identification of Earls Colne wills as part of the project, see: *Reference - Church Records, Church as Registry: documents of record concerning testaments*. <http://linux02.lib.cam.ac.uk/earlscolne/reference/church.htm#probate>.

³⁰ For more information concerning this database, see: <http://search.ancestry.co.uk/search/db.aspx?dbid=1704>.

³¹ For specific details concerning the probate records held by the London Metropolitan Archives and the various courts and jurisdictions into which they fell, see: London Metropolitan Archives, *Information Leaflet Number 6: Wills for London, Middlesex and Surrey before 1858*.

³² Due to the cataloguing of the wills on Ancestry, in some cases the year has not been modernised, whilst a number of the Archdeaconry wills are also recorded by the date they were made rather than by probate date. In all cases where the probate date was within 1 year of the relevant date assigned to the search, the will was included in the sample.

³³ Original spellings for all wills have been retained, whilst dates have been modernised.

testators. Supplementary printed and primary wills, that offered particularly relevant or valuable information were also consulted.³⁴

The vast majority of these wills come predominantly from the Commissary Court of London, the Archdeaconry Court of Middlesex, the Archdeaconry Court of London, Consistory Court of London, Archdeaconry Court of Surrey, and the Commissary Court of Bishop of Winchester. The process of probate could be a convoluted and inconsistent business, but, generally speaking, testamentary jurisdiction was determined by the place where a testator died and the extent and location of their property. Where the deceased had died abroad or had *bona notabilia* (goods worth £5 or more, £10 in London), in more than one diocese, then the will went to the appropriate Archbishop's court; in the south, this was the Prerogative Court of Canterbury (PCC). For less wealthy testators (namely, those represented in the samples from Middlesex and Surrey) if their goods were held in more than one Archdeaconry but all in the same diocese, the will went to the Bishop's Consistory or Commissary Court. Those who died with goods within the jurisdiction of one Archdeaconry would typically have had their wills sent to the lowest of the ecclesiastical courts with probate jurisdiction: the Archdeaconry (or, in some cases, a Peculiar court, with local jurisdiction).³⁵ **[Maps 1 & 2]**

The spread of wills from Middlesex and Surrey, proved in the various church courts, offers both a suitable urban/rural cross-section of testators, whilst the fact that these wills also come from courts below the level of the PCC, also provides a more representative social sample. Hopefully, this will help to give some indication of the extent to which mourning jewellery progressively established itself in the bequests and commemorative testamentary provisions of those from lower down the social scale, particularly from amongst the members of the middling sorts.

The information from the sampled wills of the parish of Earls Colne, Essex, and from the counties of Middlesex and Surrey, was entered into a database. This database recorded – where available – the name, gender, parish and county of residence, occupation, marital status, and, most importantly, the presence, or lack thereof, of bequests of jewellery, mourning rings, as well as rings (any sort). Where available, additional testamentary provisions – such as the prearrangement of a funeral sermon, the provision of mourning

³⁴ A number of will abstracts for the Archdeaconry and Commissary courts of Surrey have also been transcribed and put online as part of a collection of records on FindMyPast.co.uk.

³⁵ For more information concerning the location of wills and the process of probate before 1858, see: K. Grannum and N. Taylor, *Wills and Probate Records: A Guide for Family Historians* (Surrey: The National Archives, 2009), pp. 33-36; J. Cox, *Affection Defying the Power of Death: Wills, Probate & Death Duty Records* (Birmingham: Federation of Family Historians, 1993), pp. 18-20; J. S. W. Gibson, *Wills and Where to Find Them* (Chichester: Phillimore, 1974), pp. xiv-xxi.

wear, bequests of other commemorative mementoes, or the distribution of charitable donations – were also recorded.

The applicability and usefulness of this sample is, of course, heavily dependent upon the issues surrounding the extent to which it is possible to recover the consumption of mourning jewellery from the documentary record. Certainly, there are some uncertainties in being always able to patently define precisely *what* constitutes a mourning bequest, particularly when that testamentary gift concerns a piece of personal jewellery or where the bequest takes the form of a token monetary sum (perhaps, implicitly understood at the time by the recipient to imply the purchase of a ring), or where the terminology (“for a token”/“for a remembrance”) is overly vague.

Furthermore, it should also be noted that some bequests of mourning rings were, it seems, occasionally set out in a list separate from the main body of the will (see will extract below). This was more likely for those wills proved at a Prerogative Court, where a rich testator intended to bestow a particularly substantial number of rings, or was especially concerned that detailed instructions were available which would clearly identify the particular individuals who should receive rings. Unfortunately, “these lists are not always found with the wills”, and most have been lost, once attached or appended to the testament, or likely to have been left in the care of the appointed executor.

Bower Marsh, in attempting to trace surviving wills associated with the memorial rings found in the Crisp Collection, identified at least two examples of such lists, such as that incorporated into the 1765 will of William Reynolds, who directed that £100 should be used to purchase mourning rings for the 73 persons he selected (including ten nieces and nephews, the executors and witnesses to his will, and various other relations and friends, some of whom had subsequently died before him).³⁶

³⁶ Marsh, *Memorial Rings*, pp. 2, 119.

Images have been removed due to copyright issues. The thesis can be viewed in full by consulting the print copy on request from the University Library.

“List of Rings” included in the will of William Reynolds, esq., who died in 1766.

Source: William Reynolds, 28.06.1766: The National Archives; Kew, England; *Prerogative Court of Canterbury and Related Probate Jurisdictions: Will Registers*; Class: *PROB 11*; Piece: 920.

Of course, another element to consider when using wills to recover the ownership and use of mourning jewellery, is that, apart from the occasional testator who may have passed on their own personally-owned items of mourning jewellery, this information fails to take account of the memorial jewellery which was acquired solely by mourners or distributed at the funeral, independent of any testamentary bequest or instructions.

Selecting the Source Material: Rationale

Probate accounts - which provide details of the executor’s or administrator’s expenditure in settling the deceased’s personal estate - do sometimes offer this information concerning the costs associated with the disbursement or ‘discharge’ of funeral expenses.³⁷ However, probate accounts are also “the most chronologically limited probate document”,

³⁷ For further information concerning probate accounts, see: Grannum and Taylor, *Wills and Probate Records*, pp. 74-79, 147-8; Gittings, C., ‘Probate Accounts: A Neglected Source’, *The Local Historian*, Vol. 21 (1991), pp. 51-58.

with the number of surviving accounts declining dramatically for the years after 1685,³⁸ this obviously limits their applicability for the study of mourning jewellery, as this seems to have been the period at which mourning jewellery became progressively well-established, reaching its peak of popularity in the wills of testators in Middlesex, and slightly later for those from Surrey.³⁹

Furthermore, though probate accounts might record funeral costs, quite a few either express these charges as a single lump sum, or, where the provision of rings or jewellery is noted, the description is often too imprecise to allow for definite conclusions concerning the number or detail of the mourning memento acquired.⁴⁰ Unsurprisingly, the most detailed funeral accounts tend also to be associated with wealthier individuals, whose profuse funerary displays necessitated a greater degree of material accoutrements and financial outlay to be accounted for.

Also, probate accounts fail to record those items of mourning jewellery which were acquired independently of any instructions on the part of the deceased, or that were not classed or explicitly itemised as part of the ‘discharge’ concerning the payments made by the executor in settling the deceased’s estate. Harding has also drawn attention to the fact that in evaluating the cost and provision of the various elements of the funeral, “it is not always clear whether remembrances such as rings and gloves should also be counted as ‘funeral expenses’, or just seen as part of the wider acknowledgement of ties and affections that will-making often expressed”.⁴¹

Similarly, probate inventories do not seem to offer any further solution to the problems inherent in trying to uncover the consumption of mourning jewellery during this period. Though inventories have been used to good effect by several historians to uncover and quantify the material life and consumer behaviour of various groups in early modern England, there are also inherent problems in relying on them for the study of mourning jewellery.⁴²

³⁸ Erickson, A., ‘Using Probate Accounts’, in, T. Arkell, N. Evans, and N. Goose (eds.), *When Death Do Us Part: Understanding and Interpreting the Probate Records of Early Modern England* (Hertfordshire: Local Population Studies, 2004), pp. 104-7.

³⁹ Notably, both the probate inventories and accounts relating to the parish of Earls Colne, do not seem to have survived.

⁴⁰ These conclusions are upheld by Clare Gittings, who, whilst using probate accounts to great avail herself as part of her study of the changes in early modern funeral expenditure into the mid seventeenth century, also suggested that probate accounts – where they did exist for the critical post-Restoration period – would likely be “frustratingly brief” on the topic of mourning jewellery.

Clare Gittings to Cara Middlemass [Private Email Correspondence, 21.11.13].

⁴¹ Harding, *Dead and the Living*, p. 220.

⁴² For example, see: L. Weatherill, *Consumer Behaviour and Material Culture in Britain, 1660-1760* (London: Routledge, 1988); M. Overton, J. Whittle, D. Dean, and A. Hann, *Production and Consumption in English Households, 1600-1750* (London: Routledge, 2004).

The production of the inventory was part of the probate and administration process, providing a list of all the deceased's personal and household goods along with their appraised value.⁴³ Though, in effect, this might suggest that any items of mourning jewellery which the deceased possessed at the time of their death would be listed along with all their other goods and chattels, this was clearly not always the case.

For example, though the probate inventory might, in theory, list the deceased's moveable possessions, personal goods – such as a ring or a particular item of jewellery – may also have been passed on to the intended recipient *before* death. Furthermore, “the bequests in a will were sometimes not included in the inventory” and these were “often the testator's most precious possessions”; these items may already have been allocated or distributed, or simply removed from the house of the deceased before the inventory was drawn up.⁴⁴

It is interesting to note, for example, that in Lorna Weatherill's study of the ownership patterns of key domestic goods contained in nearly 3000 inventories, for the period 1675-1725, she found very few references to gold and jewellery at all.⁴⁵ Maxine Berg, on the other hand, who analysed the types of goods being left in the *wills* of metalworkers and women in Birmingham and Sheffield for the period 1700-1800, found many more specific references to jewellery, with over 21% (three-quarters of whom were women) of the Birmingham testators who left goods in their wills, making bequests of jewellery.⁴⁶

Another possible significant omission from the inventory concerned the widow's property or right to *bona paraphernalia*; these were the personal items and “property a woman could claim from her husband's estate upon widowhood”, such as her apparel, bed, and, crucially, her jewels and ornaments (which may also have included items of mourning jewellery).⁴⁷

Where jewellery is listed in an inventory, often the information provided is too circumscribed (i.e. “a Ringe of Gold”) to be of much use in identifying the piece as a specific item of mourning jewellery, or, in some cases, jewellery and plate might be

⁴³ Grannum and Taylor, *Wills and Probate Records*, pp. 71-74.

⁴⁴ Spufford, M., ‘The Limitations of the Probate Inventory’, in J. Chartres and D. Hey (eds.) *English Rural Society, 1500-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 144.

⁴⁵ In the sample and analysis of ‘key goods’ contained in these inventories, Weatherill classed all references to either gold or jewellery under the category of “Silver”. Weatherill, *Consumer Behaviour*, p. 203-7.

⁴⁶ These numbers are likely to be higher than for some other large English towns, as Birmingham was becoming established during this period as a manufacturing centre for the ‘toy’ and jewellery trade. Berg, M., ‘Women's Consumption and the Industrial Classes of Eighteenth-Century England’, *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (Winter, 1996), p. 420.

⁴⁷ A. L. Erickson, *Women and Property in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 26, 184, 239. See also: Grannum and Taylor, *Wills and Probate Records*, p. 73; Spufford, ‘Limitations of the Probate Inventory’, p. 145.

classed together, providing merely a lump monetary sum of their total value. In a similar vein to probate accounts, the survival and availability of inventories is also somewhat limited, and they become “much less detailed and frequent” into the early decades of the eighteenth century.⁴⁸

Richard Grassby has also highlighted that one of the essential weaknesses of using probate inventories for the study of material culture, is the fact that they tend to “remove things from their proper historical context”; though inventories might help to “establish the existence and value” of certain objects, this detached quantitative data essentially reveals very little about an object’s “personal significance”, or how it might actually have been “physically or emotionally experienced” at the time.⁴⁹

Of course, the material culture element – examined in the first two chapters of this thesis – also provides a crucial foundation to the information that can be extracted from the testamentary record, and of all the probate documents, wills do seem to offer the greatest utility for the study of mourning jewellery.

Historians such as Cressy,⁵⁰ Helt,⁵¹ and Beaver,⁵² for example, have all utilised wills as their principal source material, with which to uncover the customary funerary practices, mortuary rituals, shared attitudes, expectations, and responses towards death, mourning and remembrance, as it was experienced across various social groups within early modern England.

⁴⁸ Gibson, *Wills and Where to Find Them*, p. xix.

⁴⁹ Grassby, R., ‘Material Culture and Cultural History’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (Spring, 2005), pp. 591, 598.

⁵⁰ Cressy looked to examine some of the social and cultural aspects of the funerals of minor gentry in Elizabethan England, through the study of 600 Essex gentlemen’s wills. With a concentrated focus on one period, one county, and one social class, Cressy suggested that the wills offered a “distinctive historical voice”, revealing the attitudes and expectations, plans and preferences, of this social group as they contemplated and prepared for their final rite of passage. Cressy, ‘Death and the Social Order’, pp. 99-119.

⁵¹ Helt’s study is based upon the analysis of 1,276 women’s wills probated in the Archdeaconry courts of Elizabethan Essex. This distinctive work emphasised the gendered nature of women’s wills, using the testamentary record to reveal “the particular role of women in memory, as rememberers and as remembered, in the mortuary customs of post-Reformation England”. Helt focused on the ways in which women specifically utilised their wills and the act of testamentary gift-giving as a means of defining and securing their post-mortem memory and identity, within their communities and social networks. Helt, ‘Women, Memory and Will-Making’, pp. 188-205.

⁵² Beaver’s study was primarily based upon an analysis of 732 wills proved between 1590 and 1690 in the Consistory Court of Gloucester. Beaver sought to concentrate on the “ritual of death and its social context in early modern England”, using wills as “evidence of the beliefs and social relationships mobilized in preparation for death”. Using the wills to furnish information on local mortuary practices, he located his discussion of the transformation of these customary rituals, within the context of religious conflict and controversies of the mid-seventeenth century.

Beaver, D., “‘Sown in Dishonour, Raised in Glory’: Death, Ritual and Social Organisation in Northern Gloucestershire, 1590-1690’, *Social History*, Vol. 17 (1992), pp. 389-419.

The use of wills for the study of mourning jewellery offers the historian much valuable and unique information. They typically provide a testator's name, gender,⁵³ parish and county of residence, occupation or social rank, marital status, even indications of the health and religious beliefs of the testator at the time of the making of the will.⁵⁴

Testaments often also contain instructions for burial or directions for the performance and provision of certain elements of the funeral, as well as the obligatory concerns surrounding the bestowal of various legacies and bequests. The use of wills places the focus firmly on the concerns and attitudes of the deceased, revealing what they considered most fundamental and essential to include in their last preparations, publicly conveying and detailing their utmost expectations and expressed preferences, carefully describing and bequeathing their possessions and goods, as they contemplated their own mortality and composed their final wishes before death.

Those wills which do contain references to mourning jewellery provide information illustrating the types of bequest typically being made; in a few cases, testators were involved in providing *very* detailed directives concerning the gift of personally-owned items of jewellery for a remembrance, or precise instructions regarding the number and price of the mourning memento to be acquired and distributed. Wills also offer a unique insight into the operation of social and communal networks, providing evidence of the ways in which jewellery was transmitted and bequeathed, and how kinship links, personal relationships, expectations, obligations, and attachments, perhaps influenced and dictated the giving and receiving of mourning jewellery.

The wills offer clues as to how mourning jewellery was utilised by testators as a means of promoting personal remembrance or acknowledging and recognising the demands of contemporary social expectation and ritual tradition. They provide information concerning the ways in which these items were habitually bequeathed and transmitted, the number of pieces which might be given, the amount of money set aside for their

⁵³ It is important to note that in any sample of early modern wills, women – predominantly married women in particular – tend to be underrepresented. Though widows and spinsters could leave wills in their own right, a married woman had to first obtain the consent of her husband before she was entitled to dispose of personal property.

Prior, M., 'Wives and Wills, 1558-1700', in J. Chatres and D. Hey (eds.), *English Rural Society, 1500-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 201-225.

⁵⁴ There has been much debate, however, concerning the extent to which it is possible to ascertain the religious convictions and attitudes from the information contained in the religious preamble of a will. To what extent was the statement of Christian faith a true reflection of personal religious views or more the result of scribal influence and the insertion of formulaic statements of faith?

Spufford, M., 'The Scribes of Villagers' Wills in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries and Their Influence', *Local Population Studies*, No. 7 (Autumn, 1971), pp. 28-43; Richardson, R. C., 'Wills and Will-Makers in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: Some Lancashire Evidence', *Local Population Studies*, No. 9 (Autumn, 1972), pp. 33-42.

procurement, and the sorts of people who were typically giving and receiving mourning jewellery over the course of the period under study.

A Material Culture Approach

When we use the term ‘material culture’ what exactly do we mean? For researchers, it seems to imply not only the physical materials under investigation, but also a particular approach to the study of history. Several proponents of the approach, or method of material culture - including Henry Glassie and Ann Smart Martin - have described objects as “texts”, in the sense that they may be ‘read’ and interpreted by researchers.⁵⁵ Furthermore, Karen Harvey, has noted that “unlike ‘object’ or ‘artefact’, ‘material culture’ encapsulates not just the physical attributes of an object, but [also] the myriad and shifting contexts through which it acquires meaning”.⁵⁶

Context is a touchstone in the contemplation and interpretation of material culture. It is key to understanding what objects meant to their contemporaries; how they were used and understood, and where they fitted into the material, social, cultural, and economic lives of people in past societies. Significantly, Bernard Herman has noted that, in order to “derive meaning from material culture we must reconnect objects to their historical contexts”.⁵⁷ It is in this vein that Glassie has identified three ‘master contexts’ to which a researcher must first critically attend, in order to understand and interpret material culture; these are: “creation, communication, and consumption”.⁵⁸

Jules David Prown recognises in his definition of material culture that, first and foremost, it stands for the “the manifestations of culture through material production”. Most importantly for historians, however, the term also encapsulates the method and motivation of the approach, namely: “the study of material to understand culture, to discover the beliefs – the values, ideas, attitudes, and assumptions – of a particular community or society at a given time”. In a similar vein to Glassie’s ‘contexts’, Prown believes that the underlying premise of material culture lies in the belief that “human-made objects reflect, consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly, the beliefs of the individual who commissioned, fabricated, purchased, or used them and, by extension, the beliefs of the larger society to which these individuals belonged”.

⁵⁵ Karen Harvey, ‘Introduction: Practical Matters’, in *History and Material Culture: A Student’s Guide to Approaching Alternative Sources*, ed. K. Harvey (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 3.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁵⁷ Herman quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁵⁸ Glassie quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 11.

This approach may appear to some as a call for the promotion and production of some kind of “object-based cultural anthropology”, in opposition to the ‘traditional’ text-based study of history. Prown’s focus, however, upon the interpretation and meaning of objects, and on contextualising their place within a society in order to gain deeper understanding of that world, shares many of the same ambitions and objectives of traditional historical research – whether text- or object-centred.⁵⁹

Furthermore, Harvey, in her own definition of material culture, has also touched upon the debate amongst both proponents and critics of a material culture approach, concerning the role and possible *agency* of objects in *actively* determining and shaping human society and history. In her definition, ‘material culture’ is “not simply the objects that people make, use, and throw away; it is an integral part of – and indeed shapes – human experience”. In her negotiation and interpretation of material culture, objects are “active and autonomous, not simply reflective” in regard to past societies and mentalities.⁶⁰

This sense of objects as much more than merely “conduits of information” or simple “cultural receptacles that acquire meanings, which can then be unearthed and read” by academic researchers, is a view held by many scholars working today under the umbrella of ‘material culture’.⁶¹ For historical archaeologists, Cochran and Beaudry, for example, material culture is a “potentially active agent in social life”; they contend that by positively acknowledging the “active role of objects”, benefits researchers, guarding against more traditional or limited approaches, which would seek to “segregate objects from people”.⁶²

This abundant focus on the “relationship between people and things” has, in turn, also led – most particularly in the field of archaeology – to the creation of specific ‘object biographies’.⁶³ These investigations often take a single item or object, and seek to reconstruct and contextualise its ‘life-history’ at various stages of “production, exchange and consumption”. This method primarily serves to understand the way in which “social interactions involving people and objects create meaning”, and the way in which these meanings “change and are renegotiated through the life of an object”. Most importantly, this biographical approach asks specific questions about the “links between people and

⁵⁹ Prown quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

⁶² Cochran and Beaudry quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁶³ Gosden, C. and Marshall, Y., ‘The Cultural Biography of Objects’, *World Archaeology*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (Oct., 1999), pp. 169-78.

things” and about the ways in which “meanings and values are accumulated and transformed”.⁶⁴

In terms of a methodological approach to material culture, Bernard Herman has identified two strands of thought between those works which are ‘object-centred’, and those which are ‘object-driven’. The former is largely rooted in an art-historical approach and concentrates primarily upon the “physical description” and “aesthetic qualities” of the artefacts and objects themselves.⁶⁵ The latter, meanwhile, regards objects as “evidence of complex social relationships” and seeks to uncover the meanings of objects through a process of “thick description”, and by using a variety of sources in order to construct “collective biographies” about how people made, used, and lived with such objects.⁶⁶

Historians have approached material culture in a variety of ways. Georgio Riello, for example, has determined three broad approaches to material culture adopted by historians. The first, is a ‘history *from* things’; this utilises “objects as primary sources”, and they are treated very much in the same way that a historian would analyse or read a document or manuscript. Here the objects provide the “raw materials” for the interpretation of the past, in that they directly provide “evidence of something that was part of the past”.⁶⁷

The second approach is a ‘history *of* things’; here the object or collection of artefacts are themselves the very subject matter of analysis.⁶⁸ The third variety of material culture is perhaps the most complex: ‘history *and* things’; this regards material artefacts as “independently valuable” sources, which provide both an “immediacy” and a “direct key to aspects of the past that would otherwise be inaccessible”.⁶⁹

Trying to judge how useful material culture may be to a historian rests to large extent on determining just what the benefits may be, in opposition to a more traditional approach which focuses primarily upon the written record; namely, what can not be obtained from manuscript sources alone?

In terms of how useful Riello’s three approaches outlined above may be to the historian of death and dying, it may be first advisable to examine how historians have utilised these frameworks and what the strengths and weaknesses of each approach may be. Certainly, a ‘history *from* things’, appears to be the least daunting and perhaps most familiar approach to the majority of historians. However, many proponents of material

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 169-172.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁶⁶ Herman quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁶⁷ G. Riello, ‘Things that shape history: Material culture and historical narratives’ in, Harvey, *History and Material Culture*, p. 25.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 26; Harvey, ‘Introduction’, p. 11.

culture studies have criticised this framework as negating the “self-sufficiency of objects as sources”, in that some historians have used objects and artefacts merely as useful adjuncts to written evidence, or as an easy prop or “hook” on which to hang explanation.⁷⁰

The ‘history of things’ has been the framework that has gained, perhaps, the widest currency amongst historians working today. Prominent proponents of this approach include both Lorna Weatherill⁷¹ and Sara Pennell⁷², for example, who have been engaged, respectively, in both quantitative and qualitative approaches to the historical study of consumption and its attendant accoutrements.

In thinking about the consumption of mourning jewellery, and its place as a consumer durable seen in the context of the growing demand for new material goods in the later seventeenth and eighteenth century, historians have also looked to issues of acquisition and use. In the growing commodification of the funeral and the increasing significance of material goods and mourning accoutrements, mourning jewellery was similarly influenced by issues of taste, politeness, fashion and respectability. Middle class consumers were increasingly driving and directing the popularity and pervasiveness of mourning jewellery into the eighteenth century, and jewellers and goldsmiths increasingly responded to this demand.⁷³

Furthermore, the work done by historians within this branch of material culture studies, has also helped to establish a method that makes use of all available sources, and encourages a “dialogue” or “rapprochement between both the surviving material and documentary traces of the past”.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 7; S. Pennell, ‘Mundane materiality, or, should small things still be forgotten?: Material culture, microhistories and the problem of scale’, in Harvey, *History and Material Culture*, p. 175.

⁷¹ L. Weatherill, *Consumer Behaviour and Material Culture in Britain, 1660-1760* (London: Routledge, 1988).

Her approach is largely based upon the quantitative analysis of ownership patterns and consumption of key goods through the use of probate inventories. Some historians such as Vickery and Pennell, however, have censured some aspects of this approach, in that it “treats objects principally as units to be counted” and, thus, “the materiality of the actual object tends to be bypassed”.

Styles and Vickery, ‘Introduction’, in *Gender, Taste and Material Culture*, pp. 21-22.

⁷² Pennell, S., “‘Pots and Pans History’: the Material Culture of the Kitchen in Early Modern England”, *Journal of Design History*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (1998), pp. 201-16; Pennell, ‘Mundane materiality’, in Harvey, *History and Material Culture* (chapter 9).

It is particularly interesting that Pennell has aligned her study of early modern kitchen equipment as akin to a microhistorical endeavour. This also draws attention to the need, when studying material culture, for the historian to be aware of and to address issues, which are likely to arise, surrounding the typicality, representation, and commonality of the object[s] under study.

⁷³ Berg, M., *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). These issues are discussed in further detail in Chapter 5.

⁷⁴ Styles and Vickery, ‘Introduction’, in *Gender, Taste and Material Culture*, p. 21; Pennell, Sara, ‘Consumption and Consumerism in Early Modern England’, *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 42, No. 2 (1999), p. 562.

Consequently, numerous historians studying death and remembrance have attempted to utilise material culture – including gravestones,⁷⁵ memorial brasses,⁷⁶ church monuments,⁷⁷ and mourning dress⁷⁸ - as a useful means of shedding light on attitudes towards, and the practices concerning, burial, mourning, memory and commemoration.

Admittedly, whilst it must be noted that although many of the most prominent historians working within this field – Houlbrooke, Cressy, Gittings – have tended to base their work primarily upon manuscript sources, it is also undeniably true that nearly all of their work tends also to contain at least some element of material culture.

Nigel Llewellyn's investigation of the "rich culture of visual artefacts" which accompanied death during the early modern period, for example, exactly demonstrates the obvious need to study the material culture of the period in order to sufficiently comprehend the complexity and depth of the English death ritual.⁷⁹ Likewise, archaeologists such as James Deetz and Sarah Tarlow have pioneered the use of gravestone iconography and design as a workable indicator and barometer of changing religious beliefs and popular attitudes towards death and commemoration.⁸⁰

In establishing a theoretical framework for the study of mourning jewellery, this study broadly adopts an 'object driven' approach, and, particularly in seeking to interpret the physical objects themselves, Chapters 2 and 3 are grounded in a process of 'thick description'. As well as providing a depiction of the types of objects which were being produced and used, the interpretation also seeks to place these objects back into their historical contexts, utilising a range of other source materials, most particularly wills, but also newspapers, contemporary writings, letters, diaries and portraiture.

The use of the written record in conjunction with the visual objects of mourning jewellery uncovers layers of meaning as to how these objects were used and the ways in which they acquired meaning and operated in the negotiation of relationships and affective

⁷⁵ Deetz, J. and Dethlefsen, E., 'Death's Head, Cherub, Urn and Willow', *Natural History*, Vol. 76, No. 3 (1967), pp. 29-37.

⁷⁶ M. Norris, 'Later medieval monumental brasses: an urban funeral industry and its representation of death', in S. Basset (ed.), *Death in Towns: Urban Responses to the Dying and the Dead, 100-1600* (Leicester, London & New York: Leicester University Press, 1992).

⁷⁷ Owen, K., 'The Reformed Elect: Wealth, Death, and Sanctity in Gloucestershire, 1550-1640', *International Journal of Historical Archaeology*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (March, 2006), pp. 1-34; Finch, J., 'A Reformation of Meaning: Commemoration and Remembering the Dead in the Parish Church, 1450-1640', in *The Archaeology of Reformation, 1480-1580*, ed. D. Gaimster and R. Gilchrist (Leeds: Maney, 2003); P. Sherlock, *Monuments and Memory in Early Modern England* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2008); N. Llewellyn, *Funeral Monuments in Post-Reformation England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁷⁸ L. Taylor, *Mourning Dress: A Costume and Social History* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983); Oman, C., 'Mourning Rings', *Apollo*, Vol. 43 (1946), pp. 71-73.

⁷⁹ N. Llewellyn, *The Art of Death: Visual Culture in the English Death Ritual, 1500-1800* (London: Reaktion, 1991).

⁸⁰ S. Tarlow, 'Wormie Clay and Blessed Sleep: Death and disgust in later historic Britain', in Gaimster and Gilchrist, *Archaeology of Reformation*; Deetz and Dethlefsen, 'Deaths Head', pp. 29-37.

emotional exchanges. Whilst the items of mourning jewellery certainly provide a visual and immediate entry into the subject, they are largely silent as to who was using them, the way in which they were given, acquired meaning, and operated for their donors and recipients; in contrast, whilst the wills tell us about these exchanges in more detail, how they were bequeathed, to whom, and perhaps even why, for the most part, they are largely silent as to what these items actually looked like.

Hopefully the integration of source materials, serves to work symbiotically together to fill in the gaps of the other – a history and things approach – to create a more rounded overall picture of the custom in practice. As Gerritsen and Riello have contended, documentary sources and objects should not be seen as distinct but rather as part of a continuum; mourning jewellery appears to us “both in its material form and in textual records”.⁸¹ In a similar vein, Hamling and Richardson, have pointed to the use of various kinds of evidence in the study of materiality, serving as numerous “spotlights from different directions on a single actor”, in this case mourning jewellery.⁸²

Other primary sources that have been used to supplement the material culture element and the information gleaned from the probate record includes the use of a large body of news media and criminal trial records. The newspaper material was sampled from the searchable database of the British Library’s *Burney Collection*. The size and scope of this resource encompasses much of the period under study, and though there is a paucity of provincial titles, and relatively few titles from the 1650s, 1660s, and 1680s, the breadth of information offered by the extensive eighteenth-century London newspapers, does afford invaluable evidence for the consumption of mourning jewellery in the Capital at this time.

Many trades including goldsmiths and jewellery-sellers are represented in the advertisements, providing an insight into how the commercial and retail trade in mourning jewellery operated in practice, and detailing the types of items being produced for sale. Numerous news stories and appeals for lost or stolen personal effects also provide many enlightening references to the types of pieces being worn and the customary conventions and popular habits surrounding the ways in which contemporary men and women personally utilised and employed mourning jewellery.⁸³

Contained in these newspaper articles and trade advertisements are clues as to how jewellery was *actually* being produced, sold, and worn, and by whom; the frequency with which these articles and items repeatedly crop up in the media record, also gives some

⁸¹ A. Gerritsen and G. Riello (eds.), *Writing Material Culture History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 6.

⁸² Hamling, T. and Richardson, C., ‘Introduction’, in T. Hamling and C. Richardson (eds.), *Everyday Objects: Medieval and Early Modern Material Culture and its Meanings* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), p. 11.

⁸³ Goff, Moira, ‘The Burney Newspapers at the British Library’, *17th-18th Century Burney Collection Newspapers* (Detroit: Gale, 2007).

indication of the growing popularity and increasing prevalence of mourning jewellery throughout the eighteenth century.

The searchable database of *The Proceedings of the Old Bailey, 1674-1913*, provides transcripts of reports which detail the criminal trials held at London's central criminal court. Significantly, there are over one hundred offences and indictments – including those for larceny, theft, burglary, housebreaking, pickpocketing, shoplifting, and robbery – which were tried during the period up to 1800, and which contain specific references to either mourning rings or jewellery.

The information provided in the trial proceedings - incorporating the questioning of witnesses and defendants - can be used to reveal information about the occupations and social positions of people who acquired, sold, owned, or wore mourning jewellery, where these items were kept or stored, and how, where, and when, mourning jewellery was actually worn and used on a day-to-day basis. In describing the nature of the crime committed along with the details of the indictment, these particular records also provide further informative and often precise descriptive evidence concerning the style and cost of particular items of mourning jewellery, which had supposedly been stolen or purloined.⁸⁴

A large collection of trade cards, advertising the products and services for a variety of eighteenth-century goldsmiths and jewellers also further supplements the information found in the London newspaper advertisements. Sir Ambrose Heal - who assembled one of the largest collections of trade cards and handbills, which are held at the British Museum - suggested that no other document could present so vivid a picture of the goldsmiths' business, as that of the trade card. Detailing the activities and locations of London shops and businesses, they give first hand information about consumer demand and the kinds of wares being produced and sold. They reveal the identities of numerous tradesmen, retailers, and shopkeepers, opening a window onto the way in which the manufacturing and retail trade in mourning jewellery operated and expanded into English towns and cities during the eighteenth century.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Tim Hitchcock, Robert Shoemaker, Clive Emsley, Sharon Howard and Jamie McLaughlin, et al., *The Old Bailey Proceedings Online, 1674-1913* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0, 24 March 2012).

⁸⁵ A. Heal, *The London Goldsmiths, 1200-1800: a record of the names and addresses of the craftsmen, their shop-signs and trade-cards* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1972), p. 23.

Images have been removed due to copyright issues. The thesis can be viewed in full by consulting the print copy on request from the University Library.

Trade card of Nathaniel Roe, Goldsmith, c. 1737.

“Sells all sorts of Plate and Rings for Weddings or Funerals”.

Source: British Museum, Museum Number: Heal,67.345

Trade card of Robert Chandler, Working Jeweller, c. 1795.

“Pictures Set in the Newest Fashion, Mourning Rings made with Expedition. Variety of Gold Seals, Locketts, Bracelets & Hair Rings”.

Source: British Museum, Museum Number: D,2.1756

A range of other supplementary primary source materials were also utilised; letters, diaries, and an array of contemporary publications, including funeral sermons, chapbooks, periodicals, didactic, religious and popular literature, all provide further references to mourning jewellery and give some indication as to the cultural popularity and pervasiveness of the custom into familiar parlance and day-to-day life.

Works of art and portraiture also provide a useful visual element regarding contemporary fashions and trends surrounding the wearing and displaying of mourning jewellery. There are relatively few sources that give a clear idea as to how the jewellery was actually worn and used in practice, but portraits featuring depictions of mourning jewellery – where it can categorically be identified as such – provide demonstrable evidence and an illustrative reflection of social practices, prevailing fashions, and contemporary mourning habits.

Women and widows - often depicted in their distinctive black mourning garb - present the most easily identifiable subjects of study, particularly when biographical information on the sitter is available in conjunction with the date of the painting's composition. Such portraits provide information not only about the wearing and display of mourning jewellery, but also about the length, process, and approach to public displays of mourning and remembrance during the early modern period.

Chapter Structure

The first two chapters follow a broadly chronological narrative, charting the material development of the jewellery over the course of three hundred years, whilst the subsequent chapters each adopt a more thematic approach looking at how the jewellery was given and received, the popular impact and spread of the custom over time, and finally looking at how the jewellery was used and its role as an emotional object of mourning.

Chapter 2 begins with an introduction and overview of the jewellery itself, looking at the embryonic foundations of mourning jewellery and the establishment of the *memento mori* token. There is a comprehensive introduction to and chronological overview – both pre- and post-Reformation – of the jewellery itself: its form and fashion, cultural influences, and the evolving stylistic conventions and typical decorative motifs which occurred in the evolution from the impersonal *memento mori* to the customised memorial jewel, as well as an exploration of the popularity of the inscribed posy ring. This development in form and function and the seemingly inexorable move towards personal remembrance is foregrounded in a discussion of the influence of religious reforms and the subsequent changes in burial and commemorative practices.

Chapter 3 continues the chronological development of the personalised memorial memento, looking at the jewellery as a custom in progress. Beginning with an exploration of Stuart memorial jewellery, observing the influence of the execution of Charles I on the custom more generally, and the subsequent political impact of this event in influencing the successive mourning of other members of royalty, and the continuous thread running from Charles I to the memorial jewellery of the Jacobites. The second section looks at the emerging concept of sentimental jewellery and the ascent of personalised mourning, memorial, and commemorative jewellery, particularly in the period which followed the execution of Charles I, the progression of the practice from the Restoration and beyond, and, finally, the prevalence and popularity of mourning jewellery throughout the eighteenth century.

Chapter 4 looks at the custom in terms of the people who were typically giving and receiving mourning jewellery, and the relationships between them. It looks at the bonds of family, friendship, and obligation, which might necessitate the bequest of a ring. The conventions and proprieties influencing the bestowal or purchase of a piece of mourning jewellery are also discussed, as well as the social role which the jewellery assumed, and the intentions and personal motivations that often lay behind the bequeathing and distribution of testamentary gifts.

Chapter 5 introduces some quantitative analysis relating the testators of Middlesex and Surrey, investigating the significance and widespread popular impact of mourning jewellery, both socially and over time. It also discusses the position which mourning jewellery occupied within the funerary and mourning customs of the day, how it was viewed amid other funerary provisions and remembrance strategies, particularly in light of the growing influence of the undertaking trade. There is also some discussion concerning popular attitudes towards mourning jewellery and the issues and influences surrounding the censure or adoption of the custom among certain social groups and individuals. This leads on to a brief survey of some of those involved in the production and manufacture of mourning jewellery – the jewellers, goldsmiths, and sellers – and the spreading consumption of sentimental jewellery over the course of the eighteenth century.

Chapter 6 looks at the ways in which testators and the bereaved regarded and utilised mourning jewellery; there is an examination of the extent to which mourning jewellery might aptly articulate emotion and affect, particularly in response to the deaths of children. It also looks at how memorial jewellery performed as a panacea against grief, its role in post-mortem remembrance, and whether it provided any form of consolation or comfort for bereaved. The role of women as major contributors to the custom is considered, as well as the deployment of mourning jewellery in the making and remembrance of a ‘good death’. There is also some consideration of the typical life-cycles of such pieces, looking at what became of mourning jewellery, and whether it was typically passed on, or eventually rendered redundant or even discarded.

This study intends to demonstrate the increasing prevalence and pervasiveness of jewellery as part of customary mourning practice over the course of the period. From the impersonal and stark *memento mori* ring of the sixteenth century, to a sentimental family mourning keepsake by the end of the eighteenth, mourning jewellery evolved markedly in both its appearance and in its usage. In focussing, principally, upon just one element of mourning ritual, the aim, ultimately, is to try to reveal and comprehend the beliefs and attitudes which dictated behaviour and responses to death, mourning and remembrance, across a three-hundred-year period. By understanding the mortuary customs and memorial concerns of people in the past, we also reveal a little more of how they lived, thought, felt, and experienced the world around them.

Images have been removed due to copyright issues. The thesis can be viewed in full by consulting the print copy on request from the University Library.

MAP 1: Probate jurisdictions of Surrey

Source: C. R. Humphery-Smith, *The Phillimore Atlas and Index of Parish Registers* (Chichester: Phillimore, 1995).

Images have been removed due to copyright issues. The thesis can be viewed in full by consulting the print copy on request from the University Library.

MAP 2: Probate jurisdictions of Middlesex

Source: C. R. Humphery-Smith, *The Phillimore Atlas and Index of Parish Registers* (Chichester: Phillimore, 1995).

CHAPTER 2. A DEVELOPING TRADITION: From *Memento Mori* to the Posy Ring, c.1500-1650

*This mournful Gem remembrance bears
Of One rever'd and dead to cares...*
Thomas Adney¹

Mourning Jewellery; it is the subject of this thesis, but what exactly *is* 'mourning jewellery'? This may seem a rather simplistic question but, as this chapter will show, within this broad categorisation lie a multitude of diverse and distinctive objects.

It is the physical articles themselves, which provide the most obvious and striking entry point into understanding a custom and concept, which, to some modern eyes at least, may often appear rather morbid and maudlin. To understand the concept of 'mourning jewellery', it is first necessary to unravel some of the most basic but, ultimately, some of the most fundamental questions concerning the practice: namely, what kinds of items were utilised by the early modern consumer and what did these items actually look like?

The term 'mourning jewellery' is used today as a rather sweeping categorisation for a vast array of items that were, for hundreds of years, used to commemorate, mourn, and memorialise individuals and their deaths. It is a class of jewellery distinctive in its design and intent; to modern eyes it is both familiar and yet, at times, remote and alien.

As an outward and often deeply personal and emotive mourning accessory, what were the intentions and decisions which lay behind the bequeathing, commissioning, and wearing of such pieces? What kind of messages, if any at all, were the users attempting to convey and promote through its usage? How was mourning jewellery understood by contemporaries, and what can we, as historians today, learn from its study?

These are pertinent questions that span the whole of the thesis, but an initial look at the jewellery itself provides a good entry point into understanding the concept of mourning jewellery as a whole.

Chapters 2 and 3 are intended provide a largely chronological overview of these objects, between 1500 and 1800. Covering dominant trends, from the *memento mori*, personalised mourning jewellery, posy rings, political pieces, and mourning wear, the following two chapters also define the forms mourning jewellery

¹ Adney, Thomas, 'Lines Written on Presenting a Lady with a Mourning Ring', in *The European Magazine, and London Review*, Volume 23 (January, 1793), p. 72.

encompassed, and how prevalent fashions, design styles, artistic motifs, and stylistic conventions, ebbed and flowed across the period. Both chapters also take a thematic approach, charting the development of key trends, changes and continuities over time, as well as looking to provide some historical context as to how societal shifts were reflected in the alteration and modifications in the look and appearance of the jewellery itself.

Methodology

Material for both chapters has been gathered from a variety of collections across England. It includes some of the biggest assemblages of mourning jewellery to be found anywhere, not just in England, but globally. Initially, curators at museums known to house significant or notable jewellery collections, from a list supplied by the ‘Society of Jewellery Historians’, were contacted.² Some major national collections, such as those at the V&A³ and the British Museum,⁴ can, of course, also be consulted through their comprehensive online databases. In many other cases, relevant material was further supplemented and additional information gleaned from published catalogues and collection lists provided by curators.⁵ Some museums held only a few items of mourning jewellery, some none at all, whilst at the major national museums in London the numbers ran into the hundreds.

The examination of a combination of objects, online and printed collections, and accession lists provided by curators, totalled around 1200 items of mourning jewellery consulted overall, with the British Museum providing the largest museum assemblage of mourning jewellery at over 300 pieces.

The sheer amount of material, meant that it was both possible and necessary to construct an inventory in order to review the changing trends in forms and fashions. The sheer breadth and scope of mourning and memorial jewellery reviewed allowed

² http://www.societyofjewelleryhistorians.ac.uk/museums_uk

³ <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/>

⁴ https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/search.aspx

⁵ Information provided by curators for some pieces might only consist of a very basic entry, lacking in detail, but this supplementary information was also useful in supplying information about pieces which were not on display or were kept in storage. See for example: O. M. Dalton, *Franks Bequest: Catalogue of the Finger Rings, Early Christian, Byzantine, Teutonic, Mediaeval and Later...* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1912); C. Oman, *British Rings, 800-1914* (Totowa: Rowman and Littlefield, 1973); B. Marsh (ed.), *Memorial Rings: Charles the Second to William the Fourth, in the Possession of Frederick Arthur Crisp* (Grove Park Press, 1908); T. Murdoch (ed.), *Treasures and Trinkets: Jewellery in London from pre-Roman times to the 1930s* (London: The Museum of London, 1991); D. Scarisbrick and G. Taylor (eds.), *Finger Rings: from Ancient Egypt to the Present Day* (Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 1978); C. Oman, *Victoria and Albert Museum: Catalogue of Rings 1930* (Ipswich: Anglia Publishing, 1993).

for a comprehensive picture to be built up, with items from five of the main assemblages, totalling around 800 pieces, providing a nucleus of representative material.⁶

The jewellery selected spans the entire period, from c.1500, right up to the first few years of the early nineteenth century, and includes a wide variety of articles, ranging from the ever-prevalent mourning ring - in all its forms - to more unfamiliar items, such as the ribbon slide and the decorative buckle. This time period catches both the early green-shoots of the custom, as well as its later growth into something of a more prevalent social and cultural phenomenon. The beginning of the nineteenth century seemed a logical cut-off point, as new materials, mass-production methods and mechanisation brought in a style of jewellery often noticeably different, perhaps more commercialised and homogenised, from that which had gone before. Indeed, many jewellery specialists have treated the mourning jewellery of the nineteenth century, particularly that associated with the Victorians, as a distinct, even nominally separate genre of jewellery in its own right.⁷

The picture generated from the analysis of this large dataset has been further enhanced not only by material from various other museum collections, but also by items identified and highlighted by other authors,⁸ as well as by items found in private collections,⁹ or even listed for sale through auction houses and antique jewellers.

The rationale for studying such a copious and varied array of mourning jewellery was to create a more comprehensive picture of the genre as a whole, to analyse enough surviving jewellery to uncover broad trends, prevalent and habitual contemporary forms, and which would also provide instances of jewels which were more singular, whether remarkable for their lavish fashioning or conceptual design.

⁶ The particular focus on the five main assemblages, included: V&A, Ashmolean, British Museum, Museum of London, and the Portable Antiquities Scheme. All items of jewellery deemed to fall within the scope of *memento mori*, mourning, or memorial jewels, were included in the survey.

⁷ See for example: D. Cooper and N. Batershill, *Victorian Sentimental Jewellery* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1972) and C. Gere, *Victorian Jewellery Design* (London: William Kimber, 1972), (chapter 11).

⁸ Particular mention must be made here of the works of Diana Scarisbrick, which provide not only an insight into the jewels belonging to major museum collections, but also tend to illustrate remarkable items which would have remained, otherwise, hidden to the general public, tucked away in private hands and family collections. (See Bibliography).

⁹ Hayden Peters' website, 'The Art of Mourning: a resource for memorial, mourning, sentimental jewellery and art', provides one of the most comprehensive, informative, and educational introductions to mourning jewellery. An enthusiastic collector of mourning and sentimental jewellery, he provides regular articles and updates about the pieces in his collection, or items, which have proved of special interest to him.
<http://artofmourning.com/>

There were both recurring design styles and widespread fashions represented amongst the items under study, in addition to the more singular and uncommon examples, but the entire corpus served to create a more representative and comprehensive idea of what ‘mourning jewellery’ could actually encompass during the period under study. The aim has been to sample a large selection of jewellery that incorporates both the typical and the particular, to understand how the jewellery was fashioned, the materials employed, and what it actually looked like.

In terms of considering how representative these surviving objects are of the practice as a whole, the use of the material evidence does not simply offer an unbiased snapshot of a custom as it would have been understood by its contemporaries. One of the main issues inherent in relying upon the remnants of what has survived in museum collections are the very issues associated with survival and collection. As Hamling and Richardson have contended, the historic objects displayed in these national museums are often preoccupied with the ‘high’ culture of the social elite, with collections typically dominated by the “expensive and extraordinary”, customarily representing the most lavish and finely wrought pieces.

In considering the biases inherent in what has survived, museums offer a carefully curated view of these objects, not merely a straightforward representation of the typical or everyday pieces which might have been worn, forming part of the “daily lives and habits” of those ordinary people of the kind represented in the wills which have been sampled for this study.¹⁰ Moreover, certain factors have driven and determined the acquisition of these objects, for example the National Museums Scotland have a particular preponderance of objects relating to the Royal House of Stuart and memorial and commemorative jewellery concerned with Charles I and the Jacobites; the collections of the V&A and British Museum, meanwhile, also have a prevalence of particularly finely wrought pieces, where collectors and curators have been drawn to the uncommon, luxurious, and conspicuous items of mourning jewellery, perhaps featuring fine enamelling, well rendered mourning scenes, or which incorporate diamonds or other exclusive components.

Consequently, the most common or ordinary sort of mourning ring or jewel might therefore be somewhat underrepresented across these collections. In terms of their survival it seems likely that many of the earlier examples of mourning rings as

¹⁰ Hamling, T. and Richardson, C., ‘Introduction’, in T. Hamling and C. Richardson (eds.), *Everyday Objects: Medieval and Early Modern Material Culture and its Meanings* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 13-14

well as the plainer more generic gold bands typically distributed more generally to funeral attendees in the later seventeenth and into the eighteenth centuries have been lost – subsequently having been recycled, re-used, and melted-down.¹¹ For example, Oman contends that the “heavy melting of jewellery during the Civil War” accounts for the lack of mourning rings dating from before the late 1650s.¹² In a comparable vein, Marcia Pointon has similarly pointed to the fact that “relatively few plain gold bands from the eighteenth century survive”; she has asserted that the specific inclusion of mourning rings in the Goldsmiths’ Hall statute of 1738/39, introducing new hallmarking regulations, was a response in recognition of the fact that the “simple plain gold bands” issued to funeral attendees, “rapidly became redundant or recyclable”, a functional token which after the funeral was seen as “disposable” – “gold capable of being melted down”.¹³ Other issues of interpretation, surround the more ambiguous objects – such as posy and *memento mori* rings – where they lack a date or a clear dedicatory inscription it can be difficult to determine whether they functioned specifically as mourning tokens; likewise, many testators and the bereaved must also have utilised personally-owned jewellery bequeathing it as a token of remembrance or wearing it in memory of the deceased, but which was unrecognisable as an item of mourning jewellery in the way that other specially commissioned commemorative pieces were.

Nevertheless, the visual and illustrative information provided by items of mourning jewellery offers a particularly useful extension to the information found in the wills. It is one thing to read in a will, the description of a ring bequeathed by a dying man some four hundred years ago, and to try and guess at what it may have looked like; it is altogether different to behold an actual seventeenth-century mourning ring, and begin to realise what that man may have meant by the bequest.

The jewellery then, provides not only a graphic and immediate insight into the topic, but it also acts as a complementary companion to the information gleaned from the documentary source materials. This is particularly useful as the majority of the

¹¹ It might be contended that the mourning rings recorded on the Portable Antiquities Scheme database – over 100 items – give a fairer and more representative impression of the typical kinds of pieces which were more commonly being worn and actually used (and then subsequently lost) by people across the country. It is interesting to note that the largest single category of mourning ring on this database are the simpler gold bands engraved with a skull or death's head, which were often simply enamelled and inscribed.

¹² Oman, C., ‘Mourning Rings’, *Apollo*, Vol. 43 (1946), p. 72.

¹³ Pointon, M., ‘Jewellery in Eighteenth-Century England’, in *Consumers and Luxury: Consumer Culture in Europe, 1650-1850*, ed. M. Berg and H. Clifford (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), pp. 123-33.

testators actually tended to provide very little supplementary detail in their bequests as to the exact nature or appearance of the mourning ring they intended. The chosen selection of jewellery serves not only to depict dominant trends and design styles, but it also offers up greater background detail as to how the custom of mourning jewellery actually developed. The physical objects of jewellery are the embodiment of what we find in the written material, helping to paint a clearer picture and acting as a bridge to fill in the gaps and omissions.

Categorising the Jewellery

Although the following two chapters follow a largely chronological narrative in their overview of mourning jewellery, c.1500-1800, it is possible to discern four characteristic forms or classes within the overarching genre of mourning, memorial, and commemorative jewellery itself.

The *memento mori* jewellery of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries forms the first grouping, identifiable by the skulls, skeletons, and other morbid images of death and decay, which decorate the pieces.

The second, rather broad categorisation, concerns the more intimate and personal pieces of mourning jewellery used to commemorate individuals and loved ones after death, which are typically identifiable from the personalised inscriptions, engravings, and hair-work compositions which often adorn the pieces. Within this grouping it is also important to distinguish between two distinct kinds of mourning or memorial jewel. The first was made up of those items which were *specifically* a bespoke commission or were purchased following the death of an individual, and could be handed out to mourners following the funeral. The second concerns those items of jewellery which had belonged to the deceased in life – often very personal or evocative items such as a signet seal or wedding ring – and then subsequently *became* memorial or remembrance pieces for those who had inherited them, through the act of being bequeathed and passed on.

Personal mourning jewellery, associated with specific individuals, is certainly the most miscellaneous grouping of the four, containing a diverse array of jewels in a range of design styles, and executed along a sliding scale between extravagance and simplicity. Such items range from the highly emotive, often adorned with personal inscriptions and heartfelt mottoes, to the more generically prosaic.

The third recognisable class or genre of mourning jewellery is made up of those items that sought not only to memorialise and mourn, but also had a further purpose, in that they were also associated with a monarch or a particular political cause. They were particular in their intent, often acting as a wearable form of political propaganda, a badge of commemoration *and* support. For example, a vast amount of sentimental jewellery depicting and celebrating Charles I was produced following the King's execution in 1649; this jewellery not only venerated the dead king, but it also acknowledged loyalty and support for the future Charles II. Outwardly, this category of jewellery memorialised and commemorated, but, concurrently, it also disclosed political associations and personal loyalties.

The fourth and final grouping concerns the jewellery made to be worn as part of an individual's mourning attire. The strictures and prescriptions determined by the period's mourning customs dictated, amongst other things, dress and the wearing of jewellery. This jewellery was not specifically commemorative, but was made, rather, in a style, colour, and of a material, that would accord with the accepted rules and etiquette demanded of reputable mourning dress and accessories.

It should be understood, however, that whilst such categorisations or groupings may be useful in terms of analysis, they certainly do not present any rigid divisional boundaries. Indeed, the groupings may often be fairly fluid, and a single item of jewellery and the way in which it was designed, could, quite easily, be classified as belonging to several different categories at once. We must keep in mind the signs and symbols presented to us, and remember that mourning jewellery could play several different roles concurrently. Encompassed in a small gold ring may be a complex statement of grief, sentiment, prestige, political intent, even a reflection on one's own mortality; conversely, its purpose may simply have been to mourn the death of a relative or friend.¹⁴

This chapter will cover the early phase of mourning jewellery, looking at the initial evolution of the custom from the beginning of the period with the bequest of rings for a remembrance, and the development and influence of the *memento mori* form; this then moves through to the introduction and establishment of more personalised forms of commemorative jewellery, including the memorial ring and the posy ring as objects of individual remembrance and mourning.

¹⁴ R. Marshall and G. Dalgleish (eds.), *The Art of Jewellery in Scotland* (Edinburgh: HMSO, 1991), p. 44.

The Early Years of Mourning Jewellery

Several curators and jewellery historians have asserted that the custom of mourning and memorial jewellery has a much older lineage than is, perhaps, initially realised. O. M. Dalton, for example, contended that the custom of wearing mourning rings, in remembrance of the dead, “became general at the close of the Middle Ages,” and progressed to such an extent that by the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it was “almost universal in England”.¹⁵

Indeed, although the making and wearing of jewellery, in order to commemorate and mourn the loss of an individual, has been associated with later centuries, the giving and wearing of mourning rings certainly was in truth an “ancient practice”.¹⁶ As Oman has stated, it is both “natural” and, hence, also “ancient” to want to bequeath a “personal memento” to friends and relations.¹⁷ As long as there has been personal adornment it is likely that there has also been jewellery passed on and worn by the living, in remembrance of the dead; it is an intrinsic human characteristic to want to be remembered after death, just as it is also customary to seek to pass on treasured possessions and items of wealth.

The earliest instances, of what may justly be termed as ‘mourning jewellery’, were those sentimental pieces which had belonged to the dead or dying person, and which then *became* mourning jewellery, through the act of being passed on to friends and relatives, or bequeathed in wills, and which were then inherited, and worn in remembrance by the living. Such early forms of mourning jewellery may not have been “specifically made for the purpose”, but they could fulfil an important memorial function nevertheless.¹⁸

Dalton has suggested – and this is a theory supported by the testamentary evidence – that the “custom of leaving a ring for remembrance” probably represents a “very early form of [testamentary] bequest”.¹⁹ In his will of 1368, for example, Robert de Ufford, Earl of Suffolk, left to several named recipients “a ring of gold, for remembrance”.²⁰ Likewise, in her will of 1434, Margarete Asshcombe, a widow

¹⁵ Dalton, *Franks Bequest*, p. xvii.

¹⁶ Marshall and Dalglish (eds.), *Jewellery in Scotland*, p. 52.

¹⁷ Oman, *British Rings*, p. 71.

¹⁸ Dalton, *Franks Bequest*, p. li.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. li.

²⁰ N. H. Nicolas, *Testamenta Vetusta: Being Illustrations from Wills, of Manners, Customs, &c., as well as of the Descents and Possessions of Many Distinguished Families, Volume II* (London: Nichols & Son, 1826), p. 74.

from London, bequeathed both an early posy ring – “a ryng of golde with a ston, & a reson ‘sans departir’” – and a devotional style of ring – “a ryng of golde with a crucifix abovne” – to two female acquaintances.²¹ Although the custom of the mourning ring, as a distinct item, would develop in significance over the following centuries, it also remains true that any ring, indeed, any jewel, bequeathed is also “in a sense a memorial”.²² It is no surprise, therefore, that even in the embryonic stages of the development of ‘mourning jewellery’, as a genre, and as an accepted and recognisable social custom, that the bequest of a ring as a customary token of remembrance is repeated in wills from as early as the sixteenth century.²³ Such foundations laid the way for the personalised mourning jewellery of later years, and we can see in early wills, with the bequeathing of personally-owned items, a developing “transition towards the conventional or ceremonial memento”.²⁴ In 1559, for example, Thomas Collte, an Essex gentleman, gave bequests of gold so that four separate individuals might have rings made in his memory:

To Sir George Somersett ½ oz. of angel gold to be made in a ring to his device, trusting that he will wear it for my sake and accept so poor a remembrance in good part... To my brother George Collt ½ oz. of angel gold to be made a ring according to his device, desiring him to be an aid and help to my wife and children... To my nephews... each ½ oz. of fine gold to be made in a ring for a remembrance.²⁵

In the same year, Thomas Paynell, a priest, as well as bequeathing to a female “cosen”, his “rownd hoope of golde”, also left to another female acquaintance: “two doble docketes to make her a ring of godly remebraunce”.²⁶

Bury noted in her catalogue of the jewellery collections of the V&A, that early bequests of rings, by testators in the Middle Ages, “probably took the form of the fashionable shapes of the day”.²⁷ Similarly, Oman has suggested that some of the earliest memorial rings – those distributed by “fifteenth- and sixteenth-century testators” – tended to follow “current religious types”.²⁸

²¹ F. J. Furnivall (ed.), *Fifty Earliest English Wills in the Court of Probate, London: A.D. 1387-1439, with a priest's of 1454* (London, New York, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 96-7.

²² Dalton, *Franks Bequest*, p. li.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. li.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. lii.

²⁵ F. G. Emmison (ed.), *Elizabethan Life: Wills of Essex Gentry & Merchants, Vol. 4* (Chelmsford: Essex Record Office, 1978), pp. 184-5.

²⁶ Clay, J. M. (ed.), ‘North Country Wills: Being abstracts of wills relating to the counties of York, Nottingham, Northumberland, Cumberland, and Westmorland at Somerset House and Lambeth Palace 1558-1604, Volume II’, *Surtees Society*, Vol. 121 (1912), p. 24.

²⁷ S. Bury, *Jewellery Gallery Summary Catalogue* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1982), p. 217.

²⁸ Oman, ‘Mourning Rings’, p. 71.

Several authors have noted the sixteen rings engraved with the Five Wounds of Christ,²⁹ bequeathed to friends in 1487, by Sir Edmund Shaa [Shaw], a goldsmith and alderman of London; these rings, he specified, were to be “of fyne gold, to be gravyn with the Well of pittie, the Well of mercie, and the Well of everlasting life”, and were, no doubt, intended to secure prayers and “Requiem Masses” for their donor.³⁰ [FIG. 1]

Some early testators were, it seems, even more explicit in seeking to utilise mourning rings as a means of securing intercessory prayers for themselves. One Somerset will, quoted by Oman, contains bequests of several gold rings, in which the testator – who died in 1507 – specified that they were to be, “to the value of 20s. with this scripture to be made within everyche of the same hoopes ‘Ye shall pray for Sir Thomas Beamonde’”.³¹

Similarly, in 1559, Dame Frances Powlett, a widow from Essex, left several rings amongst her acquaintances, five of which were to feature “a death’s head”, but another three female legatees were each to receive “a ring of gold with the words *Pray for me*”.³²

Thus, some testators were clearly bequeathing mourning jewellery not only as a token of personal remembrance and regard, but were also alive to the possibility of exploiting it as a token which came with clear obligations on the part of the recipients. Indeed, in 1521, Ambrose Pudsey, a gentleman from Bolton, specifically bequeathed to the supervisor of his will, “my grete hope” ring, inscribed with his initials, “to pray for my saull”.³³ It seems a canny method to bequeath a ring which would also act as a visible prompt, ensuring, it was presumably hoped, that the hand

²⁹ “Confraternities were established in the 14th and 15th centuries to spread devotion to the cult of the Five Wounds – on His hands, feet and side – suffered by Christ on the cross. Each wound was described as a well, dripping with blood from which flowed mercy, wisdom, grace, godly comfort and everlasting life.” D. Scarisbrick, *Rings: Symbols of Wealth, Power and Affection* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993), p. 21.

³⁰ Quoted in Oman, *British Rings*, p. 117. See also J. Evans, *English Jewellery: From the Fifth Century A. D. to 1800* (London: Methuen & Co., 1921), p. 58.

Likewise, Dame Katherine Babington, in her will of 1537, bequeathed to her “daughter Merkhams my rynge with the saffure in it and my rynge of the fyve woundes...” Clay, J.M. (ed.), ‘North Country Wills: Being abstracts of wills relating to the counties of York, Nottingham, Northumberland, Cumberland, and Westmorland at Somerset House and Lambeth Palace’, *Surtees Society*, Vol. 116 (1908), p. 102;

In her will of 1564 a Southampton widow, Alice Aberie, similarly left careful bequests of plate and jewellery to several named recipients, including a “ring with the five wounds” to her granddaughter. Roberts, E. and Parker, K. (eds.), ‘Southampton Probate Inventories, 1447-1575, Volume I (1447-1566)’, *Southampton Record Series*, Vol. 34 (1992), p. 225.

³¹ Quoted in Oman, *Catalogue of Rings*, p. 40.

³² Emmison (ed.), *Elizabethan Life*, Vol. 4, p. 38.

that it adorned was also clasped together in prayer and speeding the donor's soul through the torments of Purgatory.

Interestingly, in her review of the gifts bequeathed in the wills of Tudor Londoners, Clare Schen noted that even during the Catholic Restoration, mourning rings remained a popular bequest, and by 1558 had become a "favoured gift" (forming 12.4% of all "non-pious" gifts) among testators. Schen further suggested that during this period, Mary's omission to restore the cult of saints and prayers for the souls of the dead, may also have further contributed toward a trend in testators favouring "private tokens remembrance of the person" as opposed to pious gifts in remembrance of the person's soul.³⁴ Concurrently, of course, testators still continued to carefully bequeath and transmit their personal jewels, and all manner of treasured trinkets, to friends and relatives.

Thus, the practice of giving or bequeathing rings, or other items of jewellery, as "souvenirs" to friends and loved ones, was already a fairly well-established custom by the early sixteenth century.³⁵ Whilst the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries certainly do represent the years in which the custom of mourning, memorial, and commemorative jewellery flourished and thrived, the roots of the concept must be seen as stretching much further back into the Middle Ages and beyond.³⁶

In one of the earliest wills from the Earls Colne collection, for example, George Veer, in 1502, added a codicil to his will, stating that his son and heir should receive, "my one ring of...gold with a ruby", in addition to his signet seal.³⁷ In 1589, Richard Enowes bequeathed, "my great wreathed ring of gold" to William Tyffyn, whom he described as his "loving friend", and whom he also appointed as supervisor to his last will and testament.³⁸ Although not specially commissioned pieces, such items of jewellery often had strong "emotive powers", and great personal value, for the individuals who had inherited them.³⁹ As pieces that had once belonged to the dead in life, post-mortem they could now assume a status as "memory objects".⁴⁰

³³ Raine, J. (ed.), 'Testamenta Eboracensia: A Selection of Wills from the Registry at York, Volume V', *Surtees Society*, Vol. 79 (1884), pp. 129-30.

³⁴ C. S. Schen, *Charity and Lay Piety in Reformation London, 1500-1620* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), p. 101.

³⁵ Bury, *Jewellery Summary Catalogue*, p. 217.

³⁶ Marshall and Dagleish, *The Art of Jewellery*, p. 52.

³⁷ Earls Colne, PROB11/13/182: Geo Veer, 24.12.1502.

³⁸ Earls Colne, ERO D/ACW2/33: Rich Enowes, 25.1.1589.

³⁹ E. Hallam and J. Hockey, *Death, Memory and Material Culture* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), p. 92.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

These items of jewellery previously associated with and worn by the departed could now act as prominent reminders of the dead individual, infused, as they were, with “special powers of recall” for the living.⁴¹

In a similar vein, when William Adlyngton, an innholder from Southwark, made his will in 1557, he bequeathed two personally-owned rings associated with both himself and his wife as a remembrance: “to my sister hawffild my gold Ring wth the deatnes head...and my litill gold Ring wth the dyamont wch was my other wives”.⁴²

Impact of Religious Reform

Before the sweeping doctrinal and theological changes introduced in the wake of the Reformation, the funeral had traditionally provided an occasion for the “first massive updraught of prayers of intercession” on behalf of the deceased.⁴³ Fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century testators, whilst lying afflicted upon their deathbeds, had justifiably tended to concern themselves during their final sickness not with the bequest of frippery mourning rings and memorial jewels, but instead had filled their wills with pious bequests, in a pre-emptive attempt to ensure their souls’ speedy passage through Purgatory.

Protestantism fundamentally altered this established and familiar customary relationship between the dead and the living; before the Reformation, “securing intercessory prayer”, had been the foremost priority for those facing death.⁴⁴ Accordingly, it was more typically prayers, obits, trentals, masses, tithes, gifts to the Church, and other charitable doles, rather than mourning rings, memorial brooches, and commemorative ribbon slides, which had filled the minds of the testators of the early sixteenth century.⁴⁵

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

⁴² Surrey, DW/PA/5/1557; Will Number: 155.

⁴³ Morgan, P., ‘Of Worms and War: 1380-1558’, in, *Death in England: An Illustrated History*, ed. P. C. Jupp and C. Gittings (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), p. 134.

⁴⁴ P. Marshall, *Beliefs and the Dead in Reformation England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 20.

⁴⁵ Interestingly, in his study of pre-Reformation wills from Bury, Robert Dinn noted that the “most common and popular ritual of the extended funeral...was the trental of St Gregory, a relatively cheap celebration which cost only 10s. and consisted of thirty masses celebrated on consecutive days”. As the custom became more established, similarly, the typical or customary bequest for a mourning ring was often also around 10s. (as was a sermon), so that previous pious bequests had perhaps transmuted and been adapted into these other forms of personal remembrance. Dinn, R., ‘Death and Rebirth in Late Medieval Bury St Edmunds’, in, S. Bassett (ed.), *Death in Towns: Urban Responses to the Dying and the Dead, 100-1600* (Leicester, London & New York: Leicester University Press, 1992), p. 164.

The Reformation, however, abandoned and condemned a belief in the notion of the efficacy of intercessory prayer; the symbiotic link that had previously existed between the communities of the dead and the living had been broken. The obligation and compulsion to pray for the souls of dead friends and relatives was gone, its theological underpinnings damaged and ostensibly rejected. As Llewellyn contended, effectively, “the Reformed dead had been carried beyond the influence of the living”.⁴⁶

In the context of these fundamental changes to ideas about and attitudes towards death and the remembrance of the dead, Houlbrooke has suggested that whilst doctrinal change may have “deprived the bereaved of an important means of channelling their grief into constructive action”, correspondingly, it also encouraged the “fuller development of other means of commemoration”, such as the giving and wearing of mourning jewellery.⁴⁷ Fundamentally, Houlbrooke proposes that the “gap left by the abolition of Catholic intercessory rites”, coupled with the sheer “inadequacy of mourning dress, as a proper means of expressing a personal sense of loss”, all contributed towards an ever-growing popularity for the “private rites of commemoration”, as people looked for other more satisfactory ways of remembering and memorialising their loved ones.⁴⁸

Houlbrooke suggests that this “desire for commemoration”, amongst both the bereaved and those facing the prospect of death, was partly reflected in the growing practice of giving gloves, scarves, and – particularly – memorial rings, to mourners and other funeral participants. In his view, the “remarkable burgeoning of all the major means of commemoration” – notably, funeral sermons (which were sometimes then printed), epitaphs, personal memorial inscriptions (found not only on funeral monuments, but also on mourning jewellery itself), and various grave-markers – in the century after the Reformation was given a certain degree of stimulus by the rejection of intercession. The rise of these methods and means of securing some sort of physical remembrance or establishing a more palpable and tangible means of personal commemoration, or an enduring mark of memorialisation, served as a

⁴⁶ Llewellyn, N., ‘The Royal Body: Monuments to the Dead, For the Living’, in, L. Gent and N. Llewellyn (eds.), *Renaissance Bodies: The Human Figure in English Culture c. 1540-1660* (London: Reaktion, 1995), p. 222.

⁴⁷ Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family*, p. 228.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 254.

consoling balm, acting, in Houlbrooke's view, to "compensate", somewhat, for the abolition of intercessory rites.⁴⁹

With the abolition of chantries and the worth of prayers associated with the remembrance and commemoration of the dead denounced, however, Harding, in a comparable vein, has similarly suggested that "individuals who wished their names to be remembered had to find new ways of ensuring it". Whilst lavish tombs and memorials were out of reach for most, mourning jewellery presented some testators at least with a relatively affordable and conceivably attainable material means of securing remembrance – at least from close friends and relatives – after they had died. The growing popularity and increasingly widespread usage of mourning jewellery during the sixteenth and particularly the seventeenth centuries, conceivably reflects Harding's contention that the pre-Reformation "concern with the salvation and immortality of the soul, seems to have mutated into a concern to ensure a metaphorical immortality in human memory".⁵⁰ Indeed, it is a contention, perhaps, even embodied in the very makeup of the mourning jewellery itself (as will be shown) in which there was a perceptible shift away from the purely impersonal *memento mori* designs, to jewellery that was purposefully fashioned to evoke, mourn, and commemorate, the memory of specific and named individuals.

In a similar vein, Schen highlighted the increasing importance of mourning jewellery and personal tokens of remembrance, particularly in light of the uncertainty and pace of change faced by testators in early Reformation London. Early post-Reformation testators were increasingly "investing in different forms of commemoration", and testamentary bequests and funerary provisions were accordingly "adapted to these new pious expectations".⁵¹ Schen suggests, for example, that "small private tokens of remembrance" effectively usurped pious bequests and gifts directed towards the parish church. Small personal remembrances and intimate acts of mourning - such as the bequest of a ring - were, it seems, more easily incorporated into this new religious landscape, unlikely to attract the censure of iconoclasts, whilst also perpetuating, in a comfortingly familiar manner, the memory and remembrance of the dead.⁵²

⁴⁹ R. Houlbrooke (ed.), *Death, Ritual and Bereavement* (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 12, 35, 37-41.

⁵⁰ Harding, V., 'Choices and Changes: Death, Burial and the English Reformation', in *The Archaeology of Reformation, 1480-1580*, ed. D. Gaimster and R. Gilchrist (Leeds: Maney, 2003), pp. 394-5.

⁵¹ Schen, *Charity and Lay Piety*, pp. 153, 168.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 101-2, 153, 156-8.

Memento Mori

*Some make my picture a most common thing,
As if I were continual in their thought,
A Deaths hed seale vpon a great gold ring,
And round about Memento Mori wrought...*⁵³

It was not only jewellery which had once been owned by the dead, however, which served to call death into the lives of the living.⁵⁴ Jewellery in the tradition of *memento mori* – meaning, ‘keep death in your thoughts’ or ‘remember you must die’ – was popular in the sixteenth and continued to flourish well into the early decades of the seventeenth century.⁵⁵

Joan Evans has suggested that during the sixteenth century, the pre-Reformation ‘iconographic’ or “devotional memorial jewellery” of the previous century was rapidly superseded by jewellery – rings in particular – decorated in the *memento mori* tradition.⁵⁶ It is, perhaps, possible to recognise evidence of this transition in some of the early wills and rings dating from around this period. In 1511, for example, Robert Fabyan, a Citizen and Draper of London, bequeathed to his pallbearers, four “ryngs of gold, wheryn ys graven *Memento*”.⁵⁷ Concurrently, an early sixteenth-century ring in the Ashmolean, likely provides an example of the kind of ring referred to by Fabyan.⁵⁸ [FIG. 2] The appearance of the ring would seem to suggest an item of manifold purpose; it is in a style that is very much reminiscent of the devotional and religious jewellery of the previous century, and yet, the inscription of ‘MEMENTO MEI’, around the fluted hoop, would suggest that it also functioned as a token of private remembrance and, possibly, also as a personal *memento mori*.⁵⁹ Additionally, both the inscription and the fluted hoop, comprised of eleven ridges,⁶⁰ may also point to its function as a religious and devotional device,

⁵³ Words spoken by ‘Death’ in S. Rowlands, *A Terrible Battell betweene the two consumers of the whole World: Time, and Death* (London, 1606, 2nd ed.).

⁵⁴ Hallam and Hockey, *Death, Memory and Material Culture*, p. 59.

⁵⁵ Bury, *Jewellery Summary Catalogue*, pp. 198, 217.

⁵⁶ Evans, *English Jewellery*, p. 126.

⁵⁷ Nicolas, *Testamenta Vetusta*, p. 503. Interestingly, he also made specific bequests of personal items of jewellery to his children, including “my signet of gold”, to his eldest son.

⁵⁸ Ashmolean Finger Ring Collection: ‘Ring’, Accession Number: WA1897.CDEF.F644.

⁵⁹ The inscription is, perhaps, a reworking of the religious and devotional invocations: MATER DEI MEMENTO MEI [‘Mother of God, remember me’] and ‘MEMENTO MEI DOMINE’ [‘Remember me, Lord’], found on some medieval rings.

⁶⁰ The hoop of the ring may have functioned in the same manner as a ‘decade’ ring, which, “have round the outer side a series of knobs or projections, usually, but not always ten”. According to Oman, these rings were “used in the same manner as a rosary”, with an *Ave* repeated as the as the finger passed over each hump, ending in a *Pater Noster*. Additionally, Dalton records a definite *memento mori* style of decade ring, which features a bezel fashioned into the form of a skull. Dalton, *Franks Bequest*, pp. xxxiii-xxxiv, 124 no. 807; Oman, *Catalogue of Rings*, p. 23.

used as an adjunct to pious observance, and, perhaps, demanding of its wearer intercessory prayers for the donor of the ring.⁶¹

Further evidence of a transition towards *memento mori* symbolism in the memorial jewellery of the post-Reformation period may also be found in the 1554 will of Agnes Hals. Bequests of jewellery and other carefully listed tokens of remembrance reflect how she thoughtfully bequeathed jewels and various other personal mementoes acquired over a lifetime. She bequeathed not only a more traditional – and, therefore, probably less contemporaneous – “rynge of the Passion”, but she also left to her son, “my ringe with the dead manes head”, which was a style then in vogue and likely of a more recent date.⁶²

Similarly, in 1544, George Crowche expressed his Protestant faith through the post-mortem gifts he bequeathed in his testament, which included “numerous ‘deadesman hedde’ rings and one with a motto around the head: ‘Truste in Christes bloode and none other’”.⁶³

The impersonal *memento mori* jewellery of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries served, literally, as wearable “reminders of mortality”.⁶⁴ Typical motifs within this genre included skulls, skeletons, crossbones, hourglasses, coffins, the gravedigger’s pick and shovel, and various other morbid emblems of death and decay.⁶⁵ These characteristic *memento mori* symbols are neatly summed up in a print dating from the seventeenth century, where several of the striking emblems of mortality, listed above, were clearly still recognisably vivid and powerful for their contemporary audience. **[FIG. 3]**

The symbolism of the skull and skeleton had been “familiar since classical times,” and the *transi* tombs and *Danse Macabre* images of the Middle Ages, had reinforced a familiarity with *memento mori* imagery, which further flourished during

⁶¹ It is interesting to note that in Robert Fabyan’s will – besides provision for other prayers, trentals, and masses - he also asked of those he left rings to, that they might say “*De profundis* for my soule and all Cristen soules” or, “at a tyme convenyent, say for my soule and all Cristen soules, *Placebo* and *Dirige*, with the ix lessons and other prayers...”
Nicolas, *Testamenta Vetusta*, pp. 503, 511.

⁶² Tymms, S. (ed.), ‘Wills and Inventories from the Registers of the Commissary of Bury St. Edmund’s and the Archdeacon of Sudbury’, *Camden Society*, 49 (1850), pp. 145-6.

⁶³ Quoted in, Schen, *Charity and Lay Piety*, p. 102.

⁶⁴ S. Bury, *An Introduction to Sentimental Jewellery* (London: HMSO, 1985), p. 36.

⁶⁵ A. L. Luthi, *Sentimental Jewellery: Antique Jewels of Love and Sorrow* (Buckinghamshire: Shire Publications, 2007), p. 4; D. Scarisbrick, *Historic Rings: Four Thousand Years of Craftsmanship* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 2004), p. 95.

the early modern period.⁶⁶ Both Scarisbrick and Llewellyn have also pointed to the fact that “images reminding people about their own mortality were to be found in all kinds of private and public situations”.⁶⁷ *Memento mori* symbolism “met the eye” of the early modern individual seemingly “everywhere”: in church, on the street, at home, and, in the case of jewellery, even being carried about the person.⁶⁸ Indeed, so commonplace was the theme of *memento mori*, in the art and material culture of the day - not to mention the human reminder provided by the sobering mortality rates - that Llewellyn has been bold enough to state that, in early modern England, “death *always* accompanied the individual”.⁶⁹ It was in this atmosphere that the stark and uncompromising imagery of *memento mori* served to encourage people to contemplate their own mortality and to prepare for death, whenever that might be.⁷⁰ As John Donne famously exhorted, “never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee”.⁷¹

It was the skull or ‘death’s head’ which seems to have been the most familiar and most commonly repeated emblem within the *memento mori* repertoire.⁷² Llewellyn has called it the “most powerful contemporary symbol of the consciousness of death,” and it is to be found, repeated in a number of variations, again and again, in the jewellery of the period.⁷³ It is no surprise that it proved so popular a design for early modern jewellers, goldsmiths, and their customers. Encapsulated in a simple, easily reproducible and recognisable image was a wealth of meaning; it was an embodiment of Death, an admonition of mortality, and a remembrance of those now dead. Thus, *memento mori* jewellery could provide both a visible and tangible prompt for people to meditate upon their own deaths, and also act as a remembrance of those who had gone before them. It is little wonder then, that one religious treatise, in which the author urged his readers to reconcile themselves with thoughts of death, and instead rejoice in the future prospect of everlasting life, should use the metaphor of a death’s head ring:

⁶⁶ Oman, *Catalogue of Rings*, p. 24; E. Townsend, *Death and Art: Europe 1200-1530* (London: V&A Publishing, 2009); E. Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400-1580* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2005), pp. 303-10.

⁶⁷ N. Llewellyn, *The Art of Death: Visual Culture in the English Death Ritual, 1500-1800* (London: Reaktion, 1991), p. 19.

⁶⁸ Scarisbrick, *Rings: Symbols of Wealth, Power and Affection*, p. 52; Llewellyn, *Art of Death*, p. 26.

⁶⁹ Llewellyn, *Art of Death*, p. 26.

⁷⁰ D. Scarisbrick and M. Henig (eds.), *Finger Rings* (Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 2003), p. 58; D. Scarisbrick, *Rings: Jewelry of Power, Love and Loyalty* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2007), pp. 162, 164.

⁷¹ ‘Meditation 17’, in, J. Donne, *Devotions vpon Emergent Occasions* (London, 1624), p. 416.

⁷² Scarisbrick, *Rings: Jewelry of Power, Love and Loyalty*, p. 164.

Hee that can say: Death where is thy sting? May go on, and add, Thankes bee to God, which hath given me the victory. A Signet sent from Heaven, with a Death's head, is a precious token; Come Christians, bee of good courage, set your feet on the neck of this King of terrours.⁷⁴

Of course, some resolute Christians must also have felt the need for an actual *memento mori* ring, rather than solely deriving comfort from the mere spiritual concept of one. Not even royalty was immune to the lure of the morbid decoration: a “Ringe of golde with a deathes hedde,” was listed in the inventory of Henry VIII.⁷⁵

A “popular Elizabethan type” - the prevalence of which is attested to by the significant numbers surviving today - features a hexagonal bezel, decorated with a death's head, and which is typically surrounded by some cautionary inscription or motto.⁷⁶ Figure 4, for example, shows one such ring, dating from around the mid-sixteenth century, in which the foliated and enamelled shoulders bear up a gold hexagonal bezel, decorated with a grinning skull, enamelled in white; an inscription of ‘+ NOSSE TE. YPSVM’, meaning ‘know thyself’, is on the bezel, and ‘+ DYE TO LYVE’, is inscribed around the edge.⁷⁷ [FIG. 4] Another similar late sixteenth-century example, from the Ashmolean, likewise, also features a flat – though slightly more elongated – hexagonal bezel, enamelled with the inscription ‘+ BEHOLD THE EN +’, and which is also decorated with a champlévé enamel skull.⁷⁸ [FIG. 5]

Death's head rings are identifiable in the portraiture of the period, conspicuously displayed upon the fingers of their Tudor contemporaries. These accessories were evidently regarded as something of a suitable accoutrement for those professional and prosperous sorts conscientiously seeking to “affect a respectable gravity” and, perhaps, even proclaim their resolute Protestant faith.⁷⁹ The display of these rings may be seen as an extension – indeed sometimes even as an

⁷³ Llewellyn, *Art of Death*, p. 11.

⁷⁴ R. A., *Heaven opened, or, A brief and plain discovery of the riches of Gods covenant of grace* (London, 1665), p. 85.

⁷⁵ Quoted in D. Scarisbrick, *Jewellery in Britain 1066-1837: A Documentary, Social, Literary and Artistic Survey* (Norwich: Michael Russell, 1994), p. 151.

It is also interesting to note that a portrait, painted by Michiel Coxie in 1545, of the recently widowed Christina of Denmark - who was once considered as a potential bride for Henry VIII - shows her also sporting a skull, or death's head ring, on her left hand. See Bridgeman Education, Image no. ALM283402.

⁷⁶ Oman, *British Rings*, p. 71.

⁷⁷ V&A Online Collections: Mourning Ring, <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O125925/mourning-ring/>.

Three further examples of this style of ring – the latter of which has survived in near perfect condition - can also be found amongst the artefacts recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme. See: PAS, Finds Database, Unique ID: SUSS-F84C07; CAM-49BF57; WMID-9318D6.

⁷⁸ Taylor and Scarisbrick (eds.), *Finger Rings*, p. 76.

⁷⁹ H. Clifford Smith, *Jewellery* (Wakefield: EP Publishing, 1973), p. 365.

augmentation – of the *vanitas* and *memento mori* symbols, such as the skull and hourglass, which appear in *memento mori* portraits of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁸⁰ The display of a ring, decorated in a similar style, is an extension of this *memento mori* fashion of portraiture, though a smaller, more restrained individual proclamation of the uncertainty of life. In contrast to the explicit posturing of individuals such as John Donne, depicted in his funeral shroud, or the numerous other sitters painted contemplatively meditating their own mortality whilst resting their hands upon a skull, this is *memento mori* made miniature.

The following group of three portraits shows an Englishman, Welshman, and a Scotsman, in which we can clearly recognise the typical *memento mori* ring of this period, with its distinctive flat hexagonal bezel decorated with the characteristic white skull or death's head. The first portrait, painted in 1567, depicts a rather serious looking man, his sumptuous but sombre black dress providing a stark contrast to the heavy gold chain around his neck and the prominent *memento mori* ring clearly visible on the index finger of his left hand.⁸¹ [FIG. 6]

The second portrait, painted c.1550, depicts Edward Goodman of Ruthin (1476-1560), a prosperous Welsh mercer and tradesman; the *memento mori* ring, again on the index finger of his left hand, is complemented by the pious and devout inscriptions included in the portrait. Most prominently, he clasps in his ringed hand, a small parchment inscribed with an aphorism, in Welsh, which translates as “Each man's prayer is in his heart”.⁸² [FIG. 7]

The final *memento mori* portrait depicts the Scottish landowner, administrator, and Commendator of Newbattle, Mark Ker (1517-1584); painted in 1551, his entirely black attire draws attention to the large gold *memento mori* ring prominently visible on the index finger of his clasped left hand. [FIG. 8]

Indeed, seemingly so popular were such *memento mori* rings during the second half of the sixteenth century, that we even find them alluded to in the plays and

⁸⁰ For more information about this style of portraiture see Tarnya Cooper, ‘Memento Mori Portraiture: Painting, Protestant Culture, and the Patronage of Middle Elites in England and Wales 1540-1630’, unpublished D.Phil thesis, University of Sussex, (2001).

⁸¹ The sitter is identified in the portrait, by Hans Eworth, as the forty-one year old Richard Harford Esq.

Scarlsbrick, *Rings: Jewelry of Power, Love and Loyalty*, p. 164.

⁸² National Museum of Wales, Accession Number: NMW A 3450.

https://www.museumwales.ac.uk/art/online/?action=show_item&item=159.

It is interesting to note that a *memento mori* portrait of his son, Gawen Goodman, painted 1582, may also depict the same ring; the ring was perhaps bequeathed to him as a memorial token from his father.

See: NMW A 3453.

literature of the period. In Shakespeare's⁸³ *Love's Labour's Lost*, Biron compares the countenance of Holofernes to "a Death's face in a ring,"⁸⁴ whilst in John Fletcher's Jacobean play, *The Chances*, one character proclaims, "And keep it, as they keep death's Heads in rings, to cry *Memento* to me".⁸⁵ Moreover, their popularity evidently persisted, and in one seventeenth-century comedy a beleaguered servant even accuses his mistress of having, "broke mee a tooth once with a deaths Head-ring on her finger".⁸⁶

The evidence of numerous sixteenth and seventeenth century wills, also show that *memento mori* or death's head rings were certainly being bequeathed as memorial tokens to friends and relatives.⁸⁷ In 1551, for example, Yorkshire "gentilman" Michael Wilbore, stipulated that several of his female relatives were each to receive, "a golde ringe...with the Image of deathe graved therin, in remembrance that they must nedes dye this corporall deathe".⁸⁸

In 1575, the Southampton merchant, Thomas Austen also bequeathed a gold ring with a death's head to one of the witnesses to his last will and testament.⁸⁹ Similarly, in 1589, John Trevor, a Denbighshire landowner, added a codicil to his will listing the eighteen individuals whom he specified were each to receive a gold ring with "a Deaths head" and an inscription of "Remembre me" to be "graven within them".⁹⁰ In 1613, Nicholas Johnson, an innholder from Southwark,

⁸³ Shakespeare was obviously familiar not only with the *memento mori* ring, but also with its close companion - the mourning ring. In his will of 1616, he bequeathed 26s. 8d. apiece, to several named recipients, in order "to buy them Ringes". Both the original and a transcript of Shakespeare's will are available online at *The National Archives*.

⁸⁴ Act V; scene ii. Also quoted in Scarisbrick, *Rings: Jewelry of Power, Love and Loyalty*, p. 164.

⁸⁵ This excerpt is quoted by F. W. Fairholt in an article from 1874, and later by Joan Evans, both of whom reference it as occurring in Act I, scene iii. Scarisbrick quotes it in several of her publications, but most recently she places it as occurring in Act I; scene v. In an edited version published in the early 1680s (the play is thought to have originally been written c.1617) this line can be found in Act I, scene vi.

Fairholt, F. W., 'Art VIII – Finger Rings', *The British Quarterly Review*, 60, 119 (July, 1874), p. 223; Evans, *English Jewellery*, p. 126; Scarisbrick, *Historic Rings*, p. 95; *The Chances, A Comedy: As it was Acted at the Theater Royal. Corrected and Altered by a Person of Honour* (London, 1682).

⁸⁶ Act II, scene v, in R. Brome, *The northern lasse a comoedie* (London, 1632, 2nd ed.).

⁸⁷ Vanessa Harding, for example, notes the will of the London merchant, John Kirton (d.1566), who not only bequeathed mourning to his mother, but also stipulated that she should receive "one Ringe with a deths hedd".

PRO, PROB 11/48, f.379, in, V. Harding, *The Dead and the Living in Paris and London, 1500-1670* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 227.

⁸⁸ Clay, J. W. (ed.), 'North Country Wills', *The Surtees Society*, Vol. 116 (1908), p. 215.

⁸⁹ Roberts, E. and Parker, K. (eds.), 'Southampton Probate Inventories, 1447-1575, Volume II (1566-1575)', Southampton Record Series, Vol. 35 (1992), p. 414.

⁹⁰ East Sussex Record Office, [Original Will of John Trevor of Trevalyn] GLY 738, 20 May, 1589.

bequeathed to each of his two sisters: “a Ring of gold with the picture of a death heads on it to the vallue of forty shillings”.⁹¹

Indeed, the popularity of the decoration was remarkably persistent, as seen in the 1648 will of Jasper Despotin, who bequeathed to his friends, ten gold rings, “with a death’s head upon some of them”.⁹² Similarly, in 1645, Alexander Grays, an innholder from Southwark, bequeathed to his daughter – in addition to the “hope Ring and the other a Jemmole [ring]” which he gave to his wife – a “deathes head Ringe”.⁹³ When Mary Ranner, a widow from Middlesex composed her will in 1665, along with the bequest of another three rings – including ten shillings to her overseer “to buy him a Ring” – she gave to the wife of a “kinsman”, “a Gold Ring with a Deaths head on it”.⁹⁴

Although the popularity of *memento mori* rings endured, there were also accompanying variations and change to the standard type of established Tudor *memento mori* ring. The typical hexagonal bezel underwent a transformation, though the decoration of a white enamel skull remained abidingly popular.⁹⁵ In Figure 9, we can see a simplified, more slimmed down seventeenth-century version of the conventional *memento mori* ring; it features an octagonal rather than a hexagonal bezel, the ornamented shoulders are gone, and the grim sunken-eyed enamel skull is surrounded by the cautionary inscription, ‘Hodie mihi cras tibi’ [‘today to me, tomorrow to you’].⁹⁶ **[FIG. 9]**

There are also other early seventeenth-century examples of the *memento mori* ring featuring circular or oval bezels, whilst another popular type from this period typically features a flat lobed or quatrefoil bezel.⁹⁷ In this example from the Ashmolean, it is easy to see the evolution of the ring, in terms of its shape, but we can also clearly still recognise the characteristic champlévé enamel skull set in the

⁹¹ Surrey, DW/PA/5/1613; Will Number: 65.

⁹² Tymms, ‘Wills and Inventories of Bury’, p. 201.

⁹³ Surrey, DW/PA/5/1645; Will Number: 20.

⁹⁴ Middlesex, MS 9052/15/5; Will Number: 292.

⁹⁵ The popularity of this form of ring - featuring either a hexagonal, lobed, or rounded bezel - is attested to both by the surviving numbers (10) and by the geographical spread (ranging from the Isle of Wight, Suffolk, Oxfordshire, and into Lincolnshire) represented by those found on the PAS database.

⁹⁶ British Museum Collection Online, Museum Number: AF.1522.

⁹⁷ This style of *memento mori* ring, featuring a circular bezel, can also be seen in the portrait of Sir Thomas Cambell (c.1537-1614), Lord Mayor of London, and a prominent figure amongst the civic and commercial elite. Painted around 1611, the ring can be seen upon the little finger of his left hand. National Trust Collections, National Trust Inventory Number: 222671.

centre, which is surrounded, typically, by the enamelled – and rather obligatory – inscription of ‘*Memento Mori*’.⁹⁸ [FIG. 10]

Another elaborate and often lavish take on the *memento mori* ring was to fashion the bezel into the actual shape of a miniature skull or death’s head. Several seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century examples of these rings survive, although some are likely of European, rather than solely English, origin.⁹⁹ A particularly remarkable late seventeenth-century twist on the theme of *memento mori* can be seen in Figure 11.¹⁰⁰ One side of the bezel depicts the head of a golden-haired, ruddy-cheeked youth; there is a striking juxtaposition, however, provided by a grinning skull, which lies behind that vital face, on the other side of the bezel. The white enamel used to portray the porcelain skin of a healthful face, is now used to depict a grinning skull; it is a stark forewarning to the ring’s wearer of what is to come, and a caution – albeit a gold and diamond set caution – against regarding the vanities of life.¹⁰¹ [FIG. 11]

This is a theme very much echoed in a tract, entitled ‘*Memento Mori*’, which was probably in circulation around the same time as the manufacture of the ring:

Neither will the charms of beauty, nor the finest amiable complexions, move death to pity or spare, he is so fond of his own Gastly Countenance, that he will have all look like himself.¹⁰²

The disturbing contrast provided by the close proximity of the skull to the living face was a design and motif which had been in circulation for some time. It is easy to see a thread running between the pre-Reformation double-sided rosary beads, for example, which employ a similar form of decoration, and the “janiform bezel” of the later seventeenth-century Ashmolean ring.¹⁰³ [FIG. 12]

The skull or death’s head, then, remained an enduring form. The designs and patterns of the French engraver and goldsmith, Pierre Woeiriot, published in 1561, included an engraving for an elaborate *memento mori* ring, which featured a bezel in

⁹⁸ Ashmolean Finger Ring Collection: ‘*Memento Mori* ring’, Accession Number: WA1897.CDEF.F641.

⁹⁹ See also: Ashmolean, Accession Number: WA1897.CDEF.F476; British Museum, Museum Number: AF.979; V&A, Museum Number: 528-1868; M.280-1962; 922-1871; 172-1872.

¹⁰⁰ Two versions of this ring survive (in the collections of the British Museum and the Ashmolean) and are most likely from the same (possibly German or Dutch) workshop.

Ashmolean, ‘*Memento Mori* ring’, Accession Number: WA1899.CDEF.F520.

British Museum, Museum Number: AF.983.

¹⁰¹ Scarisbrick and Henig (eds.), *Finger Rings*, p. 58; Gere, Charlotte, ‘Rings from 1500 to 1900’, in *The Ring: from Antiquity to the Twentieth Century*, ed. A. Ward et al. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1981), p. 108.

¹⁰² J. Clark, *Memento Mori, or A word in season to the Healthful, Sick, and Dying, fit for this Calamitous time* (Edinburgh, 1699, 2nd ed.).

the form of a skull, held up by skeletons on either side, which formed the hoop.¹⁰⁴ [FIG. 13] Over a century later, in 1663, a fellow Frenchman, Gilles Légaré, produced a collection of jewellery designs, one of which included an intricate model for a ring decorated, in relief, with several ornate skulls, and a hoop made up from a tangle of bones and the implements of the gravedigger.¹⁰⁵ [FIG. 14]

Several surviving English examples of skull-shaped *memento mori* rings not only attest to genre's enduring popularity, but also illustrate the potential for elaborate richness and opulence of design indulged in by some early modern consumers.¹⁰⁶ This eighteenth-century example – perhaps also utilised as a mourning ring – features an enamelled skull, the nose and eyes of which are set with diamonds, as is the hoop.¹⁰⁷ [FIG. 15] An even more extravagant variant features a bezel composed from iridescent white shell in the form of a toothy death's head, the eyes of which are also set with diamonds, and whose shoulders are further flanked by two large stones.¹⁰⁸ [FIG. 16]

It may seem that the ostentatious use of gold and precious gems is rather contrary to the ideas of humility and the conscientious piety embodied in the concept of *memento mori*. However, early modern consumers seem, for the most part, to have readily reconciled any conflict of ideas. *Memento mori* jewellery provided, rather, a medium through which the wearers were able to marry both the decorative and the didactic.¹⁰⁹ In a period when life was often precarious, and death an ever-present reality, “admonitory symbols” such as the skull or coffin were a stark warning that life was fleeting and uncertain; it was therefore imperative to make a conscientious effort to live a virtuous life and ensure that one's spiritual account was always firmly in order.¹¹⁰ It was perhaps with this notion in mind that when Sir Anthony Broun, in making his will before his death in 1565, bequeathed several mourning rings which were to feature an appropriate *memento mori* inspired posy: “a ring of gold of 4

¹⁰³ Scarisbrick and Henig (eds.), *Finger Rings*, p. 58.

¹⁰⁴ Gere, C., ‘Rings from 1500 to 1900’, p. 101.

¹⁰⁵ Scarisbrick, *Rings: Jewelry of Power, Love and Loyalty*, p. 166.

¹⁰⁶ See also: British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1561; AF.1562; AF.1564; V&A, Museum Number: 211-1870; Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, Accession Number: 1935M547.262; Museum of London, Museum Number: MoL 62.120/96.

¹⁰⁷ British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1560.

¹⁰⁸ British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1563.

¹⁰⁹ R. Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family in England, 1480-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 59.

¹¹⁰ Scarisbrick, *Rings: Symbols of Wealth, Power and Affection*, p. 24; Scarisbrick and Henig (eds.), *Finger Rings*, p. 58.

nobles, to be made like serjeants' rings and on the outside to be graven these words *Wee dye* and on the inside *Forgett nott*".¹¹¹

This cautionary imagery, as we have seen, was often also further reinforced by pointed enjoiners, in either Latin or English, urging the wearers of such rings to think on death and to reflect upon their own mortality.¹¹² The inscription 'MEMENTO MORI' was obviously the most commonly employed adage, but other examples from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century rings include mottoes such as: 'REMEMBER DEATH',¹¹³ 'RICORDATI IL TUO FINN' ['remember thy end'],¹¹⁴ 'DIE TO LIVE',¹¹⁵ 'DEATH SY MYN ERITAG' ['death is my heritage'],¹¹⁶ 'MORS BONIS GRATA' ['Death is pleasing to the good'],¹¹⁷ and 'BEHOWLD THY END'.¹¹⁸

In an era characterised by periods of great religious upheaval and schism, it seems that the "secular emblems" and the prudent message embodied by *memento mori* were ones that all Christians could identify with.¹¹⁹ The English Reformation and the disavowal of the efficacy of intercessory prayer had served to sever a seemingly tangible link that had once existed between the communities of the living and the dead; the repudiation of Purgatory had nullified a symbiotic relationship that had previously existed between the two.¹²⁰ The tradition of *memento mori*, however, provided a continued and customary means by which death and the dead could still be called forth into life; it was a familiar relationship remade. It allowed the living to point towards their own mortality and provided a medium and material means, through which the dead were also – whether directly or indirectly – able to "address the living".¹²¹

As Schen similarly suggested, the post-Reformation testators gifting rings were "no longer asking for the prayers of their survivors, but hoping for kind remembrance". However, Schen has also contended that whilst rings and tokens of remembrance may have served to "perpetuate the memory of the dead", survivors no

¹¹¹ Emmison (ed.), *Elizabethan Life, Vol. 4*, p. 15.

¹¹² Scarisbrick, *Rings: Jewelry of Power, Love and Loyalty*, p. 164; Evans, *English Jewellery*, p. 128.

¹¹³ British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1523.

¹¹⁴ V&A, Museum Number: M.272-1962.

¹¹⁵ PAS, Unique ID: WMID-9318D6.

¹¹⁶ British Museum, Museum Number: AF.970.

¹¹⁷ British Museum, Museum Number: 1871,0302.5.

¹¹⁸ Museum of London, Accession Number: 62.120/122.

¹¹⁹ Gittings, Clare, 'Sacred and Secular: 1558-1660', in *Death in England: An Illustrated History*, ed. P. C. Jupp and C. Gittings (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), p. 151.

¹²⁰ D. Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 386, 396.

longer had a way to “‘help’ them in their experience of the afterlife”; consequently, she believes that “the dead became less immediate” to the living.¹²² It is perhaps because of this that the period witnessed a great flourishing of *memento mori* imagery, a need to make death more immediate and recall the presence of the deceased into the everyday lives of the living.

Whilst theological modifications meant that the imagery of skull and skeleton no longer prompted any recourse to prayers or masses on behalf of the souls of the deceased, *memento mori* was still able to flourish in a society that seemed, ostensibly, “preoccupied with mortality”.¹²³ If anything, some historians have suggested that post-Reformation England and, particularly, seventeenth-century religious doctrine, continued to exhibit an overarching “obsession” with death.¹²⁴ The current appeal of *memento mori* symbolism perhaps lay in its sense of comforting continuity; it offered a prompt for spiritual contemplation, but also a familiar informal link to the dead amidst unsettled times.

Religious thought, both before and after the Reformation, had placed great stress on the need for spiritual preparation and reflection, if individuals were to die well.¹²⁵ Thus, it was in this vein that *memento mori* jewellery existed in alliance with the flourishing literature of the *ars moriendi*, or the ‘art of dying’. As one seventeenth-century author helpfully stated:

For if he who by often looking on a Ring with a Death’s Head, at last grew sober; who knows but by often Meditating, their Hearts may be brought into a more serious and heavenly frame? ¹²⁶

Indeed, death and the “imagery of decay” endlessly “resonated” throughout the spiritual, mental, and material world of the early modern urban individual.¹²⁷ The period presented a climate in which “refined and devoted Christians” were expected to “cultivate” the art of dying.¹²⁸ The tracts, sermons, and spiritual manuals which poured forth from the presses and pulpit sought to provide their audiences with

¹²¹ Hallam and Hockey, *Death, Memory and Material Culture*, pp. 59, 61.

¹²² Schen, *Charity and Lay Piety*, pp. 157-8.

¹²³ Gittings, ‘Sacred and Secular’, pp. 147, 151-3; P. Marshall, *Beliefs and the Dead in Reformation England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 187; Gere, C., ‘From the Fifteenth Century to the Victorians’, in Murdoch (ed.), *Treasures and Trinkets*, p. 43.

¹²⁴ Oman, *British Rings*, p. 73.

¹²⁵ Llewellyn, *Art of Death*, p. 19.

¹²⁶ R. Allestree, *The Whole Duty of Divine Meditation, Described In all its Various Parts and Branches. With Meditations on Several Places of Scripture* (London, 1694, 2nd ed.).

¹²⁷ Hallam and Hockey, *Death, Memory and Material Culture*, pp. 63, 76.

¹²⁸ Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death*, pp. 389-90.

proper spiritual instruction and advice for pious living and the subsequent fulfilment of a ‘good’ death.¹²⁹

As Jeremy Taylor stated in *The Rule and Exercises of Holy Dying*, first published in 1651:

It is great art to die well, and to be learnt by men in health...he that would die well must always look for death...we must be long in doing that which must be done but once;¹³⁰

In a similar vein, William Sherlock stated in his *Practical Discourse Concerning Death*, first published in 1689, that:

Since the time of our Death is so unknown and uncertain to us, we ought always to live in expectation of it...it must be the business of our whole Lives to prepare for Death: Our Accounts must always be ready...I know of no other Preparation for Death, but living well; and thus we must everyday prepare for death...¹³¹

According to the *ars moriendi* trope, “morbid thoughts” and a contemplation of one’s own human frailties, were to be an essential constituent of “religious consciousness” on the ultimate path to salvation.¹³² The candid and grisly imagery of *memento mori* jewellery could thus act as a visible and physical aid to the exhortations contained within the literature. The decorative jewel and the written word could be combined to work in conjunction with one another, allowing for the creation of something that was wearable, often beautiful, but also capable of providing a blunt rebuke.

An example of just such a use may be read in the notebook entry of the Puritan London wood-turner, Nehemiah Wallington, in 1621:

...I renewed my promises with my God but failed in keeping of them exceedingly for which I was so perplexed in mind that now I was desirous to die and yet some tims in feare of death[.] So then I was given to bye Books consarning death[:] on booke *Learne to Die* and *death advantage* and funarall sarmons, and many such lik book[.]And I tooke a grat delight to by pickters of Death, but above all I was at grate charge in bying Anotime of Death and a littel black coffin to put it in, and upon it written *Meemento Mory*...All this was to put me in mind and feet me for death.¹³³

It is difficult to imagine, from so brief a description, exactly what the small coffin that Wallington purchased may have looked like, but there are examples, in

¹²⁹ Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family*, (Chapter 3, 6).

¹³⁰ J. Taylor, *The Rule and Exercises of Holy Dying...* (1651), Christian Classics Ethereal Library: http://www.ccel.org/ccel/taylor/holy_dying.toc.html

¹³¹ W. Sherlock, *A Practical Discourse Concerning Death* (London, 1689).

¹³² Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death*, p. 390.

¹³³ D. Booy (ed.), *The Notebooks of Nehemiah Wallington, 1618-1654: A Selection* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 270-1.

several museum collections, of small *memento mori* coffins, some of which would have been worn as pendant jewels.

One of the most elaborate and earliest examples of one such piece may be seen in Figure 17, which, like Wallington's, also features a skeleton or "Anotime" inside. Dating from around the mid-sixteenth century, the 'Torre Abbey Jewel' is one of the most dramatic and lavish English pieces of *memento mori* jewellery to have survived from this period.¹³⁴ The small golden coffin, which would have been worn hung from a chain, features a highly decorated scrolled lid, which can be detached to reveal an intricate enamelled skeleton lying recumbent inside. The "unflinching" imagery of death and decomposition would have provided a forcible admonishment to the wearer of their certain mortality; the macabre images of the jewel, however, are countered by an essentially hopeful message of salvation, with the inscription: 'THROUGH. THE. RESVRRECTION. OF. CHRISTE. WE. BE. ALL. SANCTIFIED', which is also engraved around the exterior edge of the coffin.¹³⁵

[FIG. 17]

Another, slightly later seventeenth-century example of a small coffin pendant can be seen in Figure 18. Not as lavish as the 'Torre Abbey Jewel', the gold coffin-shaped box is inscribed on one side with the Latin '+ DISCE MORI.' and on the other with the English translation '+LERN. TO. DYI'; the lid, which is engraved with crossbones and death's heads, and also the initials 'E W.', opens to reveal a white enamelled skeleton lying inside.¹³⁶ **[FIG. 18]**

Memento mori coffin jewels were not only produced in the form of pendants. Here we can see, in Figure 19, an intricate sixteenth-century ring; the hoop, which also features a *fede*-style ornament of two clasped hands, is formed from two white enamelled skeletons supporting a coffin-shaped bezel; the tiny decorated lid of the

¹³⁴ V&A, Museum Number: 3581-1856.

Another sixteenth-century coffin pendant, possibly manufactured in France, can be found in the collections of the British Museum. The gold coffin is enamelled in black and white and decorated with tongues of fire and a skull and crossbones, whilst the hinged rock-crystal lid can be lifted to reveal a small enamelled skeleton inside. British Museum, Museum Number: 1978,1002.117.

See also: British Museum, Museum Number: AF.2970 and AF.2971.

¹³⁵ V&A Online Collections: Clare Phillips, 'Torre Abbey Jewel', <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O33863/pendant-torre-abbey-jewel/>.

¹³⁶ N. Armstrong, *Jewellery: An Historical Survey of British Styles and Jewels* (Guildford and London: Lutterworth Press, 1973), pp. 99, 106.

For later *memento mori* coffin jewels see: Science Museum, Object Number: A641823. This eighteenth-century example of a small coffin pendant is decorated in miniature, and features small handles presented in relief and a lid decorated with a plate and studs; a small silver skeleton inside is raised when the lid is opened;

Science Museum, Object Number: A38717. Another small coffin jewel in this collection made from silver-gilt, features a rather gruesome skeleton inside, shown corrupted by worms, snake and frog.

coffin also removes to reveal a diminutive skeleton lying prostrate inside.¹³⁷ [FIG. 19]

The use of such coffin jewels and *memento mori* rings, for all the warning exhortations and morbid imagery, could obviously also miss the mark, liable to be utilised by some as mere superficial baubles and showy trinkets. As one seventeenth-century writer was quick to caution, the display of such jewels was useless unless the wearers were readily willing to consider the message of impending mortality and heed the religious doctrine contained within their decoration and design:

Many Seem to be willing, yet are loath to die...Thus many men build their Tombs, prepare their Coffins, make them death's-head rings, with *memento mori* on them; yet never think of death, and are very unwilling to die...¹³⁸

Some patrons of *memento mori* jewellery were, however, obviously alive to the exigency of conspicuously keeping death always in mind, and were shrewd enough to utilise the imagery of decay in the decoration of everyday items and those pieces of jewellery which also had a more functional application.

This playful, if still rather macabre, *memento mori* accessory, for example, was utilised by someone who, even after meals, was obviously still apt to think on death. Dating from around 1620, the owner of this jewelled toothpick, perhaps pondered their eventual demise, whilst ensuring that their teeth were, nevertheless, kept in fine condition. Most probably worn attached to a *chatelaine*, it is fashioned in the form of an enamelled gold arm, which is set with a ruby, and topped with a skull or death's head device. Rather inventively, the miniature arm is styled clasping the curved sickle of Death or Father Time, which could then be used to clean around the teeth.¹³⁹ [FIG. 20]

Another practicable *memento mori* accessory, of which there are several seventeenth-century examples in existence, is the skull-shaped pomander or vinaigrette.¹⁴⁰ In a similar fashion to the small coffin pendants, it is probable that the

¹³⁷ British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1524.

¹³⁸ J. Spencer, *Kaina kai palaoa. Things New and Old. Or, A Store-house of Similies, Sentences, Allergories, Apophthegms, Adagies, Apologues, Divine, Morall, Politicall, &c...* (London, 1658).

¹³⁹ V&A, Museum Number: M.32-1960.

¹⁴⁰ It should be noted that some of these examples possibly might have been produced in Germany. See: V&A, Museum Number: M.804:1,2-1926 and 516:1,2-1903 (interestingly this second example, like the ring in Figure 11, is also double-sided in the form of a skull and a woman's head); British Museum, Museum Number: 1978,1002.162 and 1978,1002.219; Science Museum, Object Number: A641486 and A642133 (again, the first example is also double-sided, featuring a skull/face juxtaposition; there are also remnants of sponge inside which would have been soaked with some pungent substance);

pomander would have been worn suspended from a chain or girdle around the waist, or possibly borne about the neck. This example, seen in Figure 21, shows the hinged skull-shaped silver case; it opens to reveal compartments inside, which are separated by a dividing plate engraved with initials, which would have identified the spices or perfumes contained within. The eyes and mouth of the skull are open to allow the smell from the fragrant contents to permeate out.¹⁴¹ [FIG. 21]

It is an interesting thought to consider that the wearers of such morbid accessories were likely warding off perceived and dangerous miasms and smells with accoutrements shaped into a precursor of the very fate they were hoping to avoid through their use. Notably, when Robert Robotham made his will in 1570, he provided a list of the eight individuals who were each to receive a gold mourning ring of ten shillings apiece, asking that in terms of their fashioning: "...the same scripture written in everie ringe that is in my pomander, viz., 'viue ut viuas, mors lucrum'"'.¹⁴²

In a stylistically similar vein, there are also several mid-seventeenth-century examples of *memento mori* skull-shaped watchcases.¹⁴³ Like the death's head pomanders, they tend also to be made from silver and sometimes feature appropriate warning exhortations, as well as providing a literal and physical reminder of the fleeting and transitory nature of human life.¹⁴⁴ Watches were sometimes included in *memento mori/vanitas* painting compositions and portraits, as an allegorical symbol of this ephemeral existence, whilst an hourglass – sometimes winged - was also a familiar *memento mori* emblem. As one early seventeenth-century tract, which imagined the sparring conversation between 'Death' and 'Time', reminded:

The Hunt Museum, Online Collection, Registration Number: MG 086 (this gold example is engraved with the date 1679 and the inscription: 'Man proposes but God disposes').

¹⁴¹ The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Collection Online, Accession Number: 60.55.8a,b.

¹⁴² Clay, 'North Country Wills: Volume II', p. 57-8.

¹⁴³ Two German-made cast silver skull-shaped watchcases, c.1655-1665, can be seen in the British Museum. For more information concerning this style of watchcase, please refer to the curator's comments. See: British Museum, Museum Number: 1874,0718.41 and 1888,1201.199; A similar example, c.1650 is also held in the Ashmolean. See: Ashmolean, Timepieces Collection, Accession Number: WA1947.191.58;

One of the most famous and elaborately engraved examples is that known as the 'Mary Queen of Scots Skull Watch', displayed in the collections of the Worshipful Company of Clockmakers'. The royal association is now thought to be dubious, and a later date assigned to the watch. See: Bridgeman Education, Image no. WCC482963; WCC123636; WCC122182.

¹⁴⁴ For example, the watchcase in the Ashmolean is engraved not only with the images of an hourglass and scythe, but also with several *memento mori* exhortations: 'Incerta Mortis Hora' ['the hour of death is uncertain']; 'Vita Fugit/Vt Hora' ['life flies, like an hour']; 'Dum Viuis/Viue Vt Viuas' ['while you live, live to live']; 'Aeterna Respice/Caduca despicere' ['keep eternal matters in mind, shun ephemera']. See collection entry by Thompson. Ashmolean, Timepieces Collection, Accession Number: WA1947.191.58.

My Sythe cuts downe; vpon thy dart they die,
Thou hast an houre glasse, and so haue I.¹⁴⁵

Just as John Donne had recommended the funeral knell as an audible and timely prompt to call forth thoughts of one's own mortality, these *memento mori* timepieces could also provide a more private, practical - not to mention, extravagant - wearable reminder of the need to prepare for death.¹⁴⁶ Time was short and life uncertain, and it was thus advisable to cultivate the art of dying. As one seventeenth-century treatise, which ruminated on this relationship between time, death, and redemption, stated:

How soon may the Thread be cut, the Glass run, or this bright burning Lamp be dim and out; when, how or where this short dying life will terminate thou dost not know?...There is a fatal hour which none can pass...Make conscience of setting apart a little time every day on purpose to think of your latter end. Do it so frequently, until death and you become familiar;¹⁴⁷

Several seventeenth-century signet and seal rings can similarly be found decorated with *memento mori* devices;¹⁴⁸ a death's head, or skull motif, was sometimes incorporated into the crest or emblem of a ring, but may also be found engraved on the underside of the bezel.¹⁴⁹ The heraldic or armorial signet ring was worn by those entitled to bear arms, and was, therefore, likely to feature as a token naturally bequeathed to an heir or eldest son.¹⁵⁰

In 1575, Robert Vavasour bequeathed four rings of gold which, he stipulated, were to have "my creste and armes graven in them".¹⁵¹ Moreover, in 1617, Nicholas Fenay, a Yorkshire yeoman, bequeathed a ring that he obviously sought to utilise as

¹⁴⁵ Words spoken by 'Time' in Rowlands, *A Terrible Battell*.

¹⁴⁶ An interesting late eighteenth-century take on the *memento mori* watch, previously sold at auction, appears to be just a plain looking pocket watch. Closer inspection, however, shows that the letters of 'MEMENTO MORI' have replaced the numbers 1-11 on the enamel dial. Inside the inscription is a calendar scale marking the days of the month. Thus it was, literally, a timely reminder of death as the hours and days ticked by.

Bonhams, Auction 15840: 'Clocks, Watches and Barometers', London (2008), Lot 28;

See also: Bonhams, Auction 17865: 'The Haslinger Collection and Fine Watches and Wristwatches including the Dr George Fisher Collection', London (2010), Lot 287. This watch, c. 1730, features a silver champlevé *memento mori* dial, decorated with a small skull and crossbones, surrounded by the rather adroit inscription: 'WATCH & PRAY. FOR YOU KNOW NOT THE HOUR'.

¹⁴⁷ J. Fox, *Time and the end of time, or, Two discourses, the first about redemption of time, the second about consideration of our latter end by John Fox* (London, 1670).

¹⁴⁸ See for example: V&A, Museum Number: 921-1871 and M.378-1927; British Museum, Museum Number: 1927,0216.59.

¹⁴⁹ For two further examples of this form of *memento mori* signet ring with a swivelling bezel see: Scarisbrick, *Historic Rings*, pp. 95, 98, Numbers 213-14.

¹⁵⁰ Dalton, *Franks Bequest*, p. xxxi.

¹⁵¹ Clay, 'North Country Wills: Volume II', p. 72.

both a memorial favour but also as a beneficial *memento mori* aid to better assist his son:

my signet, or ringe of gould, haveinge these letters, *N.F.*, for my name thereupon ingraven, with this notable poesie about the same letters...*Nosce teipsum*, to the intente that my said son...in the often behouldinge and consideringe of that worthy poesye may be the better put in mynd of himselfe and of his estate, knowinge this, that to knowe a man's selfe is the beginninge of wisdom.¹⁵²

Such rings were obviously bequeathed as personal memorials, but others may conceivably have only been converted to such purposes by the later addition of a death's head¹⁵³ or inscription¹⁵⁴ following the demise of a family member. This seventeenth-century example of a signet ring, features an oval bezel which bears the shield of the arms of Harman of Suffolk; the swivel bezel features, on the reverse, an archetypal white enamel skull surrounded by the black-lettered inscription of '*Memento mori*'.¹⁵⁵ [FIG. 22]

In his will of 1588, in bequeathing a mixture of monetary bequests "to make a ringe" as well as his personally-owned jewellery – including "a ring of gold with a death's head to his brother – Thomas Willsonne, a gentleman from Essex, also left to one recipient: "4 angels for a remembrance to make a ring to seal with".¹⁵⁶ In a curious twist on the bequest of a seal ring as a mourning token, when Jerome Gilberd, another Essex gentleman, made his will in 1594, he stipulated that the man whom he appointed as supervisor to his will was to have: "for his pains my ring with my seal of arms, the arms to be defaced, and 20s. to engrave his own arms thereon".¹⁵⁷

Those not entitled to bear heraldic arms could utilise the iconography of *memento mori* to form the device on a personal seal or signet. One very curious ring, which, although it dates from around the early seventeenth-century, appears very much in the manner of a Catholic reliquary or talisman; the circular bezel is engraved with a skull, surrounded by the name 'EDWARD x COPE', with what appears to be a fragment of bone or tooth behind the bezel.¹⁵⁸ [FIG. 23]

¹⁵² Quoted in, Raine, J. (ed.), 'The Fabric Rolls of York Minster', *Surtees Society*, Vol. 35 (1858), p. 350.

¹⁵³ See for example: V&A, 'Signet ring' (1652) Museum Number: M.271-1962; British Museum, 'Signet ring', Museum Number: AF.802.

¹⁵⁴ See for example: V&A, 'Signet ring' (1686) Museum Number: M.268-1962; V&A, 'Signet ring' (1660-1700) Museum Number: M.269-1962; British Museum, 'Signet ring/mourning ring', Museum Number: 1927,0216.58.

¹⁵⁵ Ashmolean Finger Ring Collection: 'Signet ring', Accession Number: WA1897.CDEF.F643.

¹⁵⁶ Emmison (ed.), *Elizabethan Life*, Vol. 4, pp. 261-2.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 205.

¹⁵⁸ V&A, Museum Number: M.273-1962.

Interestingly, William Spenser, in his will of 1593, amongst other bequests of jewellery, leaves to his eldest daughter, "a little crampe ringe with a hare bone in it, the lesser of her mother's jewelles of

The fact that a number of these *memento mori* rings feature an intaglio skull device, engraved in relief, is also evidence that they were used not only as decorative jewellery but more functionally as seals used to stamp and authorise documents.¹⁵⁹ This example of a gold signet ring, from the Museum of London, features a flat circular bezel, engraved with a skull, and inscribed ‘MEMENTO MORI’ in reverse.¹⁶⁰ A very similar design may be seen imprinted into wax, which was used to seal a document detailing the sale of a portion of land in 1653.¹⁶¹ A similar Elizabethan version of a *memento mori* impression in a wax seal – featuring a skull surrounded by the inscription of ‘N.R MEMENTO MORI’- can also be viewed on display at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust.¹⁶²

It may be assumed that such signets were generally the property and accessories of men, but it is interesting to note that one wax impression is actually found next to the mark of a Mary Harvey; however, the fact that she is also identified in the document as a widow, possibly suggests that she may have actually inherited the ring on the death of her husband.¹⁶³ **[FIG. 24]**

Probate evidence, as we have seen, suggests that such *memento mori* rings, and even death’s head seals, were certainly bequeathed as tokens of remembrance and regard. For example, in 1663, Richard Bosse, a vicar of Sevenoaks, Kent, used his will to bequeath to his son, Richard, his “Deathes head seale ring”; fifteen years later, in 1678, Richard, in the same tradition as his father, bequeathed what was possibly the same “Death head Ring” to his own eldest son.¹⁶⁴

golde whiche she in her lyfe time was wonte to weare abowte her necke”. Clay, (ed.), ‘North Country Wills: 1558-1604, Volume II’, p. 157.

¹⁵⁹ *Memento mori* emblems are also evident on a number of seventeenth-century silver seal matrixes recorded by the PAS. The broad geographical spread perhaps also attests to their widespread use. For those featuring a device of a skeleton holding an hourglass and dart see: PAS, Finds Database, Unique ID: DENO-D3E954; NCL-D1CDB1; IHS-D68FC0; NCL-627595; IOW-3012D7. For those featuring a skull or death’s head device see: NARC-BDF942 and LVPL-776E04.

¹⁶⁰ Number 22, ‘SIGNET RING’, in ‘Death, Mourning and *Memento Mori*’, in Murdoch (ed.), *Treasures and Trinkets*, p. 76.

Museum of London, Museum Number: MoL 62.120/101.

See also: British Museum, Museum Number: AF.975 and AF.976.

¹⁶¹ A gold ring of a very similar design has also been excavated at the Jamestowne site in Virginia, USA. As well as featuring an engraved death’s head device and an inscription of ‘MEMENTO MORI’, the ring is also engraved with the initials ‘CL’. This has led to speculation that the ring may actually have once belonged to Captain Christopher Lawne, who arrived at Jamestown from England in 1619, and was a member of the Virginia General Assembly, but who died less than a year later. http://historicjamestowne.org/featured_find/featured_find.php?id=18.

¹⁶² McVey, S., ‘Shakespeare on Show: Top Ten Exhibition – *Memento Mori* Seal’ at <http://www.findingshakespeare.co.uk/seal-impression-shakespeares-top-ten-characters>.

¹⁶³ Warwickshire County Record Office, [no title] DR429/196, 30 January, 1652/3.

¹⁶⁴ Lansberry, H.C.F. (ed.), ‘Sevenoaks Wills and Inventories in the Reign of Charles II’, *The Kent Archaeological Society*, Vol. 25 (1988), pp. 29, 149.

In a variation on the personal signet or seal, *memento mori* rings were also utilised in a commercial capacity, and sometimes featured a merchant's mark on the reverse of the bezel.¹⁶⁵ Used by tradesmen and merchants, "who could not aspire to heraldic distinctions," the emblems were used in trade and business transactions,¹⁶⁶ and to mark and identify goods and wares.¹⁶⁷ In 1573, for example, Edmund Willsonn, a merchant from Colchester, bequeathed to his brother, a skinner in London, "my ring with the death's head which I commonly wear".¹⁶⁸

This sixteenth-century example, with the recognisable hexagonal bezel and scrolled shoulders, features a revolving circular plate; one side of the disc is decorated with a white enamel skull, and the other side, with a merchant's mark and initialled monogram. The legend on the bezel reads: '+ MORS BONIS GRATA' or, 'Death is pleasing to the good'.¹⁶⁹ **[FIG. 25]**

A further example of one such ring, shown in Figure 26, also features a revolving circular bezel; one side is decorated with a white enamel skull, and on the reverse can be found the merchant's mark or device.¹⁷⁰ It is also inscribed around the edge, with the inscription: 'NOSSE TE IPSVM'.¹⁷¹ **[FIG. 26]** It is interesting to note that the shape and appearance of the ring very much corresponds with a depiction in a portrait produced around the same time, which, significantly, hangs in the Merchant Adventurers' Hall in York.¹⁷² **[FIG. 27]**

¹⁶⁵ See also: V&A, Museum Number: M.272-1962.

This seventeenth-century ring incorporates a skull into the design on the front of the octagonal bezel, which bears both the merchant's mark and a *memento mori* inscription.

¹⁶⁶ Similarly, *memento mori* emblems, such as a death's head or skeleton, can also be found featured on a number of mid seventeenth-century trade tokens. See, for example: Museum of London, Accession Number: 96.66/292; British Museum, Museum Number: T.953; 1906,1103.4283; 1930,1102.13; T.2698; T.83; 1870,0507.1864.

¹⁶⁷ Oman, *Catalogue of Rings*, p. 14; Scarisbrick, *Historic Rings*, pp. 70-1;

They could, obviously, also function in a remembrance/memorialising capacity, being valuable tokens liable to be bequeathed and inherited. For example, in his will of 1567, Ralph Gower, of Richmond, left to his son and heir, his "ringe of golde with a merchande mark in it."

Raine, J. (ed.), 'Wills and Inventories from the Registry of Archdeaconry of Richmond, Extending Over Portions of the Counties of York, Westmorland, Cumberland, and Lancaster', *Surtees Society*, Vol. 26 (1853), p. 196.

¹⁶⁸ Emmison (ed.), *Elizabethan Life*, Vol. 4, p. 319.

¹⁶⁹ British Museum, Museum Number: 1871,0302.5.

¹⁷⁰ V&A, Museum Number: M.18-1929.

¹⁷¹ Scarisbrick illustrates a ring almost identical in appearance, in which the inscription around the edge of the bezel reads: 'MEMENTO MORI'. The revolving circular bezel also features on one face an engraved merchant's mark and on the reverse a white enamel skull surrounded by the words: 'CREDE + ET + VICISTI' ['Believe and thou hast conquered'].

Scarisbrick, *Rings: Symbols of Wealth, Power and Affection*, p. 67.

¹⁷² 'Unknown Gentleman with a Red Book and a Skull', Merchant Adventurers' Hall, Accession Number: YORMA 345.

These items of jewellery had both a spiritual and practical usefulness, offering a functional utility but also acting as wearable prompts to bolster the religious message of *memento mori* in the everyday lives of their owners. It was a coming together of the functional, decorative, and didactic; it was a kind of ‘daily dying’ made utilitarian.¹⁷³

Indeed, so prevalent was the theme of *memento mori*, that the rings, it seems, were even being utilised to mark the betrothal of some sixteenth- and seventeenth-century men and women. The ring shown in Figure 28, which dates from around the latter half of the sixteenth century, appears to be a rather stock example of the Elizabethan type of death’s head ring, discussed earlier. It features a standard hexagonal bezel, decorated with a white enamelled skull, which is surrounded by the inscription, ‘+BE HOLD. THE. ENDE’. However, a second inscription – ‘RATHER. DEATH THAN FALS. FAYTH’ – which runs around the edge of the bezel, is also accompanied by the initials ‘ML’ which are entwined together, on the reverse, by a true-lovers’ knot.¹⁷⁴ The rather contrary messages united together, suggest that the ring may actually have “combined the melancholy qualities of a *memento mori* jewel with those of a love ring”.¹⁷⁵ [FIG. 28]

In a similar manner, a *memento mori* ring, from the British Museum, also exhibits signs that it was probably exchanged as a token of marriage or betrothal. Dating from the seventeenth century, the engraved diamond-shaped bezel features a white enamelled skull, surrounded by the legend, ‘MEMENTO MORI’; notably, however, the back of the ring is also inscribed with a group of initials, which likely represents some “variation on the ‘marriage trigram’”.¹⁷⁶ This figuration was formed when the initials of the family surname were coupled with those representing the forenames of the husband and wife.¹⁷⁷ [FIG. 29]

¹⁷³ Indeed, these *memento mori* seals seemingly had an enduring utilisation, for when Francis Haybittle, a labourer from Surrey, signed and sealed his will in 1784, the impression imprinted into the red wax seal at the foot of the will, is that of a crowned death’s head with a skull and crossbones. See: Surrey, DW/PA/5/1785; Will Number: 7.

¹⁷⁴ V&A, Museum Number: 13-1888.

<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O77393/ring-unknown/>.

Previously, it was suggested that this ring was a gift from Charles I, presented to Archbishop Juxon on the day of the King’s execution, but there is little evidence to support this theory. Scarisbrick actually identifies a different gold ring, set with a cornelian cameo portrait of the King, as that which was presented to Juxon in 1649.

D. Scarisbrick, *Ancestral Jewels* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1989), pp. 40-1.

¹⁷⁵ A. S. Cocks (ed.), *Princely Magnificence: Court Jewels of the Renaissance, 1500-1630* (London: Debrett’s Peerage, 1980), p. 53.

¹⁷⁶ British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1519.

¹⁷⁷ A similar triangular configuration of initials can also be seen on the back of a typical hexagonal-shaped *memento mori* ring. See: British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1520.

It may seem entirely alien to modern sensibilities to associate marriage with death, but, for the early modern individual, it was an altogether logical connection to be made. During this period, betrothal and death habitually called for the customary transmission of rings, whilst the marriage vow - ‘til death us do part’- explicitly linked the two states together.¹⁷⁸ This mental connection between the two rites of passage, is made abundantly clear in *The Judde Memorial*, which was painted around 1560. The portrait depicts a couple testifying their union over a skull, whilst the man gestures towards an emaciated corpse in the foreground. The explicit transience of human life is made abundantly clear, and is reinforced by the words: ‘LYVE:TO:DYE:AND:DYE TO LYVE ETERNALLY’, as well as the accompanying motto: ‘THE.WORDE.OF.GOD/ HATHE.KNIT VS.TWAYNE/ AND.DEATH.SHALL.VS./ DEVIDE.AGAYNE’.¹⁷⁹ [FIG. 30]

The sixteenth-century wedding ring, shown in Figure 31, also physically makes the connection between marriage and death. The outside of the gold band is engraved with the injunction to ‘+OBSERVE WEDLOKE’ whilst the familiar appeal of ‘+MEMENTO MORI’ is inscribed inside.¹⁸⁰ It is very much a material manifestation of the seemingly divergent themes of death and union, as expressed in the Judde marriage portrait.¹⁸¹ [FIG. 31]

Of course, not all early modern women must have wished for a betrothal ring decorated with a skull or death’s head, and Scarisbrick recounts a – possibly apocryphal – tale, involving the marriage of the third Earl of Balcarres (1652-1721). In it, the groom who, having forgotten the ring on the day of his marriage to Lady Mauritia de Nassau, supposedly borrowed a *memento mori* ring from a friend. Upon presenting it to the bride, however, and she seeing the skull and crossbones, took it as an ill omen and promptly fainted away; it was seen as a fateful precursor to her death in childbed the following year.¹⁸²

A startling and rather incongruous twist on the *memento mori* love ring is the contention that prostitutes or bawds were recognisable to their contemporaries from

¹⁷⁸ Llewellyn, *Art of Death*, pp. 11-12.

¹⁷⁹ ‘The Judde Memorial’ (c.1560), Dulwich Picture Gallery, Accession Number: DPG354.

¹⁸⁰ V&A, Museum Number: 905-1871.

¹⁸¹ This intimacy or relation linking the two states together is similarly made in the striking design of a rosary terminal bead, which is probably Flemish in origin, and dates from around the opening decades of the sixteenth century. Double-sided, the carved ivory bead is fronted by a coyly smiling couple gently embracing one another; behind this happy union, however, sits the grim depiction of a skeleton, corrupted by worms, toads, and other “creeping things,” twisting and protruding about the skull (*Ecclesiasticus* 10:11).

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Collection Online, Accession Number: 17.190.305.

the death's head rings which they also supposedly wore during the early seventeenth century.¹⁸³ Referred to by Dalton, the evidence for this supposed fashion, amongst courtesans, is based primarily upon a line from the Jacobean play, *The Dutch Courtesan*, written by John Marston, which states: "as for their death, how can it bee...their wickednesse is alwayes before their eyes, and a deathes head most commonly on their middle finger".¹⁸⁴

Likewise, in *North-ward Hoe*, written during the opening decade of the seventeenth century, another character states: "as if I were a baud, no ring pleases me but a deathes head".¹⁸⁵ And similarly, in *The Old Law*, one woman is chided: "buy thee a Deaths head, and p[ut it] upon thy m[i]ddle finger, your least considering Bawds doe so much".¹⁸⁶ Or when Shakespeare's Falstaff, bids Doll Tearsheet: "Do not speak like a death's-head; do not bid me remember mine end".¹⁸⁷

These several literary references would seem to support the puzzling assertion highlighted by Dalton, yet it seems odd that a piece of jewellery intended for spiritual and moral succour should have been co-opted in such a way.¹⁸⁸ The valuable and rather solemn examples of *memento mori* jewellery we have already looked at seem unlikely to have been used, concurrently, by the civic and professional elites hoping to project a serious and respectable demeanour if this was really the case. Perhaps it was merely a dramatic conceit, the *memento mori* concept taken and turned on its head by irreverent playwrights? It is not difficult to imagine the prostitute or bawd as a moral warning – a living, breathing *memento mori*, as well as a chance to mock, from a safe distance, the affluent, professional, and pious sorts, who used such rings.

Of course, as the theme of *memento mori* became ever more commonplace, it is also likely that there would have been rings available to buy, which were simpler in design, made from cheaper materials, and aimed at a less wealthy clientele. Although inferior in quality, and less extravagant in design, there are a number of

¹⁸² Scarisbrick, *Jewellery in Britain*, p. 197. See also, Fairholt, 'Finger Rings', p. 222.

¹⁸³ Dalton, *Franks Bequest*, p. xxxiii.

¹⁸⁴ (Act I, scene ii), in, J. Marston, *The Dutch Courtesan. As it was playd in the Black-Friars, by the Children of her Maiesties Reuels* (London, 1605).

¹⁸⁵ (Act 4; scene I), in, T. Dekker and J. Webster, *North-Ward hoe. Sundry times Acted by the Children of Paules* (London, 1607).

¹⁸⁶ (Act IV; scene i), in, P. Massinger, T. Middleton, and W. Rowley, *The Excellent Comedy, called, The Old Law: or, A new way to please you*. (London, 1656).

¹⁸⁷ (Act II, scene iv.), *Henry IV, Part II*.

¹⁸⁸ For more information on the literary evidence for this custom, see: P. S. Spinrad, *The Summons of Death on the Medieval and Renaissance English Stage* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1987), p. 223; Jones, Ollie, 'A Death's Head on their Middle Finger', from *The Dutch Courtesan*, University of York, at: <http://www.dutchcourtesan.co.uk/deaths-head-middle-finger/>.

seventeenth-century examples, which are made from bronze, iron, brass, and gilt metal.¹⁸⁹

This sixteenth-century example consists of a rather uncomplicated silver-gilt hoop, which is simply engraved, with an inscription of ‘+DYE x TO x LIVE’ around the outside of the band.¹⁹⁰ [FIG. 32] It is telling, however, that in *The Varietie*, which was produced during the 1640s, one character, castigating the jewellery collection of an aspirant to fashion, condemns their “four Deaths-heads” as mere “Alehouse ornaments”.¹⁹¹ Interestingly, however, as some of the previous examples of Surrey testators bequeathing death’s head rings have shown – Adlyngton in 1557, Johnson in 1613, and Grays in 1645 – there does appear to be a certain preponderance of victuallers and innholders amongst the donors and owners of such items.

Clearly, some jewels were formed from precious metals and gems, featured intricate enamel work, and were often lavish and extravagant in their concept and design. Nevertheless, *memento mori* was, ultimately, an egalitarian concept; death came for everyone. *Memento mori* was relevant to those from all walks of life, rich and poor. As one seventeenth-century discourse perceptively advised:

Put thy self into a posture of dying, converse with thy winding sheet, Coffin, Grave...O let that Motto, *Memento mori*, which some carry in their Rings, be engraven on your hearts, it being the great concernment of our lives.¹⁹²

The popularity and applicability of the *memento mori* message thus remained relevant, and the imagery was evident on jewellery right through into the eighteenth century.

Personalised Memorial Jewellery: Mourning the Individual

To understand the custom and formal convention of mourning jewellery – evolving out of a tradition of *memento mori* and the haphazard bequests of personally-owned jewellery – to subsequently becoming firmly entrenched during

¹⁸⁹ See for example: The Fitzwilliam Museum, Collection Explorer, Object Number: M.20-1981 and PER.M.33-1923; PAS, Finds Database, Unique ID: KENT-DCB156; NMGW-9F38B2 and LVPL-5FC8A3; Dalton, *Franks Bequest*, No.s 819, 827-9, pp. 126, 128.

¹⁹⁰ PAS, Finds Database, Unique ID: SWYOR-F5ABF6.

¹⁹¹ (Act IV; scene i) in, W. Cavendish, *The country captaine and the Varietie, two comedies written by a person of honor; lately presented by his Majesties servants at the Black-Fryars* (London, 1649).

For further discussion concerning references to jewellery in the plays of Cavendish, see: Fairholt, F. W., ‘Facts About Finger-Rings’, *Art Journal*, 42 (June, 1865), p. 189.

¹⁹² Fox, *Time and the end of time*.

the course of the seventeenth century, it is beneficial to have first acknowledged the fertile ground from whence it sprung.

Memento mori jewellery was, as Becker deemed it, the “ancestor of mourning jewellery”, and thus the two share certain common elements. The decoration of skulls, skeletons, and other morbid motifs, which largely typify these pieces, whilst certainly alluding to death and mourning, did not, as we have seen, necessarily always have “commemorative associations”.¹⁹³ During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries it seems that there was an ever-increasing amalgamation between rings that were used for *memento mori* purposes, and those which were utilised for mourning. Understandably, *memento mori* or “death jewels” were gradually being put to use for the purposes of “commemorating *specific* loss”.¹⁹⁴ *Memento mori* rings counselled the wearer to regard their own impending mortality, but it seems the applicability of the imagery meant that they inevitably became “confused” or certainly “combined” with the “idea of them as memorials of the dead”.¹⁹⁵

The blending of these two strands can, however, cause a degree of uncertainty, in terms of being able to firmly identify and differentiate some pieces of *memento mori* and early mourning jewellery from one another. The “line of division” between the two is not always easily drawn.¹⁹⁶ The decoration of a death’s head, coffin, or skeleton was certainly a convenient ornamentation for mourning and commemorative items and, as we have seen, rings decorated with a skull “were certainly bequeathed as personal memorials”.¹⁹⁷

In categorising the finger rings of the Franks Bequest, for example, Dalton also noted that some rings of the *memento mori* type were also being used as mourning rings. Consequently, some of those rings which he classified as belonging within the “mourning-rings” section, might, he noted, “equally well be considered devotional”, and vice versa.¹⁹⁸

Thus, whilst many compositions may suggest a jewel that is fashioned according to the themes of death and commemoration, as Oman has noted, where they lack a name, or a date, it is “unsafe” to class such items as “true” mourning

¹⁹³ V. Becker, *Antique and Twentieth Century Jewellery: A Guide for Collectors* (London: NAG Press, 1980), p. 85.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

¹⁹⁵ Oman, *Catalogue of Rings*, p. 24.

¹⁹⁶ Dalton, *Franks Bequest*, p. lii.

¹⁹⁷ Oman, ‘Mourning Rings’, p. 72.

¹⁹⁸ Dalton, *Franks Bequest*, p. 212.

jewels.¹⁹⁹ Furthermore, in considering the terminology or nomenclature actually used by testators in referring to the bequest of mourning rings and jewellery, they were, themselves, often unspecific or overly vague, perhaps leaving money “to buy a ring”, or “for a remembrance”; it is not until the second half of the seventeenth century that the term “mourning ring” appears with any frequency, whilst designations such as “burial” or “funeral” ring might also be used into the early eighteenth century.

According to Oman, therefore, the earliest surviving English mourning ring in existence, which bears both recognisably “appropriate motifs”, as well as a suitable personalised inscription, dates from around the second half of the fifteenth century.²⁰⁰ The ring is fashioned in silver-gilt, and the bezel takes the form of a heart between two death’s heads;²⁰¹ the hoop, meanwhile, is engraved with a worm and inscribed in black letters with the name ‘+ iohes godefray’.²⁰² [FIG. 33] Perhaps, relatedly, when Ambrose Pudsey made his will in 1521, he also left to his brother: “the golde worme that was my father’s beste ryng”.²⁰³

However, it was not until the seventeenth century, that mourning jewellery – rings in particular – began to be created in any great numbers. Whereas the “impersonalised” *memento mori* jewellery of the sixteenth century had provided an “abstract general warning of the impermanence of life” and an “injunction to make good use of one’s time”, mourning and memorial jewellery sought, fundamentally, to commemorate the deaths of specific individuals.²⁰⁴

The Relationship between the Dead and the Living

For many early modern individuals, material culture, undeniably, played a pivotal role in helping them to mediate and manage the complex social, cultural, and individual relationships associated with death and the dead.²⁰⁵ Llewellyn has suggested, for example, that visual artefacts such as rings and other mourning tokens functionally helped to “ease the sudden pain of death”. Furthermore, it is also a contention, that the ritualised mortuary processes and commemorative practices -

¹⁹⁹ Oman, ‘Mourning Rings’, p. 72.

²⁰⁰ Bury, *Jewellery Summary Catalogue*, pp. 217, 182; Oman, *British Rings*, pp. 71, 123.

²⁰¹ A marriage or betrothal ring dating from around the same period is of a similar design-style, although the skulls, which flank the heart on either side, are fashioned rather into the petals of a flower. British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1113.

See also: Cherry, John, ‘Medieval Rings’, in Ward *et al.* (eds), *The Ring*, pp. 82-3.

²⁰² V&A, Museum Number: 900-1871.

²⁰³ Raine, (ed.), ‘Testamenta Eboracensia’, pp. 129-30.

²⁰⁴ H. Newman, *Illustrated Dictionary of Jewellery* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987); Marshall and Dalglish (eds.), *Jewellery in Scotland*, p. 45.

²⁰⁵ Hallam and Hockey, *Death, Memory and Material Culture*, pp. 1-5.

expressed through and supported by a range of symbols, devices, and material objects - assumed an even greater import in the wake of the Reformation, by which the living had, effectively, been “distanced” from the dead, who were no longer dependent upon the prayers and intercessions of those left behind.²⁰⁶

The ritual process of memorialisation and remembrance, however, which was partly articulated and managed through the production and wearing of items such as mourning jewellery, helped to maintain at least some semblance of continuity or connection, in that it materially “facilitated a relationship between the dead and the living”.²⁰⁷ Obviously, it was now a ‘relationship’ that was less well defined, or explicitly enacted and ritually performed, as it once had been, but it, nevertheless, still offered a means of situating the dead within the everyday lives and personal remembrances of the bereaved.

In a similar vein, Houlbrooke’s contention, discussed earlier, proposed that the “gap” left by the abolition of Catholic intercessory rites, encouraged the growth of mourning jewellery by offering the dying testator and the bereaved mourner, an “intimate, tangible, and portable” means of “expressing a personal sense of loss”. Thus, the forfeiture of Catholic ritual and intercession, meant that, in the longer term, “personal remembrance grew more important”, stimulating a “fuller, more explicit, and more prominent” expression of personal and individual grief, and promoting a desire to “sustain the life of memory”.²⁰⁸ Similarly, Susan E. James has also suggested in her study of Tudor women’s wills, that it is evident that after the Reformation the “emotional context” of bequests “changed from a focus on negotiating salvation to one establishing remembrance”.²⁰⁹

Though Houlbrooke’s thesis is undeniably persuasive, the suggestion that the establishment of mourning jewellery, as an increasingly recognised and prevalent mourning custom in the years after the Reformation, was *primarily* due to the loss of Purgatory and prayers for the dead, is undermined slightly by the timescale, and the fact that mourning jewellery predominantly flourished well over a century or more after the Reformation in England. Additionally, as has been suggested, mourning jewellery was a practice which had seemingly been established even before the Reformation years, whilst sentimental jewellery of all kinds – not just that used for

²⁰⁶ Llewellyn, *Art of Death*, pp. 19-27.

²⁰⁷ Hallam and Hockey, *Death, Memory and Material Culture*, p. 90.

²⁰⁸ Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family*, pp. 228, 252-4.

²⁰⁹ Susan E. James, *Women’s Voices in Tudor Wills, 1485-1603: Authority, Influence and Material Culture* (Routledge, 2015) [Bookshelf Online] – Chapter 6.

mourning purposes – was in demand, particularly throughout the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Nevertheless, the early decades of the seventeenth century witnessed a noticeable shift in the purpose and intent of the jewellery, which was now increasingly being commissioned for use by testators and the bereaved. The skulls and skeletons may still have been in place, but it was commemoration rather than a conceptual contemplation of human mortality which now assumed centre stage. The impersonal and detached style of *memento mori* “transmuted” into pieces which now recorded and solemnised the deaths of individual persons.²¹⁰ They were memorials to “the deaths of specific people”, rather than items designed primarily to inspire a contemplation of Death itself.²¹¹

Thus, as Oman stated, the development of a “separate class” of ring becomes noticeably evident in first half of the seventeenth century, if not sometime before.²¹² Likewise, Dalton also contended that the mourning ring - which he differentiates from the customary token or testamentary gift, in that it is conspicuously defined by having an identifying “name or initials” - makes progress towards becoming “general” in the years “after 1600”.²¹³

The early decades of the seventeenth century thus represented a key period for the development of the mourning ring. Rather accordingly, there was an evolution in concept and character, as the “stern symbolism” of *memento mori* was “merged” with ideas of individualistic commemoration and regard.²¹⁴ Personalised and inscribed, it saw the emergence of the ‘mourning ring’ proper. The jewellery, which was still largely characterised by skulls and skeletons, was “given a more personal stamp” and saw the *memento mori* ring reinvented, so that it now commemorated the deaths of specific people, through the addition of “names, initials, dates, and even coats of arms”.²¹⁵

Bower Marsh had first contended that the previously ill-defined mourning custom of giving rings, was, by the mid-seventeenth century, now established to such a degree, that it assumed “certain features of a distinctive character”.²¹⁶ It was at this

²¹⁰ J. Evans, *A History of Jewellery 1100-1870* (London: Faber and Faber, 1970), p. 143.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

²¹² Oman, ‘Mourning Rings’, p. 72.

²¹³ Dalton, *Franks Bequest*, p. li.

²¹⁴ Scarisbrick and Henig (eds.), *Finger Rings*, p. 28; Scarisbrick, *Rings: Jewelry of Power, Love and Loyalty*, p. 166.

²¹⁵ Scarisbrick, *Rings: Symbols of Wealth, Power and Affection*, p. 85.

²¹⁶ Marsh (ed.), *Memorial Rings*, p. 1.

point, he contends, that the ‘Memorial Ring’ – that is to say, “a ring bearing a distinct inscription in memory of one who had departed” – emerged as a specific and recognisable object, which was to be the subject of the Crisp Collection catalogue.²¹⁷

It is a contention repeated by Scarisbrick, who also points to the mid-century as a notable period in which, with the addition of personal details and identifying inscriptions, the *memento mori* ring is recognisably “transformed”, from an “exhortation of godly living”, into a “memorial of individuals”.²¹⁸ It is the addition of names, initials, age, and date of death, which makes it easier to “definitely distinguish” the ‘mourning ring’ from the purely *memento mori* type, which were not “specially designed for memorial purposes”, and would have been worn, predominantly, “with a purely religious motive” in mind.²¹⁹

In terms of the mourning and memorial rings and other jewels which were being especially commissioned and purchased throughout the seventeenth century, it was then increasingly the deceased individual, rather than an abstract “melancholy awareness of the uncertainty of life”, which now gained ascendancy.²²⁰

Philippe Ariès likewise portrayed this development in jewellery design as a transition from *memento mori* to *memento illius*, in which the focus perceptibly shifted from a contemplation of one’s own mortal condition, to reflect, instead, rather upon venerating and regarding the memory of the deceased individual.²²¹

As already noted, the motifs and morbid content of *memento mori* had heavily “influenced and shaped” the style and composition of many of these pieces.²²² Indeed, especially where there is evidence of repeated designs and an abundance of stylistic reproductions, it is likely that, as Dalton suggested, rings of the “*memento mori* type” would have been kept in stock by goldsmiths and jewellers, and then “names or initials” could have subsequently been added to order.²²³

In 1603, William Harlakenden of Earls Colne, for example, demanded just such a manner of ring should be produced after his own death, instructing his executors that they were to obtain several rings, “engraven with a death’s head and

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

²¹⁸ Scarisbrick, *Rings: Jewelry of Power, Love and Loyalty*, p. 166; Scarisbrick, *Rings: Symbols of Wealth, Power and Affection*, p. 85.

²¹⁹ Oman, *Catalogue of Rings*, pp. 38-9.

²²⁰ P. Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 331.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 461.

²²² Becker, *Antique and Twentieth Century Jewellery*, p. 86.

²²³ Dalton, *Franks Bequest*, p. 212.

letters for my name” or, otherwise, the “arms of my father and mother”.²²⁴ A month earlier, his brother Roger Harlakenden had also made provision in his own will to allow for the creation of five gold rings “in remembrance of me”.²²⁵ In a similar fashion, John Legard, in 1587, had left instructions in his will for the creation of two mourning rings, which, he stipulated, were to feature “letters for my name and a deathes heade thereon to be enamiled”.²²⁶

A mourning ring featuring similar traits to those specified by these early modern testators may be seen in Figure 34. The gold ring features an oval bezel and is engraved with an intaglio death’s head device, below which sit the initials ‘ST’ encircled by a flowered branch, which is topped, on either side, by a pansy or possibly a rose.²²⁷ **[FIG. 34]**

The design of this ring also has echoes of the very specific instructions issued by Anne, Lady Newdigate (1574-1618), in her will of 1610:

...my Will and desire is to have a few playne Gould Rings made of tenne or twelve shillings price with a pansie being my father’s Crest, engraven on the outside and two letters for my name enamelled with blacke on either side the pansie and an inscription within to be lattyn, these wordes followinge: *Death is the begininge of life*; and to be delivered unto soe manie of my friends as a memorie of my love as I heare nominate...²²⁸

Whilst this amount of detail is fairly unusual, several wills and testaments do provide a number of notable examples as to how individuals in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England were increasingly embracing the fashion for custom-made mourning jewellery. The conventional testamentary token of regard – for those who could afford it - was ever more likely, as the period progressed, to be a specially purchased ring customised with a name or initials, and sometimes even an appropriate memorial inscription lamenting the loss of the individual.

Figure 35 illustrates one such seventeenth-century mourning ring, which features a thick hollow gold bezel crosshatched with the shape of a skull, which would have once held enamel, and the legend: ‘REMEMBER DEATH’. So far, so familiar; however, reserved in bold gold letters around the outside of the circular

²²⁴ Earls Colne, PROB11/109/12: Wm Harlakenden, 10.2.1603.

²²⁵ Earls Colne, PROB11/101/302-303v: Roger Harlakenden, 2.1.1603.

²²⁶ He also left to his son, “my ringe of golde, whiche is a seale of armes”, Clay, (ed.), ‘North Country Wills: 1558-1604, Volume II’, p. 125.

²²⁷ PAS, Finds Database, Unique ID: GLO-240F91.

Of course, as mentioned in relation to the use of *memento mori* imagery on seal and signet rings, this ring may have merely been used in a functional capacity rather than solely as an item of mourning and commemoration.

²²⁸ A. E. Newdigate-Newdegate (ed.), *Gossip from a Muniment Room: Being Passages in the Lives of Anne and Mary Fytton, 1574-1618* (London: David Nutt, 1897), p. 151-2.

bezel, is also the name 'IOYCE.YEMAN' which would also have once been distinctly decorated with enamel.²²⁹ [FIG. 35] An earlier Tudor death's head ring, which has also been personalised through the addition of a name, features the characteristic flat hexagonal bezel of this period's *memento mori* ring, but around the skull is also engraved the name of the deceased individual - 'IAMES.POR.LACE+' - rather than the conventional moralising inscription.²³⁰ [FIG. 36]

As changes to the character and composition of the jewellery itself were taking place, concurrent developments were also occurring as to how it was provided and bequeathed. The practice of bestowing rings and other items of personal jewellery to relatives and friends, as "tokens of esteem" and as a mark of remembrance and regard, was a long-established custom.²³¹ However, as many "testators must have felt embarrassment at having more suitable recipients than rings", and as the "values of owned rings must have frequently varied too much in value", a "separate class" of memorial ring eventually emerged as the answer to this particular dilemma.²³²

Wealthy testators were soon leaving instructions to enable the creation of a number of extra, "specially bought rings", which were then to be donated to certain mourners or handed out at the funeral.²³³ As the seventeenth century progressed, bequests of possessions and personal jewels were more likely to be accompanied by gifts of money, specifically allowing for the purchase of a mourning ring, or instructions for the executor(s) detailing who was to receive the favour of a ring.²³⁴ Testators might specify the precise sums to be donated or employed in the manufacture of a mourning ring, sometimes providing detailed instructions as to the exact numbers, cost, and chosen recipients. As the custom grew in prevalence, the bequest of, or provision for, a number of identical rings in terms of their fashioning, appearance, and cost - perhaps specified by the testators themselves - increasingly became an acceptable and seemly mark of remembrance and regard.²³⁵

²²⁹ British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1523.

²³⁰ Rowan and Rowan, 'Tudor Death's Head Ring', Ref. NY5, http://rowanandrowan.com/Articles/293665/Rowan_and_Rowan/Rings/Rings_ITEMS/ny5_tudor_skull.aspx;

Oman also mentions a similar ring from the Wernher Collection, which bore the name 'HENRY LECHE'.

Oman, *British Rings*, pp. 71, 77.

²³¹ Oman, 'Mourning Rings', p. 71.

²³² *Ibid.*, p. 71; Newman, *Illustrated Dictionary*.

²³³ Marshall and Dalglish (eds.), *Jewellery in Scotland*, p. 52.

²³⁴ Taylor and Scarisbrick (eds.), *Finger Rings*, p. 30.

²³⁵ Dalton, *Franks Bequest*, p. lii.

An early example of this kind of arrangement is offered up in the will of Guy Palmes of London, who died in 1516. His post-mortem commemoration and memorialisation was ably promoted by his testamentary provisions, which not only stipulated that his burial be marked with a monument, but he also bequeathed more modest tokens of mourning rings, to be mostly distributed amongst his female relatives:

To every of my wife's daughters by hir first husbonde a ryng of xij s. iij d. To my brother's wife, & every of my susters a ryng of x s. To every of my brother sonnes vj s . viij d ., & to every of his daughters a ryng of vj s. viij d.²³⁶

The fact that this bequest of rings was made early in the period under study suggests that, like those of the previously mentioned Thomas Beaumont, the rings bequeathed by Palmes were probably intended to function both as a token of regard and as a reminder to pray for him. In expressing the hope that his wife might be “loving to my soule” it is reasonable to contend that, with the gift of mourning rings to various family members, he was endeavouring both to remember and *be* remembered.²³⁷

The bequest of rings by Dionysia Leveson in 1560 perhaps reflects this continued, though essentially post-Reformation, desire for commemoration, with the gift of mourning rings offering an established means for soliciting remembrance and memorial observance from friends and family members. She used her testament to bequeath to a number of “lovinge frends hereafter written” several gold rings which, she specified, were to be “lyke flate hoopess” and engraved with the injunction: “SEE YE FORGET NOT ME”.²³⁸

Figure 37 illustrates a rather simpler and unadorned late sixteenth-century mourning ring, which consists of a plain gold hoop, engraved on the inside of the band: ‘. W. I. L. 1592.’ Again, we see in the inscription – which denotes the initials of the deceased and the year of their death – demonstration of the individual personalisation of rings for memorial purposes, and, perhaps, evidence of a compulsion to be remembered after death.²³⁹ **[FIG. 37]**

The design and relative simplicity of this plain gold mourning band is echoed in the will of Sir Christopher Wray, which was made only a few years before the

²³⁶ Raine, (ed.) ‘Testamenta Eboracensia’ p. 80, 106.

Palmes’ brother, Brian, also bequeathed rings in his will of 1519, including three priced at 13s4d which were given to his two daughters and a sister.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

²³⁸ Quoted in, Oman, *British Rings*, pp. 71, 77.

ring, in 1589. As well as making lavish bequests of plate, money, and rings, to various relatives and servants, as well as provision for charitable endeavours, he also bequeathed to seven named friends, “everie one one ringe of golde, waienge an ounce at the leaste, with thease letters, C. and W.”²⁴⁰

It is, perhaps, merely an extraordinary coincidence, but a gold signet ring in the British Museum, may be associated with Sir Christopher Wray (c.1522-1592), possibly surviving due to his eminent position as a serjeant-at-law and Speaker of the House of Commons. The *memento mori*-style ring is decorated with a death’s head, but is also inscribed on the back of the bezel: ‘C W 1592’; this inscription, obviously, correlates correctly with both his initials and the year of his death.²⁴¹

George Savile certainly used his own will of 1612, to provide detailed instructions for the distribution of several identical mourning rings, which were, according to his description, very much indicative of the conventional *memento mori* mode of ring we have already observed:

I give unto my ever honored father, to my most honorable uncle the Earle of Shrewsbury, to my honorable and most lovinge auntes, the Ladie Grace Cavendishe and Mrs Jane Talbott, and to my kind cosin Gilbert Nevill, of Grove, esquire, to every of these a gould ringe weighing twentie shillings, havinge one parte flatt on the outside, whereon deathes head to be engraven and these wordes about it: Memor esto brevis ævi [Remember that life is short].²⁴²

A few early testators were obviously keen to stipulate the exact design and styling of their intended mourning rings, others seemed more preoccupied in specifically naming the particular recipients of their bequests, or how much was to be spent. Some may have relied entirely upon the discretion of their family or executors to arrange such matters.

Nevertheless, testamentary evidence, combined with surviving examples of *memento mori* and early mourning rings dating from the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, helps to paint a clearer picture of what kind of rings were in demand and available for consumption to the men and women of early modern England.

The diverse items of jewellery already discussed show just how great a variety of designs and styles were being utilised for memorial purposes. The rings alone - some plain, some set with gemstones, some richly chased, enamelled, or inscribed -

²³⁹ British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1525.

²⁴⁰ Clay, (ed.), ‘North Country Wills: 1558-1604, Volume II’, p. 146.

²⁴¹ British Museum, Museum Number: 1927,0216.58.

²⁴² Clay, (ed.), ‘North Country Wills: 1558-1604, Volume II’, p. 208.

confirm Oman's assertion that, stylistically, rings made "before the Civil War" do not allow for comprehensive "generalisations".²⁴³ Partly this is as a result of their relative rarity, but the ambiguities associated with interpretation and identification of what can categorically be distinguished as a 'mourning ring' also play a factor.

This relative paucity of early evidence has thus led Oman to suggest that there was no one "distinct form of mourning ring" customarily established even by the "first half of the seventeenth century". He does, however, concede that the material and testamentary evidence points towards a "general preference for the 'memento mori' type" of ring.²⁴⁴

It is only from the mid-seventeenth century onwards, with larger numbers of rings bearing dated inscriptions and conforming to recognisable and characteristic 'types', that it is possible to chronologically observe and sequence the broad stylistic evolution of the mourning ring, and other associated items of jewellery, over time.

What certainly is notable, however, in terms of the development of the custom, is that the jewellery and rings of the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, utilised for mourning and memorial purposes, were becoming more distinctive and acquiring a rather personalised touch. Increasingly customised and distinguished through the addition of inscribed biographical information, they also occasionally feature appropriate and often edifying memorial inscriptions in either Latin or English.

Posy Rings²⁴⁵

*I may go boast, I on my finger weare
The pythiest Hyeroglyphick of the yeare:
For I can summer in thy posie read,
And winter to the life in thy deaths head...*²⁴⁶

The term 'posy ring' is generally applied to those rings which have a short motto or rhyming couplet inscribed around the hoop. In use since at least the Middle Ages, when the inscription was variously described as a *chançon* or *reson*, they gained their greatest popularity during the sixteenth and throughout the seventeenth

²⁴³ Oman, *British Rings*, p. 73.

²⁴⁴ Oman, *Catalogue of Rings*, p. 38.

²⁴⁵ The most comprehensive review of these rings, and which still remains the standard text to this day, is the work of Joan Evans, which built upon an earlier lecture given by her father, Sir John Evans, in 1892.

J. Evans, *English Posies and Posy Rings: A Catalogue with an Introduction by Joan Evans* (London: Oxford University Press, 1931).

²⁴⁶ M. Stevenson, 'To Mr. R. C. upon The Mourning Ring he sent mee', in, *Occasions Off-Spring, or, Poems upon Severall Occasions by Mathew Stevenson* (London, 1645).

centuries.²⁴⁷ It was during this period that the engraved inscription moved from the outside to the inside of the hoop. The term ‘posy’ derives from the French *poésy* or ‘poetry’, which refers to the sentimental tags and short mottoes with which they are inscribed, and which Dalton deemed to be largely “unassuming and often naïve in style”.²⁴⁸

In *The Arte of English Poesie*, published in 1589, George Puttenham referred to the “short Epigrammes called Posies” which – amongst their other uses – he described as being used as “deuises in rings”.²⁴⁹ Indeed, we even find the posy ring made reference to in the plays of Shakespeare, such as when Hamlet impatiently chides: “Is this a prologue, or the posy of a ring?”²⁵⁰ Or in *As You Like It*, when Jaques rather mockingly rebukes the poetical utterances of the lovesick Orlando: “You are full of pretty answers. Have you not been acquainted with goldsmiths’ wives, and conned them out of rings?”²⁵¹

Posies were clearly becoming an established literary form and a recognised poetical device, and the sheer number and variety of examples present on rings to have survived attests to their popularity across this period. The “earliest and fullest” compilation of such posies comes from an English manuscript, “written soon after 1596” and contains examples copied from over one hundred rings.²⁵² Various collections of posies, many examples of which appear on surviving rings, can be found written down in several commonplace books dating from around this period. These “manuscript repertories of posies” were soon to be augmented, during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, by the popular literature of the period, with examples of posies appearing in chapbooks and other printed compendiums.²⁵³

It is little wonder then that Evans has contended that by the mid-seventeenth century posies were seemingly “everywhere”, finding their way onto “fruit trenchers,

²⁴⁷ Oman, *Catalogue of Rings*, p. 21.

²⁴⁸ S. Bury, *An Introduction to Rings* (London: HMSO, 1984), p. 16; Dalton, *Franks Bequest*, p. xlvi.

²⁴⁹ G. Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie. Contriuied into three Bookes: The first of Poets and Poesie, the second of Proportion, the third of Ornament* (London, 1589).

Also quoted in Evans, *English Posies*, p. xvi.

²⁵⁰ (Act III, scene ii.), *Hamlet*.

²⁵¹ (Act III, scene ii.), *As You Like It*.

Jaques’ rather cynical exchange with Orlando, follows Orlando’s rather overly effusive – and very posy-like – summation: “Just as high as my heart”, to Jaques’ rather more prosaic enquiry concerning Rosalind’s stature.

²⁵² British Library, Harleian MS. 6910, cited in Evans, *English Posies*, p. xvii; Oman, *British Rings*, p. 42.

²⁵³ Evans, *English Posies*, pp. xviii-xxvi. See also pp. xxviii-ix and Dalton, *Franks Bequest*, p. 174, for a list of these manuscripts and early printed books.

knives, girdles and garters...on brooches, and on memorial...love and marriage rings”.²⁵⁴

Many of the amatory mottoes contained within the predominantly plain gold hoops would suggest that posy rings were most commonly exchanged as love tokens between couples, or used to mark betrothals and marriages.²⁵⁵ This is a romantic notion confirmed by some famous early modern contemporaries such as Robert Herrick, who mused:

What Posies for our Wedding Rings;
What Gloves we’l give, and Ribanings...²⁵⁶

Or, similarly, Samuel Pepys, who awaiting his dinner in 1660, occupied himself in “studying a Posy for a ring,” to be given at the wedding of his cousin, Roger Pepys.²⁵⁷

The published collections of sentimental mottoes and printed examples of posies contained in the various seventeenth-century chapbooks also emphasise the predominance of love and courtship rituals in the utilisation of the posy ring. For example, one of these early works, *Loves Garland*, contained, “Posies for Rings, Hand-kerchers, and Gloves; and such pretty Tokens that Lovers send their Loves”.²⁵⁸ In 1642, *Cupids Posies*, provided readers with a collection of verses deemed suitable for “Bracelets, Hand kerchers and Rings, with Scarfes, Gloves and other things”.²⁵⁹ Similarly, in 1658, *The Mysteries of Love & Eloquence, or, the Arts of Wooing and Complementing* provided a variety of “Posies for RINGS”.²⁶⁰ *The Wits Academy*, of 1677, also provided a copious list of “Posies for Rings, or Motto’s fit for

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. xix.

²⁵⁵ Oman, *British Rings*, pp. 42-3.

²⁵⁶ R. Herrick, ‘To the Maids to walke abroad’, in, *Hesperides, or, The Works both Humane & Divine of Robert Herrick Esq.* (London, 1648).

²⁵⁷ 3 February, 1659/60, in, R. Latham and W. Matthews (eds.), *The Diary of Samuel Pepys: A New and Complete Transcription, Volume I* (London: Bell, 1970), p. 39.

²⁵⁸ According to Evans, this work was first published in 1624, though a second edition appeared in 1648 and again in 1674, with the addition of some new posies.

Evans, *English Posies*, p. xxiii; Anon., *Loves Garland, or Posies for Rings, Hand-kerchers and Gloves and such pretty Tokens that Lovers send their Loves* (London, 1648, 2nd ed.); Anon., *Loves Garland* (London, 1674).

²⁵⁹ Anon., *Cupids Posies. For Bracelets, Hand kerchers and Rings, with Scarfes, Gloves and other things; Written by Cupid on a day, When Venus gave him leave to play* (London, 1642). A second edition was later published in 1674.

²⁶⁰ E. Phillips, *The Mysteries of Love & Eloquence, or, the Arts of Wooing and Complementing...* (London, 1658, 2nd ed.). A further edition was published in 1685, and another in 1699, with the amended title, *The Beau’s Academy, or the Modern and Genteel way of Wooing and Complementing...* (London, 1699).

Presents”.²⁶¹ *The Academy of Complements*, published in 1685, similarly supplied “Posies for Rings, and other pleasant things”.²⁶²

Though some customers must undoubtedly have commissioned rings inscribed with posies of their own composition and choice, it seems likely, both from the evidence provided by the printed collections, and the repetition of certain stock phrases on the surviving examples of posy rings, that some could be purchased ready-made. It seems probable that “standard inscriptions could be bought already engraved on the rings” and enterprising seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century goldsmiths would have stocked a number of rings bearing some of the more widely applicable and popular mottoes.²⁶³

Certainly, the posy ring was obviously regarded as a suitable love token, and one which could be given by both men and women.²⁶⁴ In 1674, for example, the Rev. Giles Moore recorded in his journal that, whilst in London, he had bought, for the price of 13s.8d., a gold ring for Ann Brett, with the posy: “*When this you see, remember mee*”.²⁶⁵ Furthermore, in June, 1647, Elias Ashmole recorded in his diary, that the widow, Lady Mainwaring, whom he had been courting for several months, had gifted him “a ring enameled with black whereon was this posy: ‘A true Friend’s Gift.’”; the couple would go on to marry the following year.²⁶⁶

These rings were obviously treasured and precious love tokens, very dissimilar to the brittle “Jet Ring” which Donne poetically used to symbolise the darkness and fragility of feeling associated with the demise of a love affair; the poetry of this ring spoke only of ruin and bitterness: “I am cheap, and naught but fashion; fling me away”.²⁶⁷

²⁶¹ W. P., *The Wits Academy, or, The Muses Delight...*(London, 1677).

²⁶² J. G., *The Academy of Complements: Or, A new way of Wooing...*(London, 1685).

²⁶³ Oman, *Catalogue of Rings*, p. 21; Evans, John, ‘Posy-Rings’, *John Longman’s Magazine*, 1882-1905, 20, 115 (May, 1892), p. 42.

²⁶⁴ In one comical verse, published in 1673, the author details the revenge meted out by two girls, who both discover the unfaithfulness and duplicity of their sweetheart, who has given away the love-tokens they had each presented him with, to another woman:

Jinny sometimes to Willy gave
A Favour, and Gloves, or Rings,
And Nelly wou’d always ready have
The like, or some other things...

‘The Innocent Girles Reveng’d. A Song and true Story.’, in, W. Hicks, *London Drollery: Or, The Wits Academy...*(London, 1673).

²⁶⁵ Evans, ‘Posy-Rings’, p. 42.

²⁶⁶ Burman, C. (ed.), *The Lives of those Eminent Antiquaries Elias Ashmole, Esquire, and Mr. William Lilly, Written by Themselves...*(London, 1774), p. 305.

²⁶⁷ J. Donne, ‘To a Jet Ring Sent to Me’, in, R. Robbins (ed.), *Donne: The Complete Poems of John Donne* (Harlow: Longman, 2010), pp. 203-5.

It may, during the early modern period, have been held that: “The Lover sheweth his intent/ By guifts that are with Posies sent,” but, certainly, the posy ring was not merely utilised solely as a love or marriage token.²⁶⁸ Indeed, the whole genre of sentimental jewellery was in a “particularly flourishing state” throughout this period, and was “occasioned by a much wider range of feelings and conditions than those relating to betrothal and marriage” alone.²⁶⁹

Much valued as a “tangible expression of emotion,” sentimental jewellery actually offered a material means of marking the various bonds of love, affection, and regard. Posy rings provided an approved and customary form of “informal gift”, which could then be used to mark meaningful occasions, or exchanged as tokens acknowledging, observing, and commemorating the various bonds of affection and favour between couples, acquaintances, friends, and family members.²⁷⁰

In studying the nature of the various inscriptions, John Evans contended that the rings could be broadly grouped as falling into four main classes, which were: betrothal rings and love tokens; wedding rings; rings given on St Valentine’s Day; and, finally, memorial or funeral rings.²⁷¹

Perhaps the popularity of the posy ring helped to develop and encourage the latter custom of distributing rings to mourners at the funeral? If rings were being used as gifts to evince bonds of love and affection, and also as markers of significant events and rites of passage, it seems a fairly natural step that, sooner or later, they too would be used to record personal deaths and bereavements.²⁷² For example, when George Asinall, a gentleman from Essex made his will in 1594, he bequeathed six rings costing 6s.8d., which rings he specified, were “to be made with some pretty posies”.²⁷³

Additionally, some posy rings also feature devotionally pious inscriptions, some of which are profoundly memorialising or *memento mori* in character. The posies on some seventeenth- to early eighteenth-century rings include various edifying mottoes, such as: ‘BEFORE LYFE COMES DEATH’;²⁷⁴ ‘Death is the

²⁶⁸ Anon, *Cupids Posies*.

²⁶⁹ Bury, *Sentimental*, p. 5.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 5; Bury, *Rings*, p. 17.

²⁷¹ Evans, ‘Posy-Rings’, p. 34.

²⁷² It has been suggested that a rather elaborately styled fifteenth-century ring, found in the Thames, may be an early form of mourning ring, but this interpretation remains decidedly tenuous. Inscribed around the interior of the hoop is the ‘posy’: ‘Whan ye loke on this thynk on them yt yave you thys’. British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1047. See Curator’s comments.

²⁷³ Emmison (ed.), *Elizabethan Life*, Vol. 4, p. 150.

²⁷⁴ PAS, Finds Database, Unique ID: IOW-461BE6.

waye to life’;²⁷⁵ ‘A good life a happie death’;²⁷⁶ ‘At the graue biginneth true rest to the godli’;²⁷⁷ ‘Blessed are ye dead yt dy in ye Lord’;²⁷⁸ ‘Live well and die well’;²⁷⁹ ‘Die to live eternally’;²⁸⁰ ‘Remember to dye’;²⁸¹ ‘Piety the best monument’.²⁸²

This example shows a plain gold hoop, recognisably characteristic of the conventionally accepted posy ring.²⁸³ The interior of the hoop, however, conceals a grave warning for its wearer, featuring a depiction of a death’s head and a black enamelled inscription: ‘Like to me looke to be’.²⁸⁴ [FIG. 38]

As we have seen, it is not a far leap from the *memento mori* to the mourning ring, and in many cases the boundary is decidedly blurred.²⁸⁵ Indeed, sometimes the two functions were expressly combined in the form of a posy ring, as can be seen in this example, which is decorated, around the exterior, with the chased images of a skull, flowers, and foliage. The inside of the hoop, however, is also inscribed with a posy, forewarning the wearer: ‘As I am you must be’, followed by the initials of the deceased individual: ‘W W’.²⁸⁶ [FIG. 39]

Two similar examples include rings bearing the *memento mori* motif of a skeleton and crossbones, enamelled around the outside of the hoop, and interior inscriptions of: ‘Liue holy and dye happy MP’²⁸⁷ and ‘Morior vt videam HS’ [‘I die that I may see’].²⁸⁸

In a similar fashion, an early eighteenth-century gold ring, in the Birmingham collections, engraved with an hourglass on the outside of the hoop, features a posy

²⁷⁵ PAS, Finds Database, Unique ID: LVPL-2232A6.

²⁷⁶ PAS, Finds Database, Unique ID: PAS-B8CB06.

²⁷⁷ PAS, Finds Database, Unique ID: SWYOR-057BC8.

²⁷⁸ PAS, Finds Database, Unique ID: PAS-8DA451.

Joan Evans also notes that this motto, “probably a mourning posy”, was listed in the 1596 Harleian Manuscript.

Evans, *English Posies*, p. 27.

²⁷⁹ PAS, Finds Database, Unique ID: DUR-63A523.

Evans also records a posy, again found in the Harleian Manuscript, which is written in a very similar spirit: ‘Liue well & die neuer, Die well, and liue euer’.

Ibid., p. 70.

²⁸⁰ PAS, Finds Database, Unique ID: GLO-1B3252.

Evans also records a silver ring in her own collection, with the posy: ‘DYE · TO · LIVE · EVER’.

Ibid., p. 33.

²⁸¹ PAS, Finds Database, Unique ID: LON-DC6707.

²⁸² PAS, Finds Database, Unique ID: BM-826473.

²⁸³ Dalton, *Franks Bequest*, p. 174.

²⁸⁴ PAS, Finds Database, Unique ID: YORYM-ADB5C7.

²⁸⁵ For example, Evans records a posy found in her father’s collections: ‘Sara liue to die’; is this merely a personalised *memento mori* injunction to the wearer of the ring, or, perhaps, also a commemoration of the dead ‘Sara’?

Evans, *English Posies*, p. 91.

²⁸⁶ British Museum, Museum Number: 1961,1202.385.

²⁸⁷ PAS, Finds Database, Unique ID: WMID-6ABC41.

²⁸⁸ PAS, Finds Database, Unique ID: DENO-EA7374.

that is both a *memento mori* and a plea for remembrance: ‘Rembr thy frend & thy end’.²⁸⁹

Thus, a mockingly satiric publication of 1700, in which the author knowingly lamented: “Our Posies for Rings are either immodest, or irreligious;” was not quite speaking the whole truth.²⁹⁰

Even posy rings with amatory and sentimental mottoes, which suggest that they were first exchanged as declarations of love and devotion, were liable to be recycled, bequeathed by testators, and their use now adjusted and updated, so that they functioned afresh as tokens of mourning and remembrance.

For example, in 1622, the widowed Elizabeth Watson, of York, bequeathed three rings to each of her daughters; one, “a goulde ringe with a *posie, Desire & Deserve*”, the second, “with a *posie, Keepe faith till death*”, and to the third she left, “my little hoope ringe of gould, with a *posey, As God hath appointed, soe I am contented*”.²⁹¹

In 1676, Ann Fossey, a widow from Surrey, passed on to a male acquaintance: “my Ring with the posey of *A vertuous wife prolongeth life*”.²⁹² In 1689, John Freeman, a grocer from Southwark, whilst granting ten shillings apiece to buy five other individuals “A Ring to weare in Remembrance of me”, also bequeathed to his friend and overseer, “one gold Ring with this posie in itt (*Lett death lead love to rest*)”.²⁹³ When Sarah Chambers, a widow from Bermondsey made her will in 1723, she bequeathed four different posy rings amongst her chosen legatees, bearing the mottoes: “*In Christ & thee my Comfort be*”, “*as God decreed so we agreed*”, “*Favour my affection*”, and, finally, to her daughter -in-law, “a Ring wth this posie, *Where hearts agree their love will be*”.²⁹⁴

No doubt, many of these posy rings and jewels had strong emotional and sentimental attachments for their owners, and it is little wonder then, that dying testators should seek to pass such treasured tokens on to their nearest and dearest. In

²⁸⁹ Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, Inventory Number: 547’35-253.

²⁹⁰ T. Brown, *Commendatory Verses, on the Author of the Two Arthurs, and the Satyr against wit; By some of his particular Friends* (London, 1700).

This work was really a thinly veiled rebuke aimed at lampooning the physician and writer Sir Richard Blackmore. Although there was, perhaps, more truth in the claims than is to be supposed, particularly when one comes across some of the more salacious printed examples of “*Posies for RINGS*”, including: “Ile ring thy thumb, Then clap thy bum” or “*Dorothy this Ring is thine, And now thy bouncing body’s mine*”!

Phillips, *Mysteries of Love & Eloquence*, pp. 155-7.

²⁹¹ Raine, ‘Fabric Rolls’, p. 350.

²⁹² Surrey, DW/PA/5/1678; Will Number: 15.

²⁹³ Surrey, DW/PA/5/1689; Will Number: 33.

1668, for example, Alice Gill, a widow from Sevenoaks, used her will to bequeath to a female relative, “one ringe with a posie *gods providence is our inheritance*”.²⁹⁵ In a similar fashion, in 1568, John Norton, of Southampton, bequeathed to his daughter, a “gilt hoop inscribed on the inside ‘My hert is yowrs’” as well as a “brooch on which is written round ‘I pray make John Norton a good man’”.²⁹⁶

Similarly, in 1689, Richard Peake, a gentleman from Southwark bequeathed to his “loveing freind” a gold ring “of the posie *nott the value butt my Love*”.²⁹⁷ Whilst in 1697, Joan Woolfe, a spinster from Surrey, bequeathed her own ring, on which “the posey is *the guift is small the Love is all*”.²⁹⁸

Clearly, there were some rings and other items of jewellery, which had obviously once been exchanged as tokens which marked living and loving relationships and ties, but in death, were transmuted and subsequently were adjusted to function afresh in a new capacity. Instead, they became tokens of mourning, commemoration, and remembrance. In her will of 1705, for example, the widowed Ann Budd, bequeathed to her son: “my Gold Ring on wch there is this posey (*in thee my Choice I doe rejoice*)”.²⁹⁹

Sometimes this change in meaning was undoubtedly an emotional and psychological one, made by the wearer alone; at other times, however, the transformation could be a physical one, in which the very composition and design of the piece was materially altered in order to accord with its new status as a mourning and memorial item.³⁰⁰ John Evans suggested that some widows, upon the death of their spouse, might convert their wedding rings into mourning rings, through the addition of engraved and enamelled *memento mori* emblems and embellishments around the outside of the hoops.³⁰¹ This conversion of posy rings, following a bereavement, does seem likely, due to the “discordant” note struck by a number of rings, in which the amatory mottoes inscribed inside, stand in stark contrast to the morbid decorations featured around the exteriors.³⁰²

²⁹⁴ Surrey, DW/PA/5/1724; Will Number: 21.

²⁹⁵ Lansberry, ‘Sevenoaks Wills’, p. 74.

This particular posy seems to have been a notable favourite during the seventeenth century, with several variations of the motto noted by Evans in her overview of the literature and surviving rings. Evans, *English Posies*, pp. 44-5.

²⁹⁶ Roberts and Parker (eds.), ‘Southampton Probate, Volume II’, p. 260.

²⁹⁷ Surrey, DW/PC/5/1689; Will Number: 30.

²⁹⁸ Surrey, DW/PC/5/1697; Will Number: 24.

²⁹⁹ Surrey, DW/PA/5/1705; Will Number: 17.

³⁰⁰ Evans, *English Posies*, p. xxvii.

³⁰¹ Evans, ‘Posy-Rings’, p. 44.

³⁰² Evans, *English Jewellery*, p. 130.

A particularly illustrative piece, which dates from around the mid-1690s, features, on the inside of the hoop, the rather ardent posy: ‘God above increase our love’. Rather paradoxically, however, the outside of the ring is enamelled in black and decorated with an engraved elongated skeleton and an hourglass.³⁰³ It is this incongruity, between the designs on the outside and inside of the hoop, which suggests that the item may, originally, have been a plain gold band, bearing only the internal inscription, and that the “external decoration is presumably the result of conversion into a mourning ring”.³⁰⁴ **[FIG. 40]**

Another example of one such posy ring, dating from around the late seventeenth century, bears the rather playful posy: ‘Blind Cupid Shall me ne’ve enthrall’, whilst the exterior is decorated with a death’s head, flowers, and scrolling foliage.³⁰⁵

Likewise, a wedding or betrothal ring, from around the same period, also features similarly engraved decorations of a skull and flowers, filled in with black enamel, in conjunction with the devoted and rather dutiful posy: ‘As god decreed soe wee agreed’.³⁰⁶

Other rings bearing devoted and loving posies, in contrast to their outwardly morbid exterior decorations, possess inscriptions, which include examples such as: ‘In thee my chioyce I doe reioyce’, which features a skeleton around the length of the band.³⁰⁷ Similarly, this slightly later eighteenth-century example features a gold skeleton prominently depicted upon a ground of black enamel, the contrasting posy on the inside hoop, however, reads: ‘God hath Sent my hearts content’; the initials and date – ‘R C 1727’ – which are squeezed onto either side of the goldsmith’s mark, are likely also to have been a later addition, following the death of a spouse.³⁰⁸ **[FIG. 41]**

Perhaps one of the most poignant examples, which again, though featuring *memento mori* decorations of a death’s head and enamelled morbidly in black, also

³⁰³ V&A, Museum Number: M.80-1960.

³⁰⁴ V&A Online Collections: Mourning Ring, <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O118510/ring/>.

³⁰⁵ British Museum, Museum Number: 1961,1202.389.

³⁰⁶ Ashmolean, Finger Ring Collection, Accession Number: WA1897.CDEF.F647.

³⁰⁷ PAS, Finds Database, Unique ID: ESS-0B24A4.

³⁰⁸ British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1605.

For a similar example, see also: British Museum, Museum Number: 1960,0402.1.

features the rather touching posy, inscribed around the inside of the hoop: ‘Let our contest be who loves best’.³⁰⁹

Of course, mourning rings with posies were not merely the result of such conversions, and many more were intended specifically for their original memorial purposes.³¹⁰ Indeed, some testators expressly requested that mourning rings, inscribed with their chosen posy, were to be given to favoured recipients, or were handed out to mourners at the funeral.³¹¹ As we have already seen, Dionysia Leveson utilised her will to specify that mourning rings would be distributed bearing her intended posy. George Savile, in his will of 1612, also made provision that, should his wife happen to have another son or daughter by him, the child would receive, “a ring, wherein is written this poesey, “Keepe this and thinke of me. J.T.”.³¹²

Indeed, some of the earlier seventeenth-century examples of mourning rings are to be found inscribed with a *memento mori* or a mourning posy, variously composed in either Latin or English. One seventeenth-century example features a plain gold hoop – previously enamelled – and inscribed with the posy: ‘Ante obitum nemo beatus’ [‘no man can be called happy before his death’].³¹³ A similar style of ring, dating from around the mid-seventeenth century, features the posy: ‘Virtus post funera viuit’ [‘virtue survives lives’], and is inscribed with the initials of the deceased.³¹⁴ Another ring, with a plain gold exterior, features a posy, engraved around the interior of the hoop, which offers a *memento mori* providing both counsel and caution to the wearer: ‘Mortui monent mori’ [‘the Dead warn the dying’]; the inclusion of the initials of the deceased – ‘W H.’ – also identifies the ring as an object of commemoration and regard.³¹⁵

The various seventeenth-century figures who favoured such mourning posies included Sir Henry Wotton (1568-1639), Provost, who in his will of 1637, left to each of the Fellows of Eton, “a plain Ring of gold, enameld black; all save the verge,

³⁰⁹ Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, Inventory Number: 547’35-258.

³¹⁰ A late eighteenth-century mourning ring in the V&A, features a typical Neoclassical miniature mourning scene of a woman standing by an urn which tops a pedestal with EM in monogram; the back of the bezel, however, is inscribed not only with EM’s date of death in 1783 at the age of 25, but also includes the date on which they were married, in 1779. V&A, Museum Number: 903-1888.

³¹¹ Claire Schen also records other examples of posies requested by some late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century testators for their mourning rings, including: ‘Remember to dye’, ‘He lyves in blisse that gaue me this’ and ‘Remember thy end to lyve forever’.

Schen, *Charity and Lay Piety*, pp. 156-7.

³¹² Clay, (ed.), ‘North Country Wills: 1558-1604, Volume II’, p. 207.

³¹³ British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1529.

³¹⁴ British Museum, Museum Number: 1961,1202.471.

³¹⁵ PAS, Finds Database, Unique ID: BUC-834314.

with this Motto within, *Amor unit omnia* [‘Love unites all’].³¹⁶ Godfrey Goodman (1583-1656), Bishop of Gloucester, also left rings with the posy: “*Requiem defunctis*” [‘Rest the departed’].³¹⁷

Moreover, the long-lived author and biographer, Izaak Walton (1593-1683), friend of both Wotton and Donne,³¹⁸ left detailed instructions in his will for the distribution of over forty mourning rings, which were to be delivered to the named recipients within forty days of his death, at a cost of 13s.4d. apiece. To his son-in-law, daughter, and son, he bequeathed rings with the posy: “*Love my memory, I. W. obiit*”; to Bishop Morley, he bequeathed a ring with the posy: “*A mite for a million, I. W. obiit*”;³¹⁹ other friends and family he had named were each to receive a ring with the motto: “*A friend’s farewell, I. W. obiit*”.³²⁰

Similarly, in 1672, Richard Smyth, recording the funerary obsequies accorded to John Smith, a London alderman and JP, noted: “the posie of his rings, ‘Ever Last’”.³²¹ Less than a month later, at the funeral of Samuel Crumbleholme (1618-1672), schoolmaster of St Paul’s, he recorded that, “Rings were given, whose posie was, *Redime Tempus*”.³²² In 1693, Ann Gosford, a spinster from Southwark, in bequeathing several rings, specified that her brother was particularly to have: “one funerall Ring the posie thereof being this (no Home like Heaven)”.³²³

The rather broad sentiments embodied in some of these posies are characteristic of many of the more prevalent inscriptions found upon the rings

³¹⁶ Quoted in, I. Walton, *The Lives of Dr John Donne, Sir Henry Wotton, Mr Richard Hooker, Mr George Herbert. Written by Izaak Walton...* (London, 1670).

³¹⁷ T. Fuller, *The History of the Worthies of England...* (London, 1662).

³¹⁸ The ODNB entry for Walton notes that his will was signed and sealed with the with the bloodstone seal left to him by John Donne.

Walton mentions, in his *Lives*, this bequest of a memorial ring, which Donne had sent to several of his companions before his death in 1631:

...not long before his death he caused to be drawn a figure of the Body of Christ extended upon an Anchor...to be ingraven very small in *Helitropian* Stones, and set in gold, and of these he sent to many of his dearest friends to be used as *Seales*, or *Rings*, and kept as memorials of him, and of his affection to them.

Walton, *Lives*, p. 56.

³¹⁹ Joan Evans also notes a variation on this same posy, which appeared in the 1596 Harleian Manuscript: “A myte for a million”.

Evans, *English Posies*, p. 19.

³²⁰ Quoted in, Oman, *British Rings*, p. 72.

³²¹ Ellis, Henry (ed.), ‘The Obituary of Richard Smyth, Secondary of the Poultry Compter, London: Being a catalogue of all such persons as he knew in their life: extending from A.D. 1627 to A.D. 1674’, *Camden Society*, 44 (1859), p. 95.

³²² *Ibid.*, p. 96.

It is interesting to note that Smyth recorded Crumbleholme as having died on the 21 June, so that the mourning rings must have been promptly obtained, ready to be given out at his burial, which took place on the 26th, just five days later. The ODNB entry for Crumbleholme, also notes that he died intestate, so the rings may have been a contrivance of his wife, rather than a personally requested post-mortem gift, on his behalf.

³²³ Surrey, DW/PA/5/1693; Will Number: 41.

produced around this period. Indeed, several of the posies found on some sixteenth- and seventeenth-century rings are decidedly ambiguous. The somewhat broad or even rather vague sentiments embodied by some of the posies most likely stem from goldsmiths seeking to provide rings that would fit the needs of a more comprehensive range of customers. Some posies were convenient for a wider range of circumstances than others, and the specific intention of some of the unembellished posy rings, with their rather indeterminate inscriptions, have now been lost. Perhaps this was also one of the attractions of the posy ring, in that only the giver and the recipient knew the specific meaning and intent, which lay behind the exchange?

For example, one such - now plain - gold posy ring, features an enamelled inscription inside the hoop, which reads: ‘x ERAM x NON x SVM’ [‘I was but am not’]; without the tell-tale *memento mori* symbolism, or the inclusion of a name or date, it is difficult to determine whether this was a mourning ring or not.³²⁴

Likewise, plain rings bearing some of the more abstract posies, such as: ‘Forget me not’;³²⁵ ‘A small remembrance’;³²⁶ ‘When this you see remember mee’;³²⁷ ‘KEPE ME IN MYND’;³²⁸ or, ‘A frends gift’;³²⁹ were, perhaps, also utilised by early modern consumers for both sentimental and memorial purposes. Other similar inscriptions which impelled the wearer to remember the donor of the ring could, presumably, have also functioned as both love and/or mourning tokens.³³⁰

For example, Evans recorded a posy which appeared in one of the manuscript repertoires: “Absent I am but for a tyme”, and suggested it may have been intended for a mourning ring, thus implying that both parties would be reunited in death.³³¹ Similarly, several existent rings bearing the posy (or a variation on it): “Thinke on me”, also offer a motto which may have functioned in a similar fashion. It can be interpreted both a sentimental injunction from an admirer or as a post-mortem behest for remembrance from beyond the grave.³³² Certainly there is testamentary evidence of this posy being used in a ring for commemorative purposes when, in 1618, Robert

³²⁴ British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1228.

³²⁵ PAS, Finds Database, Unique ID: LANCUM-EC98A9.

³²⁶ PAS, Finds Database, Unique ID: KENT-6150D2.

³²⁷ PAS, Finds Database, Unique ID: WMID-F6E7A2; London, Museum Number: MoL 62.4/144; 62.4/116; 62.4/30.

³²⁸ PAS, Finds Database, Unique ID: PAS-382E72; BUC-F613F1.

³²⁹ PAS, Finds Database, Unique ID: IOW-36E4D5; SUR-495C47.

³³⁰ PAS, Finds Database, Unique ID: ESS-745A21; NMS-353268; IOW-FA3E30; NMS43; PAS-3BOF14; London, Museum Number: MoL 62.4/176; 62.4/25.

³³¹ Evans, *English Posies*, p. 15.

³³² PAS, Finds Database, Unique ID: SOM-D4E3C1; BERK-E8E7C6; British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1383; 1961,1202.475.

Eyre bequeathed to Sir Jervas Clifton, “my hoope ring of gold, with this *posie* or inscription, *Think on mee*”.³³³

Thankfully, some rings are much clearer in their intent, and the mottoes on some posy rings may be enriched by their exterior decoration, which could include lavish enamel work and elegantly chased motifs. This late seventeenth-century ring, for example is engraved with a stylised floral pattern, inlaid in black enamel; the interior of the hoop is inscribed with the initials of the deceased, and the forthright motto: ‘Tho ded I bee remember mee K. W’.³³⁴ [FIG. 42]

Another gold seventeenth-century mourning ring, features, engraved around the exterior, a wreathed or scrolled pattern, on which there remains traces of black enamel; the inside of the hoop is inscribed with the rather consoling posy: ‘Hope helpeth greife’.³³⁵ [FIG. 43]

Although there is obviously evidence of the popularity of certain stock phrases being utilised for rings, the diversity of tone and style to be found across the genre, amongst the abundant surviving examples, is testament to the flourishing appeal of the posy ring throughout early modern England. The mottoes found on *memento mori* and mourning rings from this period encompass a whole gamut of emotions. They range from the didactic: ‘let vertue by thy guide’³³⁶ or ‘Sis eadem in utraq Fortuna’ [‘Be the same in good and bad fortune’],³³⁷ and the stoic: ‘Let nothing trouble you’;³³⁸ to the consoling: ‘Not lost but gone before’,³³⁹ and ‘Not dead but sleepeth’;³⁴⁰ to the doleful: ‘God hath parted us’,³⁴¹ and even the powerfully sorrowful: ‘My Friend is Dead my Joys are fled’.³⁴²

Some patrons of the mourning ring seemed even to seek spiritual comfort and emotional succour in the composition of their posies. They may have been parted from their loved ones, but there was, perhaps, solace to be had from the heartening and hopeful mottoes which adorned the rings they wore. Scarisbrick, for example, notes a mid seventeenth-century mourning ring, which is expectantly inscribed: ‘I

³³³ Raine, ‘Fabric Rolls’, p. 350.

³³⁴ PAS, Finds Database, Unique ID: LVPL-11DBC3.

³³⁵ British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1531.

This posy is recorded in the 1596 Harleian Manuscript and a similar inscription can be found on a ring excavated at Canterbury.

Evans, *English Posies*, p. 48; PAS, Finds Database, Unique ID: KENT-FEF154.

³³⁶ Museum of London, Museum Number: MoL 62.4/135.

³³⁷ British Museum, Museum Number: 1961,1202.469.

³³⁸ British Museum, Museum Number: 1961,1202.419.

³³⁹ PAS, Finds Database, Unique ID: NARC-58FBB3.

³⁴⁰ PAS, Finds Database, Unique ID: IOW-8D4F41.

³⁴¹ Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, Inventory Number: 547’35-247.

RESTLESS LIVE, YET HOPE TO SEE THAT DAY OF CHRIST AND THEN SEE THEE, L.P. 1656'.³⁴³ In a similar vein, another late seventeenth-century ring, decorated with *memento mori* emblems, bears the posy: 'God continve our love'.³⁴⁴

Indeed, even into the early decades of the eighteenth century, the appeal of the posy or motto for a mourning ring is still evident; in 1721, for example, a London newspaper advertisement appeared, which sought the return of a stolen "Mourning Ring with a Posy. *God above reward your Love;*"³⁴⁵ Over twenty years later, in 1742, another advert was seeking the recovery of a lost "Mourning Ring, enamell'd *Ann Stepenson*, the Posy, *When this you see, remember me, A. S.*"³⁴⁶

Increasingly, the posy, which appeared on a ring used for memorial purposes, might be accompanied by some inscribed biographical information, with which to identify and commemorate the deceased individual. This mid-seventeenth-century example, features a gold hoop, which is surrounded with the delicate pattern of a laurel wreath and skull, reserved upon a ground of white enamel; it is inscribed around the inside of the band with both an appropriate posy and the date of death: 'Wee part to meete Et: 19 mar: 1658'.³⁴⁷ [FIG. 44]

Another posy ring, dated to the following decade, features an exterior which is plain, save for an engraved and black-enamelled image of a jawless skull; the inside of the hoop is inscribed with both the initials of the deceased, the year of their death, as well as the rather lucid posy: 'I am gone before : C : Y : 63'.³⁴⁸

The countless number of rings on which it appeared during the second half of the seventeenth century, and into the early eighteenth century, certainly attests to the widespread ubiquity of this particular likeness of a death's head, with which this ring is engraved. It can be recognised again, here featured on another very similar mourning ring, which was in use over sixteen years later; it is inscribed, likewise, with both the initials of the deceased, the date of their death, and the *memento mori*-style posy, which counselled: 'Bee prepared : M .B : July 79'.³⁴⁹ [FIG. 45]

Though the posy ring had established itself during the seventeenth century as a suitable vehicle for the mourning and remembrance strategies of those who had died

³⁴² British Museum, Museum Number: 1961,1202.105.

³⁴³ Scarisbrick, *Historic Rings*, p. 99.

³⁴⁴ British Museum, Museum Number: 1961,1202.166.

³⁴⁵ Classified ads, *Daily Post* (London, England), Tuesday, May 30, 1721; Issue 519.

³⁴⁶ Classified ads, *Daily Advertiser* (London, England), Saturday, October 30, 1742; Issue 3726.

³⁴⁷ British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1530.

³⁴⁸ British Museum, Museum Number: 1961,1202.401.

³⁴⁹ British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1539.

or been left bereaved, as the eighteenth century progressed, the posy ring would gradually begin to fall out of fashion. The biographical and personalised information concerning the deceased individual – name, age, and date of death - eventually began to claim precedence on the limited space of the mourning ring. Additionally, the new styles which were emerging increasingly replaced the older and simpler gold hoops of the posy ring, although sentimental mottoes would again find a place on the mourning jewellery of later eighteenth century.

Conclusion

A combined use of both testamentary evidence and the surviving objects of *memento mori* and mourning jewellery, have illustrated how, from the early sixteenth century onwards into the mid-1600s, the consumption of jewellery as a means of testators providing a mark of personal remembrance and the bereaved commemorating specific individuals evolved markedly as a recognised element of early modern mourning practice.

Whilst the bestowal of personally-owned jewellery and even the donation of a ring as a testamentary memento might have been a convention with roots stretching back into the Middle Ages and beyond, the sixteenth century served to lay the real foundations for what would later emerge as ‘mourning jewellery’. Prior to the development of custom-made memorial rings and accessories, testators utilised their own emotive possessions or disposed of rings and other tokens of remembrance which accorded to the popular fashions of the time.

The growing prevalence of *memento mori*, saw a great increase in a variety of jewellery featuring skulls, skeletons, and other emblems of mortality. Whilst the stark imagery and didactic message associated with *memento mori* served to call death into the lives of the living, it was an abstract and impersonalised behest, urging spiritual and moral contemplation.

However, the impact of the Reformation upon the traditional symbiotic relationship between the living and the dead, and the abolition of intercession as a means of securing salvation, had a fundamental impact upon the way in which the dead were remembered and individuals were commemorated. The dying and the bereaved adapted their mourning strategies, increasingly looked towards new forms of commemoration, investing in intimate, more personal and private means of remembrance.

The jewellery of *memento mori* or the emotive token of the posy ring, assumed a new role, transmuted or adapted to fit these new demands, and with the addition of biographical information or the inclusion of a fitting inscription, rings and jewellery might now be personalised as a means of securing the memory of the deceased. The focus was now firmly on the specific individual, who might now be commemorated and mourned with the procurement of a bespoke and personalised ring or piece of mourning jewellery.

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CHAPTER 3. STUART AND GEORGIAN MOURNING JEWELLERY: Political, Personal, and Sentimental, c.1649-1800

*In this golden pledge I see
The emblem of eternity,¹*

The mid-seventeenth century witnessed an evident expansion in the production and popularity of mourning and sentimental jewellery. In analysing the chronology and context underlying this progress, this chapter will begin with an investigation concerning the impact which the death of King Charles I may have had in terms of influencing and expanding the popular market for commemorative jewellery more widely.

Indeed, several jewellery historians – as will be discussed later – have actually contended that the mourning jewellery which the dead King inspired, and which was produced in the wake of regicide, served to have a direct trickledown effect in shaping and encouraging the popular usage of mourning jewellery and memorial rings more widely amongst the general population when they came to contemplate their own deaths or in commemorating the deaths of close family and friends.

Whilst political and Royalist mourning jewellery is certainly well-represented in terms of the number and scope of articles to have survived in museum collections – due to its national significance, as a historical curiosity, and the fact that many of these pieces are particularly ornate, with some even featuring a hairwork component, in the manner of a quasi-historical relic – the reception, consumption, and influence of these items at a popular level is much more difficult to trace and reconstruct. They are absent from the sampled wills,² and are only fleetingly mentioned in other contemporary sources, such as newspaper advertisements.

Nevertheless, the range of mourning jewellery associated with royalty has a certain singular significance in illustrating material responses to the death of Charles I, demonstrating the ways in which he was mourned and memorialised, and also showing the influence this had upon future responses to the deaths of subsequent monarchs and the mourning jewellery which was later produced and generated. Into the eighteenth century, the significance and legacy of the material culture associated

¹ Turner, D., 'On Being Presented with a Mourning Ring', in, D. Turner, *Poems Devotional and Moral, in Two Parts* (Henley, 1794), p. 150.

² There is at least one reference to the material culture associated with Charles I: in 1725, Ursula Kinkid, a widow from Middlesex, as well as making several bequests of one guinea for the procurement of mourning rings, she also bequeathed to her niece: "King Charles ye 1st Picture at Length in a gold frame". Middlesex, AM/PW/1730/035.

with Charles I and his heirs, remerged with the commemorative propaganda and mourning jewellery produced in response to the Jacobite cause, which borrowed and assimilated the imagery and memory of Charles I.

Following on from an overview and contextualisation of the political and royalist mourning jewellery, this chapter, in a continuation of the narrative introduced towards the end of Chapter 2, considers the continued development and expansion both in form and usage of personalised mourning jewellery into the post-Restoration period. From the second half of the seventeenth century it is possible to observe the emergence and widespread establishment of a sequence of stylistic forms or types of mourning ring, whilst the interpretation and analysis of the mourning jewellery is also aided by the increasing numbers of dated examples which survive.

It is also possible to observe innovations and developments in design, stylistic motifs, and materials employed. The sampled wills concurrently show an increasing recourse to mourning rings amongst the testators of Middlesex and Surrey towards the closing years of the seventeenth century, whilst into the 1700s the vast quantities of sentimental and mourning jewellery which survive provide a considerable corpus of material for study. This expanding mass of mourning jewellery over the course of the eighteenth century is similarly observed and interpreted, considering innovations and developments in its manufacture, such as the use of hair, and conspicuous changes in iconography as classical and sentimental themes increasingly dictated and shaped the custom towards the end of the period. Finally, in considering the fourth category of mourning jewellery which was introduced in Chapter 2, this chapter considers the appearance and form of mourning jewellery as part of conventional mourning attire.

Royalist and Political Mourning Jewellery

*Thy Sufferings and thy death let no man name;
It was thy glory, but the Kingdom's Shame.*³

For centuries, monarchs had inspired the creation of jewels, and had themselves distributed gifts and favours – sometimes bearing their own name or image – to loyal subjects and supporters. This, however, was jewellery which performed an official or commemorative function, rather than providing items solely of a mourning or memorialising bent.⁴

³ J. H., 'An Epitaph upon King Charls', in, (attributed to Charles I and to John Gauden), *Eikón Basiliké. The Povrtraictvre of His Sacred Maiestie in His Solitudes and Syfferings* (London, 1648).

⁴ Scarisbrick, *Rings: Jewelry of Power, Love and Loyalty*, p. 187.

Jewellery that “recorded loyalty to persons, glorified monarchs, or commemorated and celebrated political causes and events,” had been produced even before the politically charged ferment of the mid-seventeenth century.⁵ The English Civil Wars and the subsequent execution of King Charles I in 1649, however, inspired the creation and distribution of a particularly distinctive form of mourning jewellery. In interpreting the role and propaganda value of imagery in disseminating ideas about sovereignty, power and royal authority, Kevin Sharpe has suggested that, significantly, and perhaps more than any other English monarch before him, Charles I had formerly recognised the import and significance of the royal image, giving his attention to the “visual representation of kingship”; indeed, even before his demise, images of Charles I had acted to “disseminate the king’s representation as ruler”, serving to “publicise his regal authority”.⁶

During the early 1640s Queen Henrietta Maria had distributed “inexpensive rings, lockets and slides, bearing the royal cipher or portrait” of her husband Charles I, to those supporters who had “lent money to finance the Royalist cause”.⁷ According to Joan Evans, the Queen had rings made, called “King’s Pledges,” which were also granted in exchange for loans or gifts of money.⁸ These rings and royal mementoes were used not only as a means of encouraging and acknowledging loyalty to the Crown, but they also acted as a “form of security,” and a reminder of this financial assistance, which was to be “redeemed” with repayment or reward for service, once the monarchy was again firmly re-established.⁹

Other Royalist supporters might wear one of the portrait medals¹⁰ or badges,¹¹ many of which had been produced by the engraver Thomas Rawlins (c.1620-1670),¹²

⁵ Oman, *British Rings*, p. 65; Marshall and Dalgleish (eds.), *Jewellery in Scotland*, p. 44.

⁶ K. Sharpe, *Image Wars: Promoting Kings and Commonwealths in England, 1603-1660* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), pp. 339, 343.

⁷ Scarisbrick, *Jewellery in Britain*, p. 188; Scarisbrick, *Rings: Jewelry of Power, Love and Loyalty*, p. 188.

⁸ Evans, *English Jewellery*, p. 129.

⁹ Marshall and Dalgleish (eds.), *Jewellery in Scotland*, p. 44; Scarisbrick, *Jewellery in Britain*, p. 188.

¹⁰ Medals and badges have been largely discounted as part of this study, seen to fall essentially outside the remit of ‘mourning jewellery’. For commemorative jewellery – some likely produced after the Restoration – which incorporates portrait medallions of Charles I, however, see for example: British Museum, Museum Number: 1978,1002.1206; 1954,1002.48; Royal Collection Trust, Accession Number: RCIN 43860.

¹¹ In May 1643 King Charles had issued a warrant ordering that a medal be made, which was to be “worn on the breast of every man who shall be certified under the hands of their Commanders-in-Chief to have done us faithful service in the forlorn hope”. Moreover, it was also commanded that “no soldier at anytime doe sell nor any of our subjects presume to buy or wear any of these said badges other than they to whom we shall give the same”.

E. Hawkins, *Medallic Illustrations of the History of Great Britain and Ireland to the Death of George II, Vol. I* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1885), pp. 301-2.

whilst those of more slender means might adapt a coin to wear in order to show their loyalty and support for the King.¹³ Again, Sharpe has similarly pointed to the role of royal medals, issued as part of the “propaganda war” between King and Parliament, as serving not only to promote the royal cause, but also acting as “vital tokens of allegiance and solidarity”.¹⁴ Similarly, in his study of the visual image of Charles I, John Peacock rather vividly described medals as “ideological weapons” in the conflict between the competing factions.¹⁵

The political upheavals of the 1640s, culminating in the shock of state-sanctioned regicide, prompted the creation of a great wave of “politically significant pieces” of Royalist jewellery.¹⁶ Additionally, in a similar vein to what had been produced during the Civil War years, a number of medals were designed which celebrated and mourned the dead King.¹⁷ Jewellery featuring the royal image, which had been worn previously as a badge of support for the King and the Royalist cause, was transmuted and now put to use as a continuing mark of support for the exiled monarchy and of mourning for the late Charles I.¹⁸ It was these kinds of small, portable commemorative tokens of the King, which might be worn and sported by Royalists, “as a badge of allegiance in divided times”.¹⁹

Indeed, even before the King’s execution, some Royalists were percipient enough to view their trinkets and emblems of support as akin to mourning tokens.

¹² Rawlins had been appointed “graver of seals, stamps, and medals at Oxford in 1643,” and went on to produce a series of Royalist medals and badges, which were “cast and chased” and “may have been awarded for acts of valour or merely made for wear by the King’s supporters”.

M. Sharp, ‘Rawlins, Thomas (c.1620-1670)’, *ODNB*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2005.

¹³ For coins which have been pierced for wear, see: PAS, Finds Database, Unique ID: NMS-30F472; NLM-3A4FA4; DENO-7A8B53; NCL-506144. For medals, see also: GLO-20BE01; WMID-338537; ESS-6ECE34; BUC-575178; LIN-99D7B1; BH-DC4584; LEIC-78E0B3.

¹⁴ Sharpe, *Image Wars*, pp. 358-61.

¹⁵ Peacock, J., ‘The Visual Image of Charles I’, in T. Corns (ed.), *The Royal Image: Representations of Charles I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 190.

¹⁶ Marshall and Dalgleish (eds.), *Jewellery in Scotland*, p. 44.

¹⁷ See, for example: British Museum, Museum Number: M.7233; M.7234; M.7235; M.7237; M.7240; M.7242; AF.2961.

Other figures, from both sides of the political divide, were also commemorated with memorial medals, including Sir Henry Slingsby (1602-1658), Robert Devereux, third earl of Essex (1591-1646), Sir John Hotham (1610-1645) and, of course, Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658). For examples, see: British Museum, Museum Number: M.7386; M.7207; M.7209; M.7186; M.7396.

See also: Hawkins, *Medallic Illustrations*, pp. 315-17, 326-7, 340-353, 386, 427, 434-36.

¹⁸ Additionally, the discovery of a gold Charles I portrait medallion, found in the tomb of the wife (d.1635) of Sir Baynham Throckmorton, second baronet (1606-1664), perhaps suggests that the medal was interred, in this instance, as a funerary token or as a memorial marker of Sir Baynham’s Royalist allegiances.

National Trust Collections, National Trust Inventory Number: 135781.

¹⁹ Sharpe, *Image Wars*, pp. 341-2.

For example, a Royalist literary club, called the ‘Order of the Black Ribband’,²⁰ whose members were “enjoined to wear a piece of black ribbon” about their arm in sympathy with the King’s plight and as a pledge of fidelity to the Royalist cause, likened the accessory to a “mourning bracelet”.²¹

An “extensive martyrology” quickly grew up around the dead King and jewels that featured the image of Charles I now also assumed a memorial guise.²² The production and wearing of commemorative and memorial jewellery dedicated to the memory of Charles I was one of several methods employed by the King’s supporters in order to help “keep Royalist sympathies alive” during the years of the Protectorate.²³ Indeed, within only a few months of the King’s execution, “commemorative rings had begun to appear”.²⁴

Oman identifies what he believes to be “perhaps [one of] the earliest patterns” of memorial ring produced in 1649, which features a gold oval bezel decorated with a skull in white and the letters ‘C R’ in black enamel; the shoulders are chased and enamelled with what appear to be death’s heads.²⁵ **[FIG. 46]**

Another elaborately engraved gold mourning ring, dated 1648, presents the notable feature of a revolving central bezel, the obverse of which displays an intaglio profile bust of Charles I (which perhaps suggests that it may have been utilised as a signet) whilst the reverse is engraved with the letters ‘C R’ and a skull set between a coronet and a crown, all encircled by the motto: ‘GLORIA’/‘VANITAS’ [‘glory’/‘vanity’]. Engraved around the inside of the hoop is the inscription: ‘Emigravit gloria Angl’ [‘The glory of England has departed’].²⁶ **[FIG. 47]**

What is particularly remarkable about this distinct category of mourning jewellery is the sheer number and variety of pieces to have survived which commemorate King Charles I. They range from beautifully ornate pieces (some of which may have been gifted to loyal supporters by the royal family themselves), notable for the skilled and elaborate designs and the richness of their materials, to the more marketable and cheaper alternatives which were later produced and made for

²⁰ Loxley, James, ‘The social modes of Marvell’s poetry’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Andrew Marvell*, ed. D. Hirst and S. N. Zwicker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 13-14.

²¹ Perhaps a token or badge, featuring the King, was also worn threaded onto this “black Arme-let” ‘On a black Ribband’, in J. Shirley, *Poems, &c. By James Shirley* (London, 1646).

²² Gittings, ‘Sacred and Secular’, p. 149.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 148-9.

²⁴ Oman, *British Rings*, p. 66.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 66, 121.

V&A, Museum Number: M.22-1929.

²⁶ V&A, Museum Number: M.274-1962.

<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O126104/ring/unknown/>

sale by enterprising jewellery sellers and goldsmiths. A “vast number” of mementoes and pieces of jewellery were produced to mourn the martyred figurehead of Charles I, and they were decorated accordingly with “symbols of mortality and appropriate mottoes” which not only lamented the death of the King but tacitly proclaimed loyalty for his exiled son and heir.²⁷

This wearable proclamation of support for the future King Charles II is made abundantly clear in a ribbon slide or pendant, dating from around c.1650-60, in which father and son are depicted side by side. This jewel not only memorialises Charles I but also proclaims and exhibits the hopes embodied in Charles II for the restoration of the Stuart monarchy.²⁸ It is a powerful image of a future king mirroring a departed king.²⁹ The back of the jewel is also decorated with brightly painted enamel flowers.³⁰ **[FIG. 48]**

Portrait miniatures of Charles I, either painted onto vellum or rendered in enamel, proved especially popular, with many being set into rings or mounted for wear in mourning slides and pendants.³¹ Scarisbrick has contended that most of these miniatures were “melancholy” copies derived from a portrait of the King by Anthony Van Dyck.³² **[FIG. 49]** Some of these portrait miniatures may have been produced even before the King’s execution and subsequently *became* mourning jewels, whilst others were certainly painted after the King’s death, identifiable from the portraits in which the King is “given a doomed look, with eyes directed towards Heaven”.³³

This example features just such a portrait of Charles I, executed in enamel and set on a “celestial pale blue” ground; the shoulders and sides of the bezel are delicately decorated with a scalloped pattern of black and white enamel.³⁴ **[FIG. 50]**

Rings which were more lavishly ornamented might be set with diamonds, whilst vividly coloured and intricately realised enamel work was frequently a feature

²⁷ Marshall and Dalgleish (eds.), *Jewellery in Scotland*, p. 37; Scarisbrick, *Jewellery in Britain*, p. 188.

²⁸ This is a theme also embodied in two mid seventeenth-century mourning rings, both of which feature enamel decoration commemorating Charles I on the back of the bezel, whilst the front of the rings depict the head of a youthful Charles II with his parents set on either side of him. See: Christie’s, Sale 7731: ‘Four Gold Memorial Rings for Charles I, Charles II and William III’, London (2 June, 2009), Lot 188; British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1441.

²⁹ See also: V&A, Museum Number: M.10-1960, for a remarkable pendant which features cameos of both Charles I and II, carved from a plum-stone.

³⁰ V&A, Museum Number: M.253-1975.

³¹ Oman, *British Rings*, p. 66.

³² Scarisbrick, *Jewellery in Britain*, p. 188.

³³ Oman, *British Rings*, p. 66.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 67; British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1434.

of these more sumptuous memorial jewels set with portrait miniatures of the King.³⁵ Examples of this style of enamel decoration, which often featured the recognisable *memento mori* emblem of a skull or death's head device, may be seen in this mid seventeenth-century ring. It features an oval bezel set with the archetypal portrait miniature of the King painted in enamel.³⁶ The pale blue background of the portrait is echoed in the enamel work on the shoulders of the ring and on the back of the bezel, which features a bright yellow skull, crowned and flanked by the initials 'C R'.³⁷ **[FIG. 51]**

In a very similar vein to these rings – and it must be remembered that it was probably the same artists engaged in producing portraits of Charles I for the various types of memorial jewels which were in demand – this medallion also features an immediately recognisable enamelled portrait of the King.³⁸ In his characteristic commemorative stance, Charles I is depicted with eyes gazing upwards in supplication. The reverse of the pendant is decorated, upon a ground of white enamel, with skull and crossbones and the crowned initials of the King and the year of his execution, all of which is encircled by a laurel wreath.³⁹ **[FIG. 52]**

Images of the deceased Charles I, coupled with the percipient mottoes that featured on much of this jewellery, were intended as a means of not only memorialising the dead King, but also galvanising adherents to the Royalist cause. This bracelet slide, for example, in which the King is depicted on the front, is decorated on the reverse with a severe white skull set upon a ground of black enamel which is surrounded by the inscription: 'Sic Transit Gloria Mondy' ['Thus passes the glory of the world'].⁴⁰ **[FIG. 53]**

³⁵ See for example: V&A, Museum Number: 924-1871; British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1433; AF.1440.

³⁶ For other examples of mourning jewels featuring portrait miniatures of Charles I, see: Ashmolean Finger Ring Collection: 'Ring', Accession Number: WA1897.CDEF.F785; British Museum, Museum Number: AF.3002; AF.1438; Museum of London, Accession Number: 62.120/2; Royal Collection Trust, Accession Number: RCIN 420879; National Museums Scotland, Accession Number: H.NK 83; Q.L.1960.2; H.NK 90.

³⁷ Museum of London, Accession Number: 62.120/88.

For rings of a very similar design style, see: National Trust Collections, National Trust Inventory Number: 1171037.2; Royal Collection Trust, Accession Number: RCIN 422290.

³⁸ Oman, *British Rings*, p. 66.

³⁹ Museum of London, Accession Number: 80.271/76.

⁴⁰ Museum of London, Accession Number: 62.120/1.

A ring in the V&A, decorated in a similar fashion, also features a variation on this motto – 'sic transit gloria mundi' – inscribed around the inside of the hoop. From the repetition of imagery and phrases, it does appear that goldsmiths tended to resort to a certain acknowledged likeness of the late King, as well as endowing their work with certain stock phrases for engraving. V&A, Museum Number: M.145-1962.

Though, as we have seen, many of the rings and jewels may have “affected the form of mourning” accessories, their true intent and purpose was not principally to mourn the late Charles I, but rather to rally support and foster popular sympathy, during the years of the Interregnum, for the monarchy in exile.⁴¹ Indeed, in Oman’s opinion, jewellery dedicated to the memory of Charles I should not be considered as mourning jewellery in the proper sense at all, but recognised, rather, as a wearable form of seventeenth-century “political propaganda”.⁴²

The sheer number and variety of items to have survived, certainly suggests that such jewellery must have gained a fairly extensive circulation, particularly in London, which benefitted from a greater concentration of skilled craftsmen and goldsmiths. Indeed, the manufacturing of the various portrait miniatures, rings, and other jewellery, must have called for the involvement of “quite a number of goldsmiths and miniaturists”. Evidently, there was some “considerable variety” in the competence of execution and in the finishing and quality of materials employed, and, as Oman has contended, the standard of workmanship of the miniaturists could range from “competent to poor”.⁴³

Furthermore, as Angela McShane has suggested, the very fact that the “state had no legal control over the use of the royal image in England,” meant that it “suffered as a result”.⁴⁴ Here we can see evidence of this rather clumsy variation in workmanship, in a late seventeenth-century portrait miniature of Charles I, in which the King appears rather pathetic and bedraggled looking, but still recognisable, with eyes lifted towards the heavens.⁴⁵ **[FIG. 54]**

There was undoubtedly a demand for these “loyal objects” and it was a demand that resourceful goldsmiths and jewellery sellers were prepared to meet. Indeed, in some cases it seems that the popularity of such jewellery provided opportunities for some unscrupulous goldsmiths to defraud their customers. As Oman notes, just a few years after the King’s execution, “the wardens of the Goldsmiths made one of their periodic searches of the shops in the City [of London] in August, 1651, and seized

⁴¹ Oman, *British Rings*, p. 66.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 75.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁴⁴ McShane, A., ‘Subjects and Objects: Material Expressions of Love and Loyalty in Seventeenth-Century England’, *The Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 48 (2009), p. 879.

⁴⁵ Christie’s, Sale 4987: ‘A 17th Century Gold Mounted Mourning Pendant for Charles I’, London (1 June, 2006), Lot 76. See also: British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1440.

from Samuel Hopton some rings ‘with the late king’s pictures’ which two days later were condemned as being made of substandard gold”.⁴⁶

Perhaps the rings sold by Samuel Hopton were below standard, but there is also the suspicion that the rings were seized not simply because of concerns over adulterated gold, but because of the subversive threat which this jewellery represented. For many Royalists the King’s death had been a kind of terrible martyrdom and an intolerable crime for which the only possible salve was the eventual restoration of the Stuart monarchy.⁴⁷ Images of Charles I provided a kind of visible continuity, and a palpable reminder of these resolute hopes and ambitions. This jewellery spoke not just of mourning and commemoration; for many steadfast followers it was worn also as a mark of their enduring loyalty and devotion. Embodied in the many rings, pendants and slides, was an impetus for change, or, rather, a return to the old status quo of a nation with a monarch at its head.

This jewellery visualised not just the bitterness of feeling surrounding the death of the King but also the hopefulness of many of its wearers for the future restoration of the monarchy. This mourning jewellery, which incorporated images of Charles I and various galvanising and loyal mottoes, offered an outlet, perhaps sometimes even a stimulus for these feelings. Some of this mourning jewellery evolved out of, or was converted from, the Royalist items that had been worn during the earlier years of the 1640s, and much of it continued to carry a rallying tone of support for the King and the cause.⁴⁸ The mourning of King Charles I provided a means of carrying on the struggle to see his son and heir restored to the throne; this was seditious mourning jewellery born out of struggle and misfortune.

The mourning and memorialising of Charles I provided a mainspring to the perilous ambitions to see his son established as King. It is little wonder then that several of the rings and lockets made in memory of Charles I should also incorporate politically charged proclamations, the most popular motto of which was: ‘Prepared be to follow me’.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ *Court Minutes* O.S. 24, p. 103v, quoted in, Oman, *British Rings*, p. 66.

⁴⁷ Marshall and Dalgleish (eds.), *Jewellery in Scotland*, p. 37; Scarisbrick, *Rings: Jewelry of Power, Love and Loyalty*, p. 188.

⁴⁸ See, for instance, a gold ring found in Yorkshire, which features around the inside of the decorated hoop, an engraved and enamelled inscription: ‘OBAY x THY x KING’. A Royalist probably wore this ring in the years before the King’s execution but the tone and positioning of the inscription means that it perhaps continued to be cautiously worn even during the years of the Interregnum. British Museum, Museum Number: 2001,0101.1.

⁴⁹ For portrait rings featuring this motto engraved around the interior of the hoops, see: British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1435; AF.1436.

As well as encouraging loyalty and devotion to the King and his heirs, several pieces of mourning jewellery memorialising Charles I also exhibit an almost devotional quality in their composition and character. Reputedly incorporating relics of the King that were salvaged and preserved after his death, Charles I's supporters commissioned jewellery that presented, venerated, and memorialised the dead King as a martyred figurehead.⁵⁰ In the manner of Catholic reliquaries, this jewellery purportedly incorporated fragments of Charles I's hair or pieces of linen stained with his blood.⁵¹

Andrew Lacey and Scarisbrick have both drawn attention to a contemporary painting, attributed to the Flemish painter Weesop, showing a tableau of the execution of Charles I, which depicts a small group of people, crowded around the scaffold, mopping up the King's spilt blood with their handkerchiefs.⁵² [FIG. 55] Similarly, a printed account of the trial and execution, published in 1684, recounts how after the King's beheading:

His Blood was taken up by divers Persons for different ends: By some as trophies of their Villany, by others as Reliques of a Martyr; and in some hath had the same effect by the Blessing of God, which was often found in his Sacred Touch when living.⁵³

Some of these relics, such as handkerchiefs stained with the blood of the King, were credited with miraculous abilities to cure the sick and the blind. Indeed, Charles I is "unique in that he is the only post-Reformation British monarch to be credited with healing miracles after his death".⁵⁴ Printed accounts detailing the "posthumous healings" affected by relics associated with the King, including a 1649 pamphlet which described the recovery of Mary Bayly, the 'Maid of Deptford', assumed a certain propaganda value, which helped to "confirm the legitimacy of the Royalist

See also: Scarisbrick, *Historic Rings*, p. 99.

⁵⁰ It is a tradition that continues even to this day; the 'Society of King Charles the Martyr', an Anglican association founded in 1894, aims to promote remembrance of King Charles' martyrdom and preserves a number of 'relics' reputedly associated with the King, including fragments from his beard, gloves, shirt, coffin and pall.

See: <http://skcm.org/gallery/relics/>

⁵¹ Marshall and Dalgleish (eds.), *Jewellery in Scotland*, p. 37.

⁵² Scarisbrick, *Jewellery in Britain*, p. 189; A. Lacey, *The Cult of King Charles the Martyr* (Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2003), p. 62.

⁵³ J. Nalson, *A true copy of the journal of the High Court of Justice, for the trial of K. Charles I as it was read in the House of Commons, and attested under the hand of Phelps, clerk to that infamous Court* (London, 1684).

⁵⁴ Lacey, *Cult of King Charles*, p. 62.

cause” and to emphasise the sanctity of Charles I’s martyrdom at the hands of his Parliamentary usurpers.⁵⁵

Of course, most of the jewellery which reputedly incorporated fragments of Charles I would have been worn as a mark of remembrance and regard, rather than being seen as some sort of miraculous object able to confer, in his corporeal absence, the healing powers associated with the ‘King’s Touch’. It was not that these jewels, by incorporating the hair and blood of the King, were primarily worn as some kind of holy relic or icon, but were, instead, essentially “memorials or commemorative tokens” of the King and his sufferings.⁵⁶

Indeed, Walsham makes clear that post-Reformation thought could clearly accommodate the implicit “differentiation between relic and pious memento”, problems only tended to arise when there was significant “slippage between souvenir and sacramental, [between] sign and receptacle of supernatural virtue”. These jewels were vehicles of memory rather than of miracles, and the apparent “charisma” of these keepsakes lay in their emotive and material value, rather than in any miraculous or divine characteristics.⁵⁷

Of course, the ways in which this jewellery was displayed and understood depended very much on context; time and circumstance influenced interpretation and reception:

This was a society in which the same item could simultaneously be a focus of spiritual reverence, an historical object that could arouse the intellectual interest of those who repudiated relic worship, and a source of aesthetic pleasure.⁵⁸

Thus, for some, mourning jewellery that memorialised the King contained the revered remains of a martyr, for others it presented a remarkable artefact or extraordinary souvenir from that fateful day, whilst in many cases it was also a valuable and refined piece of craftsmanship and decoration, which commemorated the loss of Charles I but also implied support for his son and the Stuart monarchy.⁵⁹

The pieces of surviving mourning jewellery which purportedly contain relics of the dead King tend to be of particularly fine workmanship and ornate in their design

⁵⁵ For a discussion of how the relics of Charles I were appropriated by Royalists whilst being accommodated into a Protestant worldview, see: Lacey, *Cult of King Charles*, pp. 61-65; Walsham, A., ‘Skeletons in the Cupboard: Relics after the English Reformation’, *Past and Present*, Supplement 5 (2010), pp. 135-138, 142.

⁵⁶ See also: British Museum, Museum Number: OA.2354, for a circular pendant depicting Charles I, supposedly made from lead obtained from the King’s coffin.

⁵⁷ Walsham, ‘Skeletons in the Cupboard’, pp. 134-38.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

⁵⁹ See also: British Museum, Museum Number: 1978,1002.43.

styles and materials. It is not surprising that the wealthy adherents of Charles I who commissioned such pieces obviously sought to house their precious and cherished vestiges of the King within casings considered appropriate to his (and their) standing and consequence.

One of the most ornate jewels takes the form of a large heart-shaped gold locket, embellished around the outside with pearls; enclosed inside is a crowned oval portrait miniature of Charles I with a skull and crossbones set below. The portrait of the King reputedly rests upon a ground of “Charles’ light brown hair and a fragment of the blood-stained shirt he wore at his execution”.⁶⁰ At the top of the three chains from which the pendant hangs is weeping eye - which doubtless once contained enamel – and which is a symbol that reoccurs on a number of Charles I memorial pendants. **[FIG. 56]**

Another extravagant gold reliquary pendant, though simpler in design, can also be seen in Figure 57. It is set with nine sizeable flat table-cut diamonds and the central teardrop-shaped stone covers the initials ‘CR’ fashioned from and crowned with gold wire; contained within is lock of hair and a pad of cloth, supposedly relics acquired at the King’s execution.⁶¹ **[FIG. 57]**

Not only did these lavish jewels provide striking and decorative ornaments for wear, but they also provided a stark representation and an immediate visual reminder of the King’s untimely death. The gold, diamonds, pearls, and lavish enamel work, which so often housed such valued and rare symbols of the King’s sacrifice, were beautiful in their own right, but, significantly, these pieces also afforded an immediate and physical link to Charles I. The jewels presented a condensed and evocative aide-mémoire of the King’s ultimate fate, a constant prompt to their Royalist patrons to remember the King and to carry on the struggle to see his son restored the throne.⁶²

This much simpler more austere constructed locket is striking in its simplicity and in the directness of its design. The royal cipher of King Charles I is fashioned from gold wire and set upon a backdrop of the King’s own hair; the

⁶⁰ National Museums Scotland, Accession Number: H.NF 20.

⁶¹ National Museums Scotland, Accession Number: H.NK 86. See also: Royal Collection Trust, Accession Number: RCIN 28993.

⁶² A 2010 exhibition of relics associated with King Charles I also displayed a rare silver-gilt and jewelled pendant reliquary in the form of a book; it opens to reveal a portrait bust of the King accompanied by a piece of cloth stained with blood, and snippets of hair displayed along the spine. S. Dicks, *The King’s Blood: Relics of King Charles I* (London: Watski, 2010), p. 9.

reverse of the gold locket is engraved with a forthright and unambiguous dedication: ‘CR Rex Martyr’.⁶³ [FIG. 58]

Some pieces of mourning jewellery commemorating Charles I were even more uncompromising in their intentions, often making visibly candid and frank reference to the King’s grisly death upon the scaffold in their imagery and designs. One of the most surprising examples takes the form of a gold locket, the back of which is beautifully enamelled with delicate flowers set upon a ground of celestial blue enamel, whilst a hinged lid is ornamented with the initials of the King. The attractive and elegant floral designs, however, are thrown into sharp relief by the contents of the locket, which opens to reveal the rather macabre spectacle of Charles’ disembodied head depicted in relief and enamelled to show the King’s pallid complexion and closed lifeless eyes.⁶⁴ [FIG. 59]

This frank, even rather shocking, portrayal of the dead King can be found similarly echoed in a contemporary painting, which depicts Charles I after his execution, eyes closed and his head stitched on, exposing the grisly mutilation to his neck.⁶⁵ [FIG. 60]

In a similar vein, this jewelled fob ornament, which features an enamelled portrait medallion of Charles I, is contained within a small gold box, the lid of which is inscribed not only with the date of the King’s death, but also features a conspicuous image of the executioner’s axe, poised and ready to strike the royal crown engraved below it.⁶⁶ [FIG. 61]

These jewels did not attempt to mask the unpleasant or distasteful nature of the King’s death, rather they drew explicit attention to the undeniably violent character of his demise, their shock value no doubt useful as a means of encouraging Royalist adherents to the cause and in emphasising the King’s courageous martyrdom. It is no surprise, for example, that alongside the imagery of Charles I and the executioner’s axe, the loop of the fob ornament is also inscribed with an express message urging and emboldening Royalist supporters: ‘o follow me’.

For other individuals, this jewellery was “not to be worn openly,” being revealed only to like-minded acquaintances, and often too dangerous to be overtly displayed during the precarious years of the Interregnum.⁶⁷ As McShane notes, many

⁶³ V&A, Museum Number: M.103-1662.

⁶⁴ British Museum, Museum Number: AF.2963.

⁶⁵ London, Museum Number: 46.78/573.

⁶⁶ Royal Collection Trust, Accession Number: RCIN 43840.

⁶⁷ Marshall and Dalgleish (eds.), *Jewellery in Scotland*, p. 44.

Royalist objects were produced during this period, but, certainly, “not without risk”.⁶⁸ It is for this reason that several pieces of mourning jewellery dedicated to Charles I, were designed in such a way as to disguise their true intent, with miniatures of the King and Royalist mottoes being neatly concealed from any casual or potentially unsympathetic observers.

In some rings, the portrait miniature might be enclosed within a locket bezel, or concealed beneath a decorative lid.⁶⁹ This rather lavish example possesses just such a contrivance, with an oval bezel, featuring a hinged cover set with a large diamond on top; elegant ornamental enamel work adeptly disguises the lid, which opens to reveal an enamelled portrait of Charles I.⁷⁰ **[FIG. 62]**

In a similar fashion, this ring looks like a rather unremarkable gold band, but, in truth, actually features a hidden inscription concealed around the interior of the hoop; known only to the wearer, the ring is engraved with the King’s initials and date of execution, and also features enamelled images of a crown and a death’s head.⁷¹ **[FIG. 63]**

Similarly, this small, unobtrusive black enamel locket is plain and unadorned on the outside; opening it, however, reveals a vivid portrait miniature of Charles I, whilst the lid is lustrously decorated with a weeping eye and inscribed with both the date of the King’s death and the rather poignant dedication: ‘Quis temperet a lacrymis’ [‘Who can refrain from tears’].⁷² **[FIG. 64]**

Many more small, easily concealable, and relatively affordable silver lockets were produced which commemorated King Charles I.⁷³ Some of these “silver loyalty badges” were made during the 1640s, but many others incorporate concealed portraits, as well as appropriate mottoes and emblems lamenting the loss of the King.⁷⁴ McShane has suggested that since these small lockets weighed “almost

⁶⁸ McShane, ‘Subjects and Objects’, p. 877.

⁶⁹ British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1437.

Sharp also notes a ring, the bezel of which was decorated with the four cardinal virtues; “touching a secret spring”, however, opened the case to reveal a hidden miniature of Charles I. He also refers to an elaborate and brightly coloured spray of enamelled flowers in which the central rose conceals, within its centre, a tiny portrait miniature of the King.

Sharp, A., ‘Notes on Stuart Jewellery’, *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, 57 (1922-23), pp. 227, 239-40.

⁷⁰ British Museum, Museum Number: AF. 1439.

⁷¹ Ashmolean Finger Ring Collection: ‘Mourning ring’, Accession Number: WA1990.48.

⁷² Museum of London, Museum Number: 80.271/57.

⁷³ Bury, *Sentimental*, pp. 8-9.

⁷⁴ Sharp, ‘Notes on Stuart Jewellery’, pp. 240-1.

See, for example: British Museum, Museum Number: 1954,1002.51; 1925,0216.1; National Museums Scotland, Accession Number: H.NK 81.

nothing” they proved to be relatively inexpensive and thus “cheap enough for the middling sorts” to readily purchase.⁷⁵ Indeed, several examples of these small locket survive, some superior in workmanship to others, but all noticeably fashioned according to a consistent design style.

Less extravagant but obviously popular and marketable to a much wider audience, these “loyal objects” were “designed to both express and to evoke love and loyalty”.⁷⁶ Naturally, a silver heart seems to have been a particularly favoured form; not only did it convey an obvious sense of love and regard for the monarchy, but it, perhaps, also allowed these lockets to be worn more openly, being easily dismissed as run-of-the-mill amatory tokens, and less liable to attract any unwanted interest or suspicion from overzealous Parliamentarians.⁷⁷

This example is illustrative of most of the surviving heart-shaped silver lockets that were made to mourn Charles I. Small in size, the obverse is inscribed with the King’s cipher, and the motto: ‘Prepared be To follow me’; the reverse is decorated with a bleeding heart, pierced by two arrows, and an equally emotive maxim: ‘I liue and dy in loyaltye’. Moreover, the interior of the locket is also set with a medallion of the King and engraved with the forlorn pronouncement: ‘I morne for monerchie’.⁷⁸ Other examples were similarly engraved with images of a weeping eye or a death’s head device.⁷⁹ **[FIG. 65]**

Other heart-shaped mourning pendants, dedicated to the memory of Charles I, were formed from jet, its dark colour infinitely suited to its sombre purpose. This example, made from polished jet, has a face sculpted with a depiction of the King in profile, whilst the reverse is engraved with a jawless skull, which sits below the inscribed date of the King’s execution.⁸⁰ A more ostentatious version of this same style of pendant was exhibited in 2010; comparable in most regards, the main

⁷⁵ McShane’s assessment of mid-seventeenth-century silver prices suggests an approximate value of “about 5s. per ounce”.

McShane, ‘Subjects and Objects’, p. 876.

⁷⁶ McShane, ‘Subjects and Objects’, p. 884.

⁷⁷ Silver heart-shaped lockets certainly seem to have been a popular form of love token in mid-seventeenth-century England, and many examples have survived: British Museum, Museum Number: OA.1407; OA.1408; OA.1409; M.7502; Museum of London, Museum Number: MoL A10488; MoL A7502; PAS, Finds Database, Unique ID: IOW-3B50B4; NARC-5BD1F6; DENO-FA82E5.

⁷⁸ V&A, Museum Number: M.811-1926.

⁷⁹ For other examples see: British Museum, Museum Number: M.7289; M.7291; Museum of London, Museum Number: 62.120/25; PAS, Finds Database, Unique ID: ESS-259730; V&A, Museum Number: 827-1864; National Museums Scotland, Accession Number: H.NK 80; Dicks, *King’s Blood*, p. 22.

⁸⁰ Science Museum, Object Number: A69183.

variances being that the second piece is mounted in gold, its surface is duller, and three gold rivets in the form of flowers have been fixed into the pendant.⁸¹ [FIG. 66]

Following the Restoration of King Charles II in 1660, jewellery commemorating his father could now be openly displayed, indeed, in many ways it was now “diplomatically desirable” to do so.⁸² With the monarchy re-established, the wearing of mourning jewellery for Charles I was an expedient way of publicly proclaiming one’s faithful and sustained adherence to the newly restored regime. Moreover, a special service was added to the 1662 Book of Common Prayer, and a statute issued decreeing that the anniversary of the King’s execution was to be observed with a day of fasting and prayer throughout the Kingdom.⁸³ The wearing of this mourning jewellery visibly acknowledged support for King Charles II, but it also bolstered the efforts of the newly restored King to see his father honoured and commemorated as a royal martyr. Thus, it is likely that mourning jewellery, like the widespread keeping of January 30th as a fast day, continued to be worn for at least a good few years after the Restoration.⁸⁴

McShane has contended that the Restoration marked a real turning point in the way in which the affective relationship between subject and state was materially articulated and forged. The ensuing ‘explosion of cheap loyal goods’ produced and consumed during the second half of the seventeenth century (particularly in the years which followed the Restoration and, later, the Glorious Revolution) in some ways served to “domesticate” the monarchy, bringing them into the households and everyday lives of the countless number of people who purchased and utilised such commonplace commemorative objects. These “cheap and accessible political commodities” expressed popular feeling towards the monarchy, who were commemorated and portrayed across a variety of objects, including jewellery.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Dicks, *King’s Blood*, p. 20.

Another probable example is in the British Museum, also made from jet and mounted in gold. See: British Museum, Museum Number: 1916,0304.1.

⁸² Marshall and Dalgleish (eds.), *Jewellery in Scotland*, p. 44.

⁸³ Scarisbrick, *Jewellery in Britain*, p. 189; Tomlinson, H., ‘Commemorating Charles I – King and Martyr?’, *History Today*, Vol. 45, 2 (Feb., 1995), p. 12.

⁸⁴ Tomlinson, ‘Commemorating Charles I’, pp. 17-18.

⁸⁵ McShane, ‘Subjects and Objects’, pp. 872-885.

A variety of silver medals, badges, and small ornaments, were produced for wear portraying King Charles II. See, for example: British Museum, Museum Number: 1954,1002.144; M.7427; M.7433; M.7435; M.7436; M.7499; V&A, Museum Number: T.451-1990.

In 1689, and perhaps retained long after the King’s marriage or acquired in response current events concerning the monarchy, a newspaper advertisement appealed for the return of a number of lost items of jewellery, including: “a Medal of K Charles the Second and Queen Katherine, a little bigger than a Crown Piece”.

In a similar vein to the Charles I mourning pendants, for example, many small heart-shaped silver lockets were produced to mark the marriage of King Charles II to Catherine of Braganza in 1662.⁸⁶ Many of these “material expressions of love and loyalty” may have continued to be worn as tokens of mourning when these monarchs died, but specific mourning jewellery was also produced.⁸⁷

For example, in much the same style, this silver heart-shaped locket commemorates the death of Henry, Duke of Gloucester (1640-1660), the brother of Charles II, who died from smallpox not long after the King’s return to England; it features a silver-gilt bust of the young prince and is also engraved with a skull and crossbones, and the inscription: ‘H D of gloster’.⁸⁸ [FIG. 67]

Oman, however, has suggested that when Charles II died in 1685, there was no established precedent for the distribution of mourning rings upon the death of a monarch,⁸⁹ and, in his view, the rings and other jewellery associated with the death of Charles I had been purely political in motive.⁹⁰ Although the jewellery dedicated to the memory of Charles I undeniably possessed certain political undertones, much of it was, nevertheless, an emotive testament to feelings of real poignancy in response to the death of the King. Moreover, the pervasiveness of this jewellery, and the growing popularity of sentimental jewellery as a whole, does seem to have laid down a marker for the commemorative and mourning strategies associated with the reigns of future monarchs.

Indeed, as Scarisbrick has noted, “during their lifetime all the descendants of Charles I gave portrait rings to supporters of their particular cause, and these might be converted to memorial rings, with the addition of appropriate inscriptions, dates, and symbols,” after their deaths.⁹¹ For example, in this group of pendants and slides,

Classified ads, *London Gazette* (London, England), February 21, 1689 – February 25, 1689; Issue 2430.

⁸⁶ See, for example: Hawkins, *Medallic Illustrations*, p. 484; British Museum, Museum Number: M.7500; M.7501; M.7503; M.7504; M.7505; M.7506; M.7507; M.7508; M.7510; V&A, Museum Number: M.104:1,2-1962; PAS, Finds Database, Unique ID: SOMDOR-C6EDD1; BUC-25A347; SUR-558BB7.

⁸⁷ McShane, ‘Subjects and Objects’, p. 883.

⁸⁸ The National Trust purchased the locket in 2011, see:

<https://nttreasurehunt.wordpress.com/2011/02/28/the-locket-and-the-coffer/>.

⁸⁹ Bower Marsh suggested that rings bequeathed by Richard II (d.1400) “to each of the five bishops and four great nobles,” whom he named as executors, represented an early example of memorial rings being distributed as a customary testamentary legacy.

Marsh (ed.), *Memorial Rings*, p. 1.

⁹⁰ Oman, *British Rings*, p. 75.

⁹¹ Scarisbrick, *Rings: Symbols of Wealth, Power and Affection*, p. 86.

See, Dalton, *Franks Bequest*, pp. 197-199, for examples of rings with portrait miniatures of royalty.

various monarchs are depicted according to a similar design aesthetic; the earliest monarch to be shown is Charles I, and the small enamelled portrait presents the King dressed in armour, with a small crown visible in the background.⁹² Charles II,⁹³ Mary of Modena,⁹⁴ William III,⁹⁵ and Anne,⁹⁶ are all depicted in a comparable fashion, with a small crown displayed in the backdrop of the portrait.

In some instances, such as the slide that depicts Mary II, a skull has taken the place of the royal crown; this may have been because the piece was manufactured following the Queen's death, or the crown was, perhaps, later painted over to convert the piece into an appropriate mourning accessory.⁹⁷ Similar pieces, depicting Charles I,⁹⁸ Charles II,⁹⁹ and Mary's husband, William III,¹⁰⁰ can also be found with a skull rather than a crown displayed behind the sovereign. **[FIG. 68]**

The mourning of Charles I had served to promote a distinctive response to deaths of future monarchs, namely, the creation and supply of memorial jewellery. Mourning rings were certainly produced following the death of Charles II, and a particularly notable example even incorporates a short verse, written on a heart-shaped piece of paper, which is set under the bezel of the gold ring:¹⁰¹

On the Death of K. CHARLES ye II.
A greater Prince ye Throne did never grace
Nor to a better ever left his Place:
Charles is reviv'd while Royal JAMES does Reign;
And all our loss well paid in such a gain.

A particularly interesting piece of jewellery - a filigree cross, manufactured c.1760-1800 - looks to have been made up to incorporate six recycled portrait miniatures of various monarchs (Charles I, Mary II, William III, Anne, George I, George II) which had previously been set into the bezels of earlier finger rings. See Curator's comments for further information: British Museum, Museum Number: 1978.1002.1200.

⁹² Museum of London, Museum Number: A7507.

⁹³ V&A, Museum Number: M.9-1960; National Museums Scotland, Accession Number: H.NK 85.

⁹⁴ V&A, Museum Number: M.105-1962.

⁹⁵ V&A, Museum Number: M.106-1962; British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1451.

⁹⁶ Marshall and Dagleish (eds.), *Jewellery in Scotland*, p. 49.

⁹⁷ V&A, Museum Number: M.109-1962; Sharp, 'Notes on Stuart Jewellery', p. 238. See similar ring: British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1450. For other pendants featuring portrait miniatures, see: Museum of London, Museum Number: 62.120/4; 62.136/4.

⁹⁸ British Museum, Museum Number: AF.3002; Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, Accession Number: 1928M387; Christie's, Sale 7731: 'A William and Mary silver-mounted shagreen case containing three Charles I memorial pendants', London (2 June, 2009), Lot 187.

⁹⁹ British Museum, Museum Number: AF.3001; Museum of London, Museum Number: 62.120/3.

¹⁰⁰ Christie's, Sale 7731: 'Two William III memorial pendants and a William III commemorative pendant', London (2 June, 2009), Lot 189. See also: Museum of London, Museum Number: 62.120/6; 62.136/5.

¹⁰¹ For other mourning rings, see: V&A, Museum Number: 927-1871; Scarisbrick, *Ancestral Jewels*, p. 43.

See also: East Sussex Record Office, [Copy of the will of Richard Watts of Hastings, jurat] MIL 2/10/1, 1 December, 1691, in which a mourning ring for Charles II features as a testamentary bequest, so that it functioned afresh as a personal token of remembrance.

Died Feb. 6. 1684.¹⁰²

Like some of the more political pieces associated with his father, the function of this ring was not just to mourn the dead King; it also displays certain partisan objectives in seeking to celebrate and promote the formerly disputed succession of Charles II's brother, the Catholic King James II.

Even the short-lived reign of James II, however, obviously succeeded in inspiring the creation of at least some mourning jewellery, with this surviving ring produced when the former King died in 1701.¹⁰³ Made in a style very much in line with other mourning rings dating from around this period, the decorated black enamelled band is set with an oval bezel, which is topped with a piece of faceted rock crystal; beneath lies a monogram –‘JR’– picked out in gold wire, whilst two angels, made from coloured silk, hold aloft a majestic crown.¹⁰⁴ **[FIG. 69]**

Moreover, whilst the ring, as Oman has noted, is “typically English” in style, James II himself actually died in exile in France; thus, it could be that this ring is not merely a straightforward memorial item, but, rather, a piece of “Jacobite propaganda”.¹⁰⁵ Like earlier mourning jewellery associated with Charles I, this ring holds potentially subversive undertones, mourning one dead King but essentially also proclaiming tacit support for a displaced heir to the throne, in this case, the ‘Old Pretender’, James Francis Edward Stuart.¹⁰⁶

Less controversially, the daughter of James, Queen Mary II, certainly did inspire the enthusiastic creation of a number of mourning jewels when she died from smallpox in 1694.¹⁰⁷ Various mourning rings were produced, but ribbon slides also seem to have been especially popular.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, as Bury has confirmed, it is likely that a number of London goldsmiths, seeking to capitalise on the public demand for such items, would have manufactured an assortment of “mass-produced”, relatively

¹⁰² British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1489.

¹⁰³ See also: Royal Collection Trust, Accession Number: RCIN 65445.

¹⁰⁴ V&A, Museum Number: M.21.1929.

¹⁰⁵ Oman, *British Rings*, p. 75.

¹⁰⁶ See also: National Museums Scotland, Accession Number: H.NA 630. This mourning slide possibly also commemorates James II, with a monogram – ‘JR’– set upon a ground of plaited hair, which is surrounded by the legend, formed from gold wire: ‘God Save The King’. Also: H.NA 614.

¹⁰⁷ Her elaborate funeral and the mourning response, which greeted her death at the relatively young age of 32, expressed the despondency felt by many when she died. Indeed, Schwoerer has asserted that: “a greater number of sermons, elegies, and medals appeared to memorialize Mary’s death than that of any other monarch”. Schwoerer, L., ‘Images of Mary II, 1689-95’, *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 42, 4 (Winter, 1989), p. 743.

For an example of a bronze mourning medal, see: National Museums Scotland, Accession Number: A1991.58.

¹⁰⁸ For rings, see: British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1505; Museum of London, Museum Number: 62.120/5; Oman, *British Rings*, p. 125.

modest mourning accessories, with standardised components, so that they might be quickly and economically made for sale.¹⁰⁹

Interestingly, a few months before Mary's death, an enterprising advertisement appeared which, perhaps inspired by previous royal commemorative distributions, contended that "Medals of Silver and Copper for Funerals" might be a better personal investment than mourning rings as means of economically and prudently dispensing mourning tokens:

All such persons of Quality who desire to continue their Memories, may best do it by Copper Medals, the impression being so much better than the Metal they will never be melted, but remain forever, and the lowness of the price will extend them in the greater numbers.

Any Gentleman may for fifty pounds have 400 Copper Medals, with his Arms and a Motto on the one side, and an Inscription with his Name, Seat, Age and Day of Death on the other....

The larger Silver Medals are about 8 s. price apiece, the lesser ones are about 5s. price, and the Copper Medals are 2 s. apiece...and are to be sold by all those that furnish for Funerals, and most Book Sellers in England.

Note, that a hundred Medals is the least number that will be Coin'd for any person, which if in haste, will be done in six hours time.¹¹⁰

Although advertised at a cost similar to the standard mourning ring, the lack of surviving medals or instructions in wills detailing the procurement of such tokens amongst even wealthier testators, would suggest that the idea never really caught on in replacing mourning rings as the default choice for a favoured funerary and commemorative token.

In terms of jewellery dedicated to the memory of the Queen, this mourning slide – subsequently converted into a pendant – is decorated with the Queen's crowned monogram, set above *memento mori* symbols of a skull and crossbones, and surrounded by the inscription: 'MEMENTO MARIA REGINA OBIT, 28 DECEMBRIS 94'.¹¹¹ [FIG. 70]

In typical Baroque-style, much of this late seventeenth-century mourning jewellery incorporated enamel work, with elements fashioned from gold wire; other items might feature a hair work component, and pieces were routinely set with prominent covers of faceted rock crystal.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Bury, *Sentimental*, p. 16.

¹¹⁰ Classified ads, *Collection for Improvement of Husbandry and Trade* (London, England), Friday, September 28, 1694; Issue 113.

¹¹¹ V&A, Museum Number: M.10-1948.

For other memorial slides which commemorate Mary II, see also: V&A, Museum Number: M.107-1962; Museum of London, Museum Number: 62.120/13; 62.120/26; Royal Collection Trust, Accession Number: RCIN 28988; 43843.

¹¹² For example, an archetypal memorial slide produced following the death of Charles II, see: Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, Accession Number: 1928M346.

This memorial pendant, for example, also contains the crowned monogram of Mary II, set over a background of woven hair, with a small enamelled skull featured on the reverse.¹¹³ [FIG. 71] Similarly, an appeal for the recovery of a stolen gold locket – “with a Crown and Cypher of Queen Marys and a Cut Crystal” – also appeared in a newspaper advertisement of 1704.¹¹⁴

Mourning jewellery of a similar style was also produced when Mary’s husband, King William III, died in 1702.¹¹⁵ For example, over a year later, a newspaper advertisement appeared in which a London goldsmith sought to retrieve a lost “Hair Ring”; not only was there a “Guiny reward” offered in return for the ring, but it also sounded lavish in composition, being “set with Diamonds, and on the Hair W. M. and a Crown over it”.¹¹⁶

Considering the events surrounding William’s accession to the throne over a decade before, much of his mourning jewellery was, unsurprisingly, “strongly political in tone”.¹¹⁷ This colourful mourning pendant, which also contains hair, is set with the King’s gold monogram, framed inside an enamelled pavilion which is bathed in a heavenly light; the pointed inclusion of Britannia, accompanied by angels who point towards a celestial crown, unambiguously portrays William’s death as the passing of a divinely elected and rightful King of England, Scotland and Ireland.¹¹⁸ [FIG. 72]

Even more forthright and fulsome in paying homage to the dead King, this mourning slide – which has later been converted into a brooch – frames a wistful and plaintive verse dedicated to the King:

On ye Death of K. WILLIAM III. Mourn Justice Liberty Religion, Peace. Lament your Royal Patron’s sad Decease. Your brave Protector Peace, is now no more, Whose Greatness was all good, & kind his Pow’r, Whilst widow’d Europe fills the Air with Cries Defenceless nations weep his obsequies. Ob. Mar...¹¹⁹ [FIG. 73]

¹¹³ V&A, Museum Number: M.7-1960.

For a comparable mourning pendant created in memory of Queen Anne, see: Museum of London, Museum Number: A7514.

¹¹⁴ Classified ads, *Post Man and the Historical Account* (London, England), September 14, 1704 – September 16, 1704; Issue 1318.

Interestingly, listed amongst the items stolen was also a “small Picture of King Charles the 1st, Enamelled with blue on the back”, perhaps a similar version to the Museum of London mourning pendant illustrated in FIG. 68.

¹¹⁵ For a mourning ring, see: British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1504.

A plain gold posy ring – inscribed ‘God bless K Wm & Q Mary’ – may also have been put to later use as a mourning ring. See: British Museum, Museum Number: 1961,1202.163.

¹¹⁶ Classified ads, *Daily Courant* (London, England), Thursday, December 2, 1703; Issue 408.

¹¹⁷ Scarisbrick, *Jewellery in Britain*, p. 191.

¹¹⁸ V&A, Museum Number: M.289-1962.

¹¹⁹ V&A, Museum Number: M.108-1962.

Mourning rings commemorating Queen Anne, who died in 1714, followed the prevailing fashions of the day.¹²⁰ This example, illustrative of a style of mourning ring customary during the early decades of the 1700s, features a black enamelled hoop and a conspicuous coffin-shaped bezel containing a skull and crowned monogram atop a ground of plaited hair.¹²¹ [FIG. 74]

Moreover, a contemporary pamphlet detailing the foiled Jacobite risings of 1715, also includes an interesting reference to a mourning ring associated with the Queen; describing the events surrounding the arrest of politician, Sir William Wyndham (c.1688-1740) and the questioning of one of his servants, it relates the discovery of a supposedly incriminating Jacobite ring:

...When finding nothing but a Gold Cypher Hair-Ring, with a Crown on the Top of it...the Magistrate cry'd out, *This is the Pretender's Hair, I know it full well; I know the Man and his Principles so well that it can be nothing else.* But it appear'd at last to be a Mourning-Ring, in Memory of the late Queen ANNE, with *A.R.* wrought in it; which gave the Court no small Diversion at the Inconsiderateness of that Gentleman's Assertions.¹²²

Although, in this case, the ring eventually proved to be innocuous, jewellery associated with the Jacobite cause was most certainly produced in the ensuing years following the deposal of James II. Termed, rather perceptively by Scarisbrick, as the “jewellery of treason” and by Murray Pittock in his study of Jacobite material culture as “treacherous objects”, this class of commemorative political jewellery was worn by adherents of the Stuart cause, who hoped to realise the restoration to the English throne of James II and later his son and grandson.¹²³ The advantageous propaganda value of such jewellery meant that numerous pieces were produced during the eighteenth century, particularly in support of the charismatic ‘Bonnie Prince Charlie’.¹²⁴

Though many of these pieces may have been produced as commemorative mementoes, affirming and nurturing support for the exiled Stuarts, the very political turmoil and struggle that had prompted their creation also meant that some pieces, consequently, were fashioned primarily as tokens of mourning. A number of

¹²⁰ See also: British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1506; Royal Collection Trust, Accession Number: RCIN 28985; Marsh (ed.), *Memorial Rings*, p. 21.

¹²¹ Ashmolean, Finger Ring Collection, Accession Number: WA1897.CDEF.F653.

¹²² C. Andrews, *A Full and Authentick Narrative of the intended Horrid Conspiracy and Invasion...* (London, 1715), p. 17.

¹²³ Scarisbrick, D., ‘Jewellery of Treason’, *Country Life*, Vol. 182 (March, 1988), pp. 128-9; Pittock, M., ‘Treacherous Objects: Towards a Theory of Jacobite Material Culture’, *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (2011), pp. 39-63.

¹²⁴ Marshall and Dalglish (eds.), *Jewellery in Scotland*, pp. 50-1; Scarisbrick, *Jewellery in Britain*, pp. 266-69.

memorial rings - “with names, and so on, in reserve on white or black enamel, often in scrolls” - were produced to commemorate the various individuals who were executed in the wake of the 1745 Jacobite rebellion which culminated in defeat at the Battle of Culloden the following year.¹²⁵

Robert Lyon, the episcopal chaplain of Lord Ogilvy’s regiment, who was hanged in 1746, is commemorated with a black enamelled scroll-style ring, which also includes a fragment of hair set under the bezel,¹²⁶ Oman has concluded that the ring – in commemorating a person of “no political importance” – was most probably commissioned as a “record of private grief”.¹²⁷

The death of the infamous Simon Fraser, Lord Lovat (1667/8–1747) also prompted the creation of a similar style of mourning ring; the inside of the hoop is notably engraved with his final stirring words, uttered upon the scaffold before he was beheaded: ‘Dulce et Decorum est pro Patria Mori’.¹²⁸

Lord Lovat is further commemorated, collectively, in a mourning ring known as the ‘Four Peers Ring’.¹²⁹ Thought to have been made by the Edinburgh goldsmith Ebenezer Oliphant, the ring commemorates the deaths of the four noblemen - Lovat, Balmerino, Derwentwater, and Kilmarnock - along with seventeen officers, who were all executed 1746-7. The gold and white enamelled ring allocates uppermost prominence to the four peers, with their initials and dates of death set around a small gold axe upon the bezel; the two entwined bands, which culminate at the shoulders into a white rose and a thistle, form the hoop, which carries the initials and dates, associated with the seventeen other individuals who perished for their cause.¹³⁰ **[FIG. 75]**

In much the same way, those from across the political divide were equally keen to “win the propaganda war”.¹³¹ Members of the House of Hanover are also commemorated in portrait rings, and towards the end of the period resourceful artists such as James Tassie (1735-99) began mass-producing paste cameos, or intaglios, for

¹²⁵ Stevenson, R. B. K., ‘Jacobite Rings’, *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, Vol. 80 (1945-6), p. 130.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

¹²⁷ Oman, *British Rings*, pp. 67-68.

¹²⁸ Stevenson, ‘Jacobite Rings’, p. 127. See also, National Museums Scotland, Accession Number: H.NJ88.

¹²⁹ At least three examples of this ring exist, including one containing a sample of hair and the letters ‘CS’ worked in gold wire, at the back of the bezel. See: British Museum, Museum Number: .1418; AF.1490; National Museums Scotland, Accession Number: H.NJ 154.

¹³⁰ Stevenson, ‘Jacobite Rings’, p. 129

¹³¹ Marshall and Dagleish (eds.), *Jewellery in Scotland*, pp. 50-51.

popular sale.¹³² Some of these rings may have continued to be worn after the deaths of successive royals, by monarchists and supporters keen to display their fidelity to the Crown, but specific mourning jewellery was obviously also commissioned.

In 1766, for example, a few months after the death of the Duke of Cumberland (1721-65), it was being reported that “several Patriotic Gentlemen have lately given Orders for Mourning Rings, to be worn in Remembrance of his late Royal Highness...”; whilst Jacobite jewellery may have lionised the ‘martyrs’ who heroically perished in pursuit of an ill-fated cause, even the belligerent ‘Butcher’ of Culloden could inspire his supporters to mark his passing.¹³³

Even the generally unpopular George I managed to inspire the creation of at least one English mourning ring, when he died abroad in 1727.¹³⁴ Although the ring is made according to a fashionable type, it is also, uncommonly, made from silver rather than gold.¹³⁵

Likewise, the mourning ring made in memory of Queen Caroline (1683-1737), consort of George II, is an even more frugal construction, modestly fashioned from black enamelled copper.¹³⁶ Probably made for general sale, the ring was, perhaps, a more economical version of the “great Number of Mourning Rings” which were reported to have been produced in preparation for her funeral in December 1737.¹³⁷

Interestingly, an entry in the diary of a Dr Richard Wilkes, a physician living in the West Midlands, not only detailed the local production of Japanned buckles, which might be utilised for mourning, but he also recorded the making and selling of economical mourning rings as souvenirs in memory of the Queen, nearby in Bilston, probably similar to the copper example described above:

Upon the Death of Queen Caroline mourning Rings handsomly enamelld wth this Inscription on the outside Qu. Car. ob . 20. Sept. 1737. AEt. 54 . were sold at 4/ a Dozen, & lookt very little inferior to those made of Gold, especially upon a Gentleman’s Finger. All Sorts of Toys are made of this [Bath] metal at Bilston as well as in London,¹³⁸

¹³² For rings with portrait miniatures see: Dalton, *Franks Bequest*, pp. 199-200; Scarisbrick, *Historic Rings*, pp. 115-7; Oman, *British Rings*, p. 69.

¹³³ News, *St. James’s Chronicle or the British Evening Post* (London, England), January 2, 1766 – January 4, 1766; Issue 755.

¹³⁴ For a memorial brooch, containing hair, which is also dedicated to the King, see: Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, Accession Number: 1928M368.

¹³⁵ Marsh (ed.), *Memorial Rings*, p. 32.

¹³⁶ British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1507.

¹³⁷ News, *Old Whig or The Consistent Protestant* (London, England), Thursday, December 1, 1737; Issue 143.

¹³⁸ Staffordshire Record Office, [Journal entry (in Journal of Dr Richard Wilkes, physician, of Willenhall, 1736-38)] 5350/pp 110-111, Dec, 1737.

Her husband, George II, was also commemorated with mourning rings, when he died in 1760.¹³⁹ Indeed, some of these memorial rings seemingly retained their appeal for sometime afterwards; a trial at the Old Bailey in 1773, for example, detailed the theft of a “mourning ring for King George the Second” – valued at 10s. – in which the female prosecutor stated to having had the ring “about a twelvemonth”, but this was still well over a decade since the King had actually died.¹⁴⁰

Though any real political threat had effectively dissipated with the failure of the ‘45, jewellery commemorating key figures associated with Jacobitism continued to be worn throughout the eighteenth century and beyond. Indeed, portrait rings and other jewellery commemorating Charles I, in particular, “had a long future”, worn not just in the wake of the events of 1649, but also – and sometimes being re-set – as “badges of political loyalty” in response to the deposal of James II and his heirs.¹⁴¹ This was not perhaps mourning jewellery in the truest sense, but Charles I appeared on a number of eighteenth-century “crypto-Jacobite” rings, as a familiar figure of defiance and the progenitor of the ‘rightful’ heirs to the throne.¹⁴² Similarly, Pittock has referred to the apparent referencing and use of the image of Charles I in Jacobite material culture as a kind of “false loyalism”.¹⁴³

Indeed, the mourning jewellery of Charles I lived on even into the nineteenth century, as the spirit of Romanticism helped to revive cultural interest in the forlorn and tragic saga of the Jacobites. The popular appeal of Sir Walter Scott’s *Waverley* novels – the first, published in 1814 – also helped to create a romantic mythology and a popular interest in the doomed Jacobite uprisings, which had taken place a century before. A ‘Stuart Exhibition’, held in London in 1889, further piqued Victorian interest, and a number of jewels and other ‘relics’, showcased at this event, were also auctioned for sale the following year.¹⁴⁴

A kind of mourning jewellery – though probably designated more accurately as a historical souvenir – was also created, when the coffin of Charles I was discovered in the Royal vault at St George’s Chapel, Windsor, during preparations for the burial

¹³⁹ British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1508; Scarisbrick, *Historic Rings*, p. 134; PAS, Finds Database, Unique ID: WMID-888880.

¹⁴⁰ Old Bailey Proceedings Online, April 1773, Trial of William Collins, Thomas Oats, Thomas Spooner (t17730421-10).

¹⁴¹ Scarisbrick, *Rings: Jewelry of Power, Love and Loyalty*, p. 188.

¹⁴² Oman, *British Rings*, p. 67. For examples of rings, see: Scarisbrick, *Ancestral Jewels*, p. 69; British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1446; V&A, Museum Number: M.1-1909; Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, Accession Number: 1935M547.267; Scarisbrick, *Historic Rings*, p. 117.

¹⁴³ Pittock, ‘Traacherous Objects’, p. 53.

¹⁴⁴ ‘Sale of Stuart Relics’, *British Architect*, 1874-1919; November 21, 1890; *British Periodicals*, p. 382.

of the Duchess of Brunswick (1737-1813).¹⁴⁵ The Prince Regent had the coffin opened in the presence of his physician, Sir Henry Hallford, and a number of mementoes of the dead King were taken, including locks of his hair, which were then later set into several commemorative lockets and rings.¹⁴⁶ [FIG. 76]

The Iconography of Death and Sentiment

*Pretty and precious gift, it shows to mee
Both puritie, and perpetuity;
For whilst the Gold thy pure love does commend,
The ring instructs my thanks to know no end.*¹⁴⁷

Some jewellery historians have portrayed the death of Charles I as a decisive watershed for the development of mourning jewellery as a conventionally recognised constituent of seventeenth-century mourning custom and practice.¹⁴⁸ Bower Marsh, for example, saw in the Royalist commemorations of the King, a direct stimulus for the subsequent “increase, if not the origin” of the memorial ring.¹⁴⁹ Oman has been less enthusiastic of this interpretation, keen to stress the presence of mourning jewellery even before the events of 1649, but he does concede that there was certainly a “profusion” in the distribution of personalised mourning jewellery in the decades after the Restoration.¹⁵⁰

Indeed, the whole field of sentimental jewellery was witnessing a surge in popularity, as the themes of love and friendship, not just mourning, occasioned the production of various commemorative mementoes and keepsakes. Some of the decorative motifs and emblematic devices they shared were alike, and it is often only through judicious interpretation, or the advantage of an accompanying inscription that the intention of the piece becomes apparent. Hearts and cherubs were used on both mourning and sentimental items, and “many layers of meaning” might be encompassed within the materials and appearance of the ornament.

¹⁴⁵ Hair obtained when the coffin of Edward IV was opened in 1789, was also set into a memorial ring. See: Murdoch (ed.), *Treasures and Trinkets*, pp. 43, 123.

¹⁴⁶ See: The Fitzwilliam Museum, Collection Explorer, Object Number: M.97-1961; Royal Collection Trust, Accession Number: RCIN 43778; 43819; British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1491.

¹⁴⁷ Stevenson, ‘To Mr. R. C. upon The Mourning Ring he sent mee’ (London, 1645).

¹⁴⁸ Luthi, *Sentimental Jewellery*, p. 4; S. Nehama, *In Death Lamented: The Tradition of Anglo-American Mourning Jewelry* (Massachusetts: Massachusetts Historical Society, 2012), p. 16; Becker, *Antique and Twentieth Century Jewellery*, p. 84.

¹⁴⁹ Marsh (ed.), *Memorial Rings*, p. 1.

¹⁵⁰ Oman, ‘Mourning Rings’, p. 72.

Indeed, particularly during the seventeenth century, the “themes of love and death were closely identified and intermingled” and so it is unsurprising that “the souvenirs of living loves and dead ones frequently looked alike”.¹⁵¹

Hair became an increasingly important constituent of sentimental jewellery and was used in a range of both mourning and amatory mementoes.¹⁵² As we have already seen, Royalist memorial tokens made astute use of both hair and the favourably adaptable symbolism of the heart. Another commemorative jewel associated with Charles I illustrates “just how closely the commemoration of love and death were associated in the seventeenth century”.¹⁵³

A small enamelled gold heart, from the Museum of London, is mounted with a lock of hair, believed to have been cut from the head of the King, and later presented by Henrietta Maria to her page, Ralph Creyke.¹⁵⁴ An almost identical pair of jewels – possibly worn as earrings – can be found in the collections at Ham House, in which a small red and a black enamelled heart both feature locks of hair reputedly cut from the head of Robert Devereux, second earl of Essex (1565-1601) prior to his execution in 1601.¹⁵⁵ **[FIG. 77]**

These jewels, in encompassing both the tacit passion embodied by the emblem of the heart and including locks of hair, a gift commonly exchanged between couples, blurs the boundary between commemoration of love and regard and the memorialisation of the deceased. This notion of jewellery situated upon a seemingly liminal boundary between life and death is powerfully evoked in John Souch’s 1635 painting, *Sir Thomas Aston at the Deathbed of his Wife*.¹⁵⁶ Part of the iconographic detailing of the painting includes the insertion of mourning jewellery, which appears comparable to the heart-shaped mementoes associated with Charles I and the Earl of Essex.¹⁵⁷

In the painting, Sir Thomas Aston sports a heart-shaped death’s head jewel, fastened to his sash; it is a wearable *memento mori*, accompanying other inscriptions and emblems positioned around the room, which also allude to death and mortality.

¹⁵¹ Gere, ‘Rings from 1500-1900’, in Ward *et al.* (eds), *The Ring*, p. 97; Bury, *Sentimental*, pp. 5-6, 15.

¹⁵² PAS, Finds Database, Unique ID: SOM-DDF682.

¹⁵³ G. C. Munn, *The Triumph of Love: Jewellery, 1530-1930* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993), p. 43.

¹⁵⁴ Murdoch (ed.), *Treasures and Trinkets*, pp. 43, 45, 121.

¹⁵⁵ Thanks go to Tracey Davis, conservation assistant at the National Trust, for providing further information regarding both of these objects.

¹⁵⁶ Souch, John, ‘Sir Thomas Aston at the Deathbed of his Wife’ (1635), Manchester City Galleries, Accession Number: 1927.150.

¹⁵⁷ Munn, *Triumph of Love*, p. 44.

The “social body” of his wife, kneeling at the foot of bed – in contrast to the “natural body” of her corpse, depicted as a result of her death in childbed – is adorned with a small silver heart-shaped pendant, fixed to her bodice by a black bow, from which hangs a lock of brown hair, perhaps that of Sir Thomas.¹⁵⁸ [FIG. 78]

This potential exchange or permeability between the spheres of love and death, during the seventeenth century, is also reflected in the work of the metaphysical poets. For example, in *The Relique*, Donne, in celebrating an enduring love, imagined it through the discovery of his final resting place, where, with lovers entombed together, one would find: “A bracelet of bright haire about the bone”.¹⁵⁹ More bitter in tone, in *The Funeral*, Donne, this time as the spurned lover, imagined his burial accompanied by: “That subtle wreath of hair which crowns mine arm”.¹⁶⁰

These bracelets of hair, however, were not just exchanged between lovers, they were also utilised as mourning accessories, such as when Mary Verney wrote to her husband, Sir Ralph, in 1648, following the death of their young daughter, Peg, enquiring:

...if you have enough of my deare girles haire to make bracelets I know you could nott send a more acceptable thing than every one of your sisters a bracelet.¹⁶¹

As Marvell had reminded his ‘Coy Mistress’: “The Grave’s a fine and private place, but none I think do there embrace”.¹⁶² Accordingly, allusions to mortality or the use of *memento mori* symbolism, combined with romantic intimations, was an approach also reflected in some of the sentimental jewellery of the period. As we have already observed, rings bearing amatory posies were sometimes converted, through the addition of appropriate imagery, into mourning rings upon the death of a spouse.

However, there are also many examples of posies, clearly meant for use on rings to be exchanged between couples, which already refer unequivocally to death and dying. These include such forthright statements, as: ‘You and I will louers die’,

¹⁵⁸ For further information regarding Llewellyn’s “multiple bodies” hypothesis, see: Llewellyn, *Art of Death*, pp. 47-49.

¹⁵⁹ Pointon, Marcia, ‘Materializing Mourning: Hair, Jewellery and the Body’, in *Material Memories*, ed. M. Kwint, C. Breward and J. Aynsley (Oxford; New York: Berg, 1999), p. 40.

¹⁶⁰ J. Donne, ‘The Funeral’, in, Robbins, *Donne*, pp. 191-193.

Similarly, Scarisbrick recounts that when Lord Bristol died in 1751, aged 86, he “asked to be buried with the letters of his first wife by his left cheek, the turquoise ring she gave him on his finger, and on his wrist the bracelet of her hair which he ‘ever wore’”.

Scarisbrick, *Jewellery in Britain*, p. 265.

¹⁶¹ F. P. Verney, *Memoirs of the Verney Family During the Civil War, Vol. II* (London: Longmans, 1892), p. 316.

¹⁶² C. Ricks (ed.), *The Oxford Book of English Verse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 187.

‘This and I until you dye’, or the equally direct, ‘Till death noe change’.¹⁶³

Even these were not as morbid as the posy commissioned by a wearer in the throes of grief, following a bereavement in 1768, however, who gloomily bewailed: ‘THE. FATE. OF. LOVE’.¹⁶⁴ Furthermore, in a rather curious twist on the mourning ring as a post-mortem token of affection, Erickson recounted the gift of a ring in 1712, by Katherine Browne, a Somerset teenager who, in anticipation of her final demise, “made her only bequest orally: £1 1s. 6d. to her betrothed that he might buy himself a ring”.¹⁶⁵ Here, in essence, was both a betrothal and mourning token combined.

Remarkably, when Edmund Steere, an unmarried gentleman from Surrey made his will in 1715, as well as bequests of several mourning rings amongst his relations and funeral attendees, he also bequeathed a further diamond ring to a married woman which held particularly emotive associations: “my diamond Ring to Mrs Sarah Camden wife of Mr Camden Minister which Ring I bought when I courted her”.¹⁶⁶

The commonality between the materials and devices that embodied the celebration of love or the commemoration of the dead continued to find reflection in the sentimental jewellery of the period. Hair as a token of affection or as a means of remembering the deceased remained enduringly popular well into the eighteenth century and beyond. In 1716, for example, a newspaper advertisement sought the recovery of various stolen items, including: “a Hair Locket in a Heart shape [and] a Hair Ring with 4 Brilliants made in a Heart, being a mourning ring”.¹⁶⁷ Similarly, over a decade before, a classified advert had also appealed for the return of a luxurious sounding sentimental keepsake: “a Hair Locket with a Cypher, set round with small Diamonds”.¹⁶⁸

This link between sentiment and death was certainly familiar to contemporaries; indeed the growing popularity of these mementoes meant that they even garnered criticism and bred contempt in some quarters. In 1754, for example, a letter appeared which sarcastically mocked the supposed false sentimentally and extravagance associated with the fashionable display of commemorative jewellery; it

¹⁶³ Evans, *English Posies*, pp. 110, 97, 100.

¹⁶⁴ British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1709.

¹⁶⁵ A. L. Erickson, *Women and Property in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 91.

¹⁶⁶ Surrey, DW/PA/5/1716; Will Number: 127.

¹⁶⁷ News, *Post Man and the Historical Account* (London, England), May 24, 1716 – May 26, 1716; Issue 11250.

¹⁶⁸ Classified ads, *Post Man and the Historical Account* (London, England), September 25, 1702 – September 17, 1702; Issue 1016.

was clearly aimed at pricking any pretence of sentimental affectation or pompous mourning sensibility:

I might mention the admirable method of qualifying the melancholy hue of the mourning ring, by enlivening it with the brilliancy of a diamond. I knew a young lady, who wore on the same finger a ring set round with death's heads and cross marrow bones for the loss of her father, and another prettily embellished with burning hearts pierced through with darts, in respect to her lover.¹⁶⁹

Indeed even by the mid seventeenth-century, so conversant were people with the customary appearance of the mourning ring, that one rather ambitious poet could even boldly endeavour to woo his sweetheart by comparing her dark eyebrows to the form of a mourning ring:

(A pretty strange conceited thing)
Two arches of a mourning ring.
Thence 'tis that those black haire do grow,
Thence are thy browes enamel'd so.¹⁷⁰

The black enamelled mourning ring was no doubt what Dame Margaret Verney, making her will over a decade before in 1639, had in mind when she left directions to bestow one pound apiece on “toyos or blake rings for my mother, my brothers, sisters and their husbands and wives”.¹⁷¹

Post-Restoration Mourning Jewellery

Just as the black enamelled ring became a recognisable mourning accessory, *memento mori* symbolism also continued to hold sway as the dominant stylistic approach for the majority of mourning jewellery produced during the second half of the seventeenth century.

It is from this period onwards that, as Taylor and Scarisbrick have suggested, it becomes possible to clearly observe a “standardisation of form and style” as greater numbers of inscribed and dated mourning rings were increasingly produced for distribution as funerary and commemorative keepsakes.¹⁷² Likewise, Oman also sees in the evolution of the “fashionable” mourning ring, the perceptible formation of a “regular sequence of types” in the decades that followed the Restoration.¹⁷³ The first “coherent period” he identifies for this development, which also witnessed the advent

¹⁶⁹ ‘To Mr. TOWN’, *The Connoisseur*, Number 39, 24 October, 1754; British Periodicals, p. 233.

¹⁷⁰ ‘On Amanda’s black eye-browes’, in N. Hookes, *Amanda, a sacrifice to an unknown goddess, or, A free-will offering of a loving heart to a sweet-heart* (London, 1653), pp. 66-7.

¹⁷¹ Quoted in, Oman, ‘Mourning Rings’, p. 72.

¹⁷² Taylor and Scarisbrick (eds.), *Finger Rings*, p. 30.

¹⁷³ Oman, *Catalogue of Rings*, p. 39.

of the earliest definite “type” of mourning ring to survive in particularly large numbers, begins with the reign of Charles II and continues up to around 1740.¹⁷⁴

It is unsurprising to note that during such an extended phase of time, “a number of different designs competed” and styles were by no means uniform, as fashions ebbed and flowed and favoured motifs and aesthetic conventions were eventually superseded by newer varieties.¹⁷⁵

One of the most prevalent early designs – which has already appeared in the form of a posy ring – consisted of a plain gold hoop, chased and enamelled on the exterior with a jawless skull or death’s head, and which usually featured the initials or name and date of death engraved around the interior of the hoop.¹⁷⁶ Variations on this design, with a skull as the focal point, either included a crosshatched pattern,¹⁷⁷ or incorporated a delicate wreath of flowers or scrolling foliage, usually picked out upon a ground of black (sometimes white) enamel.¹⁷⁸ It was obviously a popular design trend and remained in vogue for many years, even well into the first few decades of the eighteenth century. **[FIG. 79]**

In fact, a gold band in its various forms featuring this skull motif is the commonest and most widespread type of mourning ring recorded through the PAS database, with nearly fifty examples recorded; inscribed and dated examples range in years from 1662 up to 1729, and are also geographically widespread, having been found in areas right across England and Wales, from County Durham, across to Wales and Norfolk, and all the way down to Cornwall.

It was clearly this genre of ring which was advertised, when Ralph Good - “Goldsmith in the Devizes in the County of Wilts” - appealed for the recovery of nearly one hundred “new Gold Rings”, which had been lost at his “Standing in Chippenham Fair”; about six of them, he informed readers, were “ingrav’d on the Out-side, one Mourning Ring in Flowers, some few with a single Death’s Head”.¹⁷⁹

Another standard reworking of the *memento mori* theme depicts a skeleton curved around the exterior span of the hoop - nominally identified by contemporaries

¹⁷⁴ Oman, *British Rings*, p. 73.

¹⁷⁵ Oman, *British Rings*, p. 73; Scarisbrick, *Rings: Jewelry of Power, Love and Loyalty*, p. 170.

¹⁷⁶ See: British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1533; 1534; 1542; V&A, Museum Number: M.88-1960; PAS, Finds Database, Unique ID: DENO-5B22F3; LON-43C1F0; SUR-EB7801; SOM-419E80; NMS-9E1EF8; BUC-087696; LVPL-072347.

¹⁷⁷ See: British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1545; PAS, Finds Database, Unique ID: NMS-6AA818; LON-A96750; CORN-0DD6D3; WILT-1364E7; YORYM-47B500.

¹⁷⁸ See: British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1546; AF.1547; AF.1550; AF.1553; PAS, Finds Database, Unique ID: PAS-8E0946; NMS-2DBBE5.

¹⁷⁹ Classified ads, *London Gazette* (London, England), May 20, 1708 – May 24, 1708; Issue 4438.

as “Death at length” - often accompanied by the characteristic emblems of mortality, such as the hourglass, or the gravedigger’s pick and shovel, all set against a ground of black or white enamel.¹⁸⁰ For example, in 1731, a newspaper report, detailing the various items which had been stolen from a house in London, included a ring, described as: “a Burial Ring, white enamel’d, with Death at length”.¹⁸¹ In her will of 1665, Lydia Road, a widow from Middlesex, had similarly bequeathed one of her own rings, each to her brother and overseer, both of which rings she described as featuring “death at large”.¹⁸²

The appearance of one particularly well-preserved example – inscribed around the inside of the hoop with the dedication: ‘Donu Johannis Pinder’ [‘Given by John Pinder’] – the decoration not only features an intricately realised skeleton and crossbones, but the cavities of the hourglass have also been highlighted with a vivid shade of green enamel.¹⁸³ **[FIG. 80]**

It has been suggested that the Great Plague in London provided an additional spur to an already developing trend, as the swelling of the mortality rate during the mid-1660s purportedly prompted the creation of an “enormous quantity” of mourning rings.¹⁸⁴ Though the surviving material evidence for this argument is somewhat patchy, Oman has suggested that the artistic devices and decorative motifs used on mourning rings which date from around this period, are similarly mirrored in the designs which adorn the frontispiece to the *Bills of Mortality*, issued in 1665.¹⁸⁵ **[FIG. 81]**

In this vein of thought, the stark imagery used to decorate the mourning jewellery of the period was a direct echo of the scenes of death and decomposition being played out, with an all too depressing frequency, right across the Capital. Death was very much in attendance within the everyday life of the early modern individual, who evidently had few qualms in using such morbid badges of mortality as decorative adornments to both commemorate and counsel. Here was Death abstracted and condensed into a few simple images; the essentials defined, ornamented, and reduced down, to fit the form of a mourning ring.

¹⁸⁰ See: British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1600; AF.1601; AF.1608; AF.1609; AF.1604; AF.1610; PAS, Finds Database, Unique ID: LVPL-6178C6; BH-9E39F1; Ashmolean, Finger Ring Collection, Accession Number: WA1897.CDEF.F646.

¹⁸¹ News, *Daily Advertiser* (London, England), Wednesday, April 7, 1731; Issue 55.

¹⁸² Middlesex, MS 9172/73; Will Number: 15.

¹⁸³ Museum of London, Museum Number: A18226.

¹⁸⁴ http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight_objects/pe_mla/g/gold_and_enamelled_mourning_ri.aspx.

¹⁸⁵ Oman, *British Rings*, p. 73.

This particularly fine example, is ornamented with a delicately detailed skull, which sits between two pairs of crossbones, picked out upon a ground of black enamel; the inside of the hoop has also been engraved with the addition of a rather poignant inscription: ‘In death shees blest Since heauens her rest’.¹⁸⁶ [FIG. 82] Another black enamelled mourning ring, which also features a prominent, though slightly less refined, representation of a white skull, has also been inscribed with a sentimental motto, more commonly associated with the jewellery of the later eighteenth century: ‘Not lost but gone before’.¹⁸⁷ [FIG. 83]

The skulls, skeletons, crossbones, coffins, picks and shovels, which were used to decorate the mourning jewellery of the late seventeenth century and beyond, were clearly an extension of similar illustrations being reproduced not only in the *Bills of Mortality*, but also on funeral tickets, sermons, eulogies, and other printed works and ephemera. The black enamelled bands and sombre motifs of the mourning ring undeniably find reflection in the analogous black borders used to frame these equally melancholic publications; it is likely that printers, goldsmiths, and engravers, imitated, modified, and appropriated popular images from one another.¹⁸⁸ [FIG. 84]

Some of these rings – like those belonging to the goldsmith Ralph Good – would have been kept in stock, the simple gold bands, featuring a death’s head, ready to be engraved with an appropriate motto or lettered to order for the specific needs of the customer.

Other more expensive and lavish mourning articles were essentially diminutive works of art, standing as a testament to the great skill of the engravers, enamellers, and goldsmiths who made them. Indeed, as has been suggested by Scarisbrick, it was during the seventeenth century that *memento mori* jewellery decoration reached a veritable “peak of richness and elaboration”.¹⁸⁹

One of the most decorative and striking examples of this form of mourning ring, was made to commemorate the death of ‘Samuell Nicholets’, who – according to the inscription engraved inside the hoop – died in July, 1661. A highly personalised memorial token, the ring is ingeniously ornamented with enamelled skulls and crossbones, and even a set of miniature coats-of-arms. The hollow hoop also encloses a lock of hair, which is visible through the intricate openwork of the

¹⁸⁶ British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1555.

¹⁸⁷ British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1556.

¹⁸⁸ Elmhirst, E., ‘Mourning Rings’, *Country Life*, Vol. 25 (June, 1953), p. 2059.

¹⁸⁹ Scarisbrick, *Rings: Symbols of Wealth, Power and Affection*, p. 109.

enamelled decoration; a reassuring missive also accompanies the name and date of death, arranged around the interior of the hoop: ‘Christ is my portion’.¹⁹⁰ [FIG. 85]

In a similar fashion, a lock of hair was probably also once contained within the hollow hoop of another gold mourning ring, which is inscribed with a still more poignant, though insightfully chosen, inscription: ‘Death hath surpris’d my cheifest Jewell T H’.¹⁹¹ [FIG. 86] In a comparable stylistic vein, when Anne Singleton, a widow from Middlesex made her will in 1705, included amongst the personal possessions she bequeathed to her granddaughter, was also “one Gold hollow Ring with hair in it”.¹⁹²

The sentimental trend for enclosing hair inside a mourning ring was also earlier applied, when Sir Ralph Verney, writing abroad to his brother, after the death of his of his young daughter, Anna Maria, several months before in 1638, promised him:

You shall herewithal receive a ringe filled with my deare gerle’s haire; shee was fond of you, and you loved her therefore I now send you this to keepe for her sake.¹⁹³

Towards the end of the seventeenth century, oval-shaped gold-mounted mourning slides also became a popular form of mourning jewellery, often incorporating hair and *memento mori* imagery into their designs.¹⁹⁴ They are normally fitted with two loops at the back or sides, through which a silk or hair ribbon could then be threaded for tying at the neck or wrist.¹⁹⁵ Typically, they feature a ground composed of silk or, more usually, a backdrop of woven or plaited hair, which was then overlaid with cast, stamped, and enamelled decoration, such as a skeleton or a death’s head;¹⁹⁶ an identifying cipher or initials in gold wire or thread might also be added, and the whole covered with a thick piece of faceted rock crystal.¹⁹⁷ More expensive versions were framed with borders of pearls or other

¹⁹⁰ V&A, Museum Number: M.156-1962.

¹⁹¹ PAS, Finds Database, Unique ID: WMID-565CB5.

¹⁹² Middlesex, AM/PW/1705/104.

¹⁹³ Verney, *Memoirs of the Verney Family*, Vol. II, p. 9.

¹⁹⁴ Birmingham Museums and Art Galleries maintain a large selection of late seventeenth- to early eighteenth-century mourning slides, with over 40 different examples in their collections. For example, Accession Number: 1928M341; 1928M343; 1928M350; 1928M352; 1928M359; 1928M380.

¹⁹⁵ It was probably this style of jewel – a gold circular ornament attached to a black band around his wrist – depicted in a portrait of William Dutton (1642-1675).

National Trust Collections, National Trust Inventory Number: 562395.

See also: Scarisbrick, *Jewellery in Britain*, p. 218, for another seventeenth-century portrait featuring a sitter sporting a ribbon slide.

¹⁹⁶ Bury, *Sentimental*, p. 33.

¹⁹⁷ According to Clare Phillips, this rock crystal was sourced mainly from around Cornwall and Bristol.

C. Phillips, *Jewels and Jewellery* (London, V&A Publishing, 2000), p. 45.

gemstones; an inscription was often added to the back of the slide, supplying the deceased's initials or name and date of death, or sometimes a short motto or enamel decoration.¹⁹⁸

This example shows a small enamelled skeleton lying propped up on a coffin, which is emblazoned with the message: 'I REST'; two gold cherubs support the encircled initials of the deceased – 'MT' – which are picked out in gold thread and set upon a background panel of woven hair, surrounded by a border of looping gold wire.¹⁹⁹ [FIG. 87]

Another mourning slide features the torso of an enamelled skeleton arising from out of a tomb, which is inscribed: 'COME YE BLESSED';²⁰⁰ two angels, on either side, sound trumpets heralding the Resurrection, whilst two cherubs hold aloft a crown. The initials of the deceased – 'JS' – are also set upon the light background of tightly woven hair, which is protected with a cover of rock crystal.²⁰¹ [FIG. 88]

The ornate and substantial look of the conventional Baroque-style mourning ring, produced during the years of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, followed a style of ornamentation very similar to that seen in the ribbon slides. The "oval, round, or octagonal bezels" were typically set with hair, over which a cipher or monogram in gold thread was worked, which was then topped with a faceted rock crystal cover;²⁰² the hoops were often chased and enamelled, whilst a personalised inscription might be engraved around the interior of the band.²⁰³ [FIG. 89]

In 1705, for example, when Giles Grene from Middlesex made his will, he not only passed on to his daughter Mary, "her Mothers Wedding Ring", but he also bequeathed to her what may have been his own mourning ring made in memory of his former wife, leaving to her: "a Cypher Ring of her Mothers Hair".²⁰⁴

¹⁹⁸ Scarisbrick, *Jewellery in Britain*, p. 198.

¹⁹⁹ V&A, Museum Number: M.14-1960.

For other examples at the V&A, see: M.15-1960; M.12-1960; M.124-1962; 1127-1864.

²⁰⁰ For similar mourning slides also featuring this phrase (*Matthew* 24:34), see: V&A, Museum Number: M.13-1960; Science Museum, Object Number: A642144; Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, Accession Number: 1928M381; The Fitzwilliam Museum, Object Number: PER.M.185-1923.

²⁰¹ Science Museum, Object Number: A642146.

²⁰² Scarisbrick, *Rings: Symbols of Wealth, Power and Affection*, p. 85.

²⁰³ For example, see: British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1566; 1590; 1587; V&A, Museum Number: M.95-1913; 1639-1903; M.21-1996; PAS, Finds Database, Unique ID: NCL-FFE147; SWYOR-DB246B.

²⁰⁴ Middlesex, AM/PW/1705/044.

Some mourning rings, emulating the artistic accomplishments of the memorial slide, even include small *memento mori*-style compositions, set within the bezels.²⁰⁵

[FIG. 90] Like the ring made to commemorate the death of Queen Anne, and following in the footsteps of earlier *memento mori* pendant jewels, a number of mourning rings produced during the first two decades of the eighteenth century feature a coffin-shaped bezel, beneath which can usually be glimpsed a white enamel skeleton lying recumbent inside.²⁰⁶ **[FIG. 91]**

A London newspaper advertisement, published in the early 1720s contained a corresponding description of this type of ring, which – according to the report – was worn in remembrance of a man who had died several years previously:

Dropt from a Gentleman's Finger Yesterday Morning...a Mourning Ring with a Christal theron in the Shape of a Coffin, and this Motto engrav'd on the Outside, viz. *Jonathan Boulton, obit 13 Octob. 1717. Atat. 48...*²⁰⁷

A diminutive coffin-shaped pendant, produced during the initial years of the eighteenth century, is also further testament to the continued appreciation and popular acceptance of *memento mori* imagery well into the early decades of the eighteenth century. Unlike the earlier sixteenth-century coffin jewels, however, this gilded silver pendant is a markedly personal memorial token. Though it utilises the familiar *memento mori* emblems of a coffin and a death's head, through the inclusion of a biographical inscription – 'P.B. obit ye 17 Marc 1703 Aged 54 years' – as well as a hair-work panel and gold wire initials contained beneath the hinged lid, it is transformed into a strikingly poignant mourning memento.²⁰⁸ **[FIG. 92]**

Eighteenth-Century Mourning Jewellery

Into the second quarter of the eighteenth century, a newer design-style began to find favour, as the solemn and extravagant Baroque manner began to give way to the "light-hearted asymmetric" Rococo, which had been introduced from France.²⁰⁹

One of the most noticeable changes to the standard type of mourning ring now being produced was the transfer of the biographical inscription – providing the name,

²⁰⁵ For example, see: British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1559; AF.1580; AF.1584; Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, Accession Number: M547.261; 1935M547.265; 1928M309; 1928M307.

²⁰⁶ For example, see: British Museum, Museum Number: 1864,1103.1; AF.1635; AF.1636; AF.1614; AF.1637; 1893,0601.255; The Fitzwilliam Museum, Object Number: PER.M.166-1923.

²⁰⁷ Classified ads, *Daily Post* (London, England), Wednesday, February 20, 1723; Issue 1060.

²⁰⁸ V&A, Museum Number: M.119-1962.

For a later example (dated 1782) of a coffin-shaped mourning accessory, possibly used as a snuffbox or for housing a lock of hair, see: V&A, Museum Number: M.728-1926.

²⁰⁹ Bury, *Sentimental*, p. 17.

age, and date of death – from the inside to the outside of the hoop, where it was picked out in gold letters, set against a ground of black or white enamel.²¹⁰ It appears that, customarily, black enamel was employed for mourning jewellery commemorating married individuals, and white enamel for children and the unmarried, but it was probably a matter of personal preference in some instances.²¹¹

As Scarisbrick has noted, the newer standard ‘type’ of mourning ring also meant that the “name of deceased was now given much more prominence”, whilst hoops became slimmer and more delicate, and bezels were ordinarily smaller in size, and sometimes set with a gemstone or crystal.²¹² The enduring popularity of *memento mori* imagery was also still in evidence, even into the 1750s, with small skulls sometimes appearing beneath the bezels of these rings.²¹³ It was most likely this kind of ring in question, which was described in a newspaper advertisement in 1730: “suppos’d to be dropt near the Church in Greenwich, a Mourning Ring with a Death’s head in a Christall between two Sparks, the Motto,- Ob. Aug. 8, 1723. Ætat. 73”.²¹⁴ **[FIG. 93]**

Into the 1730s, the fashion for splitting the enamelled hoop of the mourning ring into a series of linked scrolls, each bearing a part of the inscription, grew in popularity.²¹⁵ There were several variations on this pattern, though a number of plainer enamelled hoop rings, in a similar vein, were also produced, suitable for both men and women to wear.²¹⁶ **[FIG. 94]** It was probably this distinctive style of mourning ring, which was described in a newspaper advert of 1743, at a time when this pattern was particularly fashionable: Lost yesterday...a divided Motto Ring, enamell’d black, Motto, *Tho. Fuller. Obt. 22 August, 1741, Ætat. 20*”.²¹⁷

The enamelled scrolls associated with this predominant style of mourning ring, are similarly echoed in this elaborate memorial brooch, characteristic of the sentimental heart-shaped and double sided crystal pendant lockets, which “enjoyed considerable popularity” as tokens of remembrance during the mid-eighteenth

²¹⁰ Oman, *British Rings*, p. 73.

²¹¹ Oman, *Catalogue of Rings*, p. 40.

²¹² Scarisbrick, *Jewellery in Britain*, p. 262.

²¹³ For example, see: British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1642; AF.1675; AF. 1677; AF.1681; AF.1699.

²¹⁴ Classified ads, *London Evening Post* (London, England), June 16, 1730 – June 18, 1730; Issue 394.

²¹⁵ Oman, *Catalogue of Rings*, p. 40.

²¹⁶ For example, see: Museum of London, Museum Number: A5567; British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1621; AF.1666; AF.1696; AF.1700; AF.1712; AF.1710; V&A, Museum Number: M.160-1962; 660-1864.

²¹⁷ Classified ads, *Daily Advertiser* (London, England), Thursday, July 7, 1743; Issue 3890.

century.²¹⁸ The elaborate piece is topped with a bow, composed of diamonds, whilst black enamelled ribbon scrolls, also set with gemstones, are inscribed with the name, age, and date of death – ‘ELIZ: EYTON OB: 10 FEB: 1754 Æ: 81’ – of the deceased; a locket, containing an elaborately arranged lock of hair, is set within the centre of the brooch.²¹⁹ [FIG. 95]

As the century progressed, the use of sentimental devices in jewellery design assumed a greater prominence, as the morbid and uncompromising imagery associated with *memento mori* increasingly began to give way to gentler and more allegorical decorative motifs.

Neoclassical Influence

The last quarter of the eighteenth century saw another change in influence, as the flowering of Neoclassicism ushered in a distinctively different design aesthetic. Though the fashion for sentimental jewellery had been in the ascendancy for some time, the latter half of the century witnessed a noticeable shift, as the jewellery became more widespread and the predominant stylistic themes became more expressive of sentimental feeling and attachment.²²⁰ The change was relatively swift; for the most part, the skulls and skeletons, which had so dominated the memorial landscape of the past few centuries, were swept away, to be replaced by a new standard assortment of Classically-influenced emblematic mourning motifs.²²¹

The steady development of this Neoclassical leitmotiv in the years after 1760 introduced a “new mourning iconography”, with a “stereotyped repertory” of generic devices largely derived from Antiquity, such as the sepulchral urn, the cypress tree or weeping willow, broken columns and obelisks, and the requisite grieving female, arrayed in Classical dress, and draped artistically over a tomb.²²²

Different styles garnered popular appeal and fresh forms of jewellery emerged or evolved to become commonplace memorial and sentimental items; with such a

²¹⁸ Bury, *Sentimental*, p. 37.

²¹⁹ V&A, Museum Number: M.121-1962.

For other lockets, see: British Museum, Museum Number: 2008,8007.3; Museum of London, Museum Number: 62.121/44.

²²⁰ See Chapter 6, for a fuller discussion of the reasons that lay behind this change in mourning iconography and sensibility.

²²¹ C. Gittings, *Death, Burial and the Individual in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 149.

²²² Holm, C., ‘Sentimental Cuts: Eighteenth-Century Mourning Jewelry with Hair’, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Vol. 38, 1 (2004), p. 139; Bury, *Sentimental*, p. 40; Scarisbrick, *Rings: Symbols of Wealth, Power and Affection*, p. 125.

degree of variety, it is no wonder that “memorial jewellery to honour the dead is one of the largest categories of eighteenth-century jewellery to survive”.²²³

This evolution in style may be seen, for example, in this enamelled gold memorial pendant, which has progressed from the Rococo locket illustrated earlier, with its fluid scrolls and bows, to something more Classically-influenced and refined; the pendant itself has been formed to imitate the appearance of a funerary urn, ornamented with amethysts, and inscribed with the names of the deceased: ‘CHARLES YEATMAN. CHARLES FOOT’.²²⁴ The addition of a tender memorial inscription on the reverse – ‘MY SOUL HATH THEM STILL IN REMEMBRANCE’ – helpfully illustrates Holm’s argument, that the focus and iconography of late eighteenth-century mourning jewellery was increasingly geared towards the mourner and *their* grief, rather than solely concerned with the remembrance of death and the deceased, as had more generally been the case in the preceding century.²²⁵ **[FIG. 96]** Another similar pendant incorporates a crystal locket, though unlike the urn it symbolises, the human remains it contains are strands of hair rather than ashes.²²⁶

Indeed, the device of a funerary urn became particularly widespread, and was utilised in a number of forms, to decorate and adorn a variety of different mourning jewels.²²⁷ It was worked in a number of mediums, including hair and various gemstones, and sometimes even formed the actual bezel of a ring.²²⁸ This example, dated 1773, features a white enamelled urn, set with pale garnets, whilst the outside of the hoop is enamelled to display the deceased’s name, age, and date of death.²²⁹ **[FIG. 97]**

Likewise, in 1773, a newspaper advertisement appealed for the return of a “Fancy Mourning Ring”, which was “in the Shape of an Urn, ornamented with a few very small Brilliants, with Hair under the Chrystal, the Inscription, Anthony Gyfford, Esq. died 11th October, 1769, aged 52 Years”.²³⁰

²²³ Scarisbrick, *Jewellery in Britain*, p. 262.

²²⁴ V&A, Museum Number: M.137-1975.

²²⁵ Holm, ‘Sentimental Cuts’, p. 139.

²²⁶ V&A, Museum Number: M.58-1950.

²²⁷ For example, see: V&A, Museum Number: M.167-1951; 985-1888; 877-1888; 849-1888; 852-1888; 854-1888; British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1716; AF.1727; AF.1720; 1978,1002.534.

²²⁸ For example, see: Ashmolean, Finger Ring Collection, Accession Number: WA1897.CDEF.F655; LI1045.7; V&A, Museum Number: M.85-1960; M.167-1962.

²²⁹ British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1652.

²³⁰ Classified ads, *Daily Advertiser* (London, England), Thursday, October 11, 1773; Issue 13355.

Bower Marsh suggests that the last quarter of the eighteenth century witnessed the “most ornate” period for the construction of the mourning ring, and what is certainly striking, is the great variety of pieces being produced for wear.²³¹ Hair was also being incorporated into memorial designs in more elaborate and imaginative ways than ever before; it was not used merely as a backdrop or as a simply arranged curl, but was often highly stylised and used to construct the various motifs such as the urn or weeping willow.

The initial stages of this trend, can, perhaps, be seen in the selection of mourning rings which follow. The first, dated 1765, features an oval bezel containing a portion of light plaited hair set under glass, which is surrounded by a border of garnets.²³² **[FIG. 98]** This is followed by a mourning ring, dated a few years later – 1769 – in which the hair has been more intricately styled to imitate either the form of moss agate²³³ or, more likely, a rosemary²³⁴ bush.²³⁵ **[FIG. 99]**

Variations on this pattern suggest that another configuration, formed from snippets of hair, might be made up to represent the ‘Tree of Life’, a symbol of perpetuity and a forerunner of the melancholic pastoral scenes that chiefly appeared on mourning jewellery into the 1780s.²³⁶ **[FIG. 100]**

Both of these mourning rings – dated 1768 and 1770, respectively – feature oval bezels which are set with miniature trees fashioned from hair; white enamelled hoops, indicative of the young age of the deceased, also show the name, age and date of death.²³⁷ The slightly later example even includes the addition of a pale sky and hills, with two naturalistic trees featured in the foreground of the composition; Death has been replaced by Nature. **[FIG. 101]**

²³¹ Marsh (ed.), *Memorial Rings*, p. 4.

²³² British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1647.

See, AF.1715, for similar style of ring, but featuring, instead, a border of seed pearls and emerald pastes surrounding the bezel.

²³³ This was a form of “dendritic quartz, a mineral favoured for its suggestion of fossilized flora”. Hair might be embroidered onto silk or appropriately fashioned and glued onto card, in order to imitate its appearance.

Nehama, *Death Lamented*, p. 40.

²³⁴ Sprigs of rosemary were a familiar accompaniment at the early modern funeral; handed out to mourners, they were not only symbolic of remembrance, but the fragrant smell also served a useful purpose.

See: Gittings, *Death, Burial and the Individual*, pp. 110, 131.

²³⁵ The Fitzwilliam Museum, Collection Explorer, Object Number: PER.M.228-1923.

See also: M.26 & A-1979; Ashmolean, Finger Ring Collection, Accession Number: WA1897.CDEF.F656; British Museum, Museum Number: 1978,1002.212; AF.1714.

²³⁶ Museum of London, ID Number: C24.

²³⁷ British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1649; AF.1650.

In several subsequent pieces, hair obviously also proved to be particularly adaptable as a material with which to style the branches and fronds of a weeping willow, which soon became a staple of the miniature mourning compositions which adorned the memorial jewellery of the last few decades of the eighteenth century. In this ring, for example, the fashioning of the hair – which seems to have been combined with paint – has become more involved and artistically elaborate, with an intricately realised weeping willow, the hair of which has been built up on the trunk to create a sense of depth, and enclosed beneath the glass-fronted bezel.²³⁸ [FIG. 102]

Other rather modest arrangements, designed with hair and set within the bezels of mourning rings, which were particularly in use during the 1770s, included urns and, in another gesture towards greater personalisation, the initialled monogram.²³⁹ This example, presents the entwined letters ‘JJ’ partly executed in hair and enclosed within a sepia-painted wreath; the white enamelled hoop reveals that the initials commemorate, ‘JOHN JACKSON’, who died in 1778, at the age of 27.²⁴⁰ [FIG. 103]

As the artistic ambitions which could be realised within the small space of the mourning ring continued to expand, the miniature mourning scenes which were depicted became progressively more detailed, incorporating not just an urn or tomb and trees, but often a lamenting individual or grief-stricken female mourner. This rather naive example, dated 1780, and featuring, like the earlier incarnations, a border of garnets, depicts – rather simply – an angel leaning disconsolately upon an urn, which is overshadowed by the branches of a weeping willow, all shaded in with hair.²⁴¹ [FIG. 104]

In a similar vein, in 1775, a newspaper advertisement appeared, appealing for the recovery of a stolen mourning ring, inscribed: “M. Wilkinson, died Feb. 1771: a Child reclining on an Urn, over it a Willow Tree”.²⁴²

Increasingly there was a blending of both religious- and Classically-inspired iconography being utilised in mourning jewellery compositions, which included depictions of angels and cherubs, souls ascending to heaven, and other allegorical

²³⁸ British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1660.

²³⁹ For example, see: British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1651; AF.1655; AF.1665; AF.1654; AF.1656; AF.1658.

²⁴⁰ British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1659.

²⁴¹ British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1661.

²⁴² Classified ads, *Public Advertiser* (London, England), Friday, September 15, 1775; Issue 14338.

figures such as the personified virtue of Hope.²⁴³ A clear depiction of this Christian symbolism may be seen in this rather unassuming figure, recognisable as Hope by her accompanying anchor, painted and partly executed in hair.²⁴⁴ [FIG. 105] The inclusion of the anchor meant that the symbol was also applicable as a motif for those who had died at sea.²⁴⁵ Similarly, in 1783, a newspaper announcement had appealed for the return of a lost ring, featuring a similar sounding device:

Lost Yesterday...an oval Gold Ring, engraved, with a Hair Device, Hope leaning on an Anchor, with a Gold Letter fixed on the Anchor, and a back View of a Ship, a Motto 'Sacred to Friendship' in the Hollow of the Ring.²⁴⁶

As these small mourning miniatures began to dominate the jewellery of the period, the bezels of memorial rings increased in size – typically covering the finger up to the knuckle – so that pictures and personal inscriptions might be more easily accommodated.²⁴⁷ Into the 1770s, the distinctive 'marquise' or 'navette' form emerged,²⁴⁸ but rings also sported various other large elongated oblong, oval, or octagonal bezels, which were set with hair-work or painted miniature tableaux.²⁴⁹ [FIG. 106]

In 1784, for example, and illustrative of the ubiquity of the design, a newspaper advert appealed for the recovery of: "a...Mourning Ring...set in hair; device, a woman weeping upon an urn, with an inscription of black round the chrystal: 'Eliz. Clugh, Obit 27 May, 1785, aged 59.'"²⁵⁰ [FIG. 107] The various design styles and motifs were evidently recognised and understood, for in 1772, one London jeweller could concisely advertise for sale: "funeral rings, either mausoleum, urn, or round mottos, made cheap and with expedition".²⁵¹

²⁴³ (*Hebrews* 6:19). For more information concerning commemorative memorial imagery see: F. Burgess, *English Churchyard Memorials* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1963), p. 189.

²⁴⁴ British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1662.

²⁴⁵ For example, a late eighteenth-century mourning locket is decorated with an image of Hope contemplating a distant shipwreck. See: Museum of London, Museum Number: 62.120/66. See also: 62.120/52.

²⁴⁶ Classified ads, *Daily Advertiser* (London, England), Tuesday, April 22, 1783; Issue 17238.

²⁴⁷ C. Phillips, *Jewellery: From Antiquity to the Present* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996), p. 120.

²⁴⁸ This term refers to a pear- or boat-shaped bezel.

See also: Marshall and Dalglish (eds.), *Jewellery in Scotland*, pp. 45, 52, for a Scottish portrait - *Margaret Whyte by Taverner Knott, c.1775* - in which the sitter proudly displays a number of these distinctively shaped rings.

²⁴⁹ For example, see: British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1663; AF.1718; AF.1728; AF.1731; The Fitzwilliam Museum, Collection Explorer, Object Number: PER.M.243-1923; V&A, Museum Number: 858-1888; 872-1888.

²⁵⁰ Classified ads, *Parker's General Advertiser and Morning Intelligencer* (London, England), Friday, June 4, 1784; Issue 2356.

²⁵¹ Classified ads, *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser* (London, England), Tuesday, June 2, 1772; Issue 944.

The period also witnessed an “immense vogue” for memorial clasps, pendants, medallions, and brooches, of a similar style.²⁵² Into the last three decades of the eighteenth century, there was a real flourishing of the Neoclassical theme, some of the artistic compositions were more ambitious and refined, but their popularity also meant that they were increasingly being mass-produced, with more affordable versions available to customers ready-made. The standard repertory of motifs and iconography was alike to that seen on the mourning rings – the sentimentalised pastoral scenes occupied by mournful women lamenting at the foot of an urn or tomb, whilst overshadowed by weeping willows or an attendant cherub – with numerous variations on this archetypal configuration.²⁵³

The miniature compositions were executed in sepia or watercolour onto ivory, enamel, or vellum; snippets of hair might also be chopped and mixed or ‘dissolved’ into the paint, so that the deceased actually became an integral part of the personalised composition. More ambitious or lavish arrangements might also feature some embellishment with seed pearls – representative of tears – gold wire, enamels, and hair-work.²⁵⁴ As Pointon has noted, these later eighteenth-century mourning jewels were frequently “multi-media devices” constructed from a combination of “paint, glass, jewels and human hair”.²⁵⁵ [FIG. 108]

The Use of Hair in Mourning Jewellery

The use of the hair of the deceased, was often a key component in this personalised and lavish mourning jewellery, and might materially have added to the emotional and sentimental connection felt by the wearer to both the jewel itself and to the individual commemorated. Evident in the mourning jewellery of both the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, hair often formed a central design component in many of the pieces produced during this period.

As an incorruptible and physical material fragment of the dead individual, hair had the potential to act as a “powerful medium of memory”.²⁵⁶ Pieces of mourning jewellery which incorporated a hair-work component – whether as a simple lock,

²⁵² Evans, *History of Jewellery*, p. 165.

²⁵³ Becker, *Antique and Twentieth Century Jewellery*, p. 91; S. Bury, *Jewellery 1789-1910: The International Era, Vol. 1, 1789-1861* (Woodbridge: Antique Collectors’ Club, 1991), p. 69.

²⁵⁴ R. F. Frank, *Love and Loss: American Portrait and Mourning Miniatures* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 123; Becker, *Antique and Twentieth Century Jewellery*, p. 91.

²⁵⁵ Pointon, M., ‘Valuing the Visual and Visualizing the Valuable: Jewellery and its Ambiguities’, *Cultural Values*, Vol. 3, 1 (1999), p. 8.

²⁵⁶ Holm, C., ‘Sentimental Cuts: Eighteenth-Century Mourning Jewelry with Hair’, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (Autumn, 2004), p. 40.

woven as a background, or prepared and shaped into more artificial forms – provided an emotive “material reminder of the embodied living person”.²⁵⁷

Mourning jewellery, in incorporating the hair of the deceased, not only memorialised and commemorated that individual, but for the bereaved, such a possession also offered a remaining link or basic physical connection to the deceased themselves.

As Hallam and Hockey have contended, the wearing of hair jewellery, at a fundamental level, could connect the body of the deceased with that of the living. As a powerful form of “materialised memory”, hair was an accessible and physically evocative medium, acting as a stimulus to memory and remembrance, visually and tangibly “infused with special powers of recall”. Unlike any other mourning article, jewellery which contained the hair of the deceased acted as a unique memorial to that individual, in that it both “consisted of and represented that particular person”.²⁵⁸

Some testators also recognised the advantageous benefits of such memorial keepsakes, and some specifically made provision so that those left behind should not be in want of a token by which to remember them. In 1729, for example, the spinster, Hannah Smith, provided detailed instructions in her will for the creation of mourning rings after her death:

...I will to be buried in a handsome but decent manner and Rings to be given to all my relations to wear in remembrance of me with some of my hair included in each Ring and the Rings to be of the value of One Guinea.²⁵⁹

The bereaved themselves were seemingly just as keen to acquire such a personal and intimate token of mourning and remembrance, providing locks of hair to be worked and fitted into rings and jewels. In 1725, for example, a newspaper advertisement sought the return of a lost letter, “in which was enclos’d a Funeral Ring and some Hair”.²⁶⁰ This was probably a similar communication which had been received in 1769, when, following the death of a Mrs Salkeld of Cumbria, an acquaintance wrote to her executor, offering his condolences, but also asking if it might be possible to obtain: “any of our dear Kinswomans hair and to send it that we may putt it in a Ring here, together with her age, which I think is about 53”.²⁶¹

²⁵⁷ Hallam and Hockey, *Death, Memory and Material Culture*, p. 134.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 136-40.

²⁵⁹ Hannah Smith, 01.08.1731: The National Archives; Kew, England; *Prerogative Court of Canterbury and Related Probate Jurisdictions: Will Registers*; Class: *PROB 11*; Piece: 646.

²⁶⁰ Classified ads, *Daily Post* (London, England), Friday, March 26, 1725; Issue 1716.

²⁶¹ Cumbria Record Office, [no title] D HUD 9/14/17, 15 May, 1769.

Eighteenth-century goldsmiths and jewellers were also quick to cater to these demands, and their advertisements, particularly in the latter-half of the century, regularly promoted services for the fashioning of hair devices and jewellery. In 1779, for example, T. Liddiard, a “Working Jeweller and Goldsmith”, based in London, was offering clients:

...bracelets, lockets, and rings, with curious hair devices, in a taste entirely new, and flatters himself that none can exceed him in this new discovery of figures being raised in hair...Has various other things in the hair way...N.B. Mourning rings with hair devices of any kind, finished at the shortest notice.²⁶²

Such skills were not just advertised in newspapers, but several jewellers also explicitly proclaimed the availability of hair-working services in their trade cards; George Pinnock, for example, around the mid-eighteenth century, was advertising: “HAIR formed in a Curious manner for Rings, Ear-rings, Locketts, Bracelets and Watches”.²⁶³ Towards the very end of the period, another goldsmith and jeweller, was also offering: “Bracelets, Locketts, Rings...of the most fashionable Shape, with Hair devices, for Friendship or Mourning Subjects”.²⁶⁴

Whilst the inclusion of hair might offer the mourner a seemingly highly personal and emotive token of remembrance, there was, conversely, an increasingly stereotyped repertory of designs and motifs being produced for wear, particularly towards the end of the eighteenth century. The mourning figures and motifs might have been infused with a sentimental demeanour, but enterprising jewellers and hair-workers were also fashioning the hair into a number of recognisably generic and duplicated designs.

For example, in 1795, the engraver Garnet Terry published two pattern books offering jewellers, hair-workers, and enamel painters, in particular, practical designs and motifs they could directly copy and work from. The first book, is made up of an alphabetised collection of cyphers and elaborately-worked and interlinked initials;²⁶⁵

Another document reveals that 18 mourning rings were acquired from a jeweller in Newcastle, which also included a bill for “working the hair”. See: Cumbria Record Office, [no title] D HUD 9/14/20, 2 June, 1769.

²⁶² Classified ads, *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser* (London, England), Wednesday, December 15, 1779; Issue 2237.

²⁶³ British Museum, Museum Number: Heal,67.324.

²⁶⁴ British Museum, Museum Number: D,2.1827.

²⁶⁵ G. Terry, *A Complete Round of Cyphers for the use of Engravers, Painters, Sculptors, Jewellers, Hair Workers, Enamellers, Pattern-Drawers, &c. Consisting of Six hundred Examples for the forming of Cyphers of Every Denomination. Designed and Engraved by Garnet Terry* (London: Bowles and Carver, 1795).

Some of these patterns can find direct reflection in surviving items of mourning jewellery, such as the ring pictured in Figure 103.

the second book, offers a range of devices and images, including a number of Neo-classically-inspired miniature mourning scenes, all set within small, ring or locket-sized oval and marquise-shaped borders.²⁶⁶ [FIG. 134]

In fact, so popular and in demand was the use of hair in all kinds of mourning and sentimental jewellery that by the end of the eighteenth century there were even accusations and persistent suspicions that unscrupulous jewellers and professional hair-workers were periodically failing to use the hair entrusted to them by the bereaved. In some cases, it was insinuated that the hair might actually be that of a stranger, or even possibly substituted for or mixed with horsehair, which was supposedly easier to handle and arrange into artistic forms.²⁶⁷ In 1796, for example, one London jeweller, in advertising, “a variety of new patterns of round Locketts for hair”, as well as “mourning Rings, Bracelets, &c.”, was also seeking to reassure potential customers:

He...assures those who may favour him with their commands, that in order to remove every idea of hair being changed, it shall be worked in the presence of any Lady or Gentleman who desires it.²⁶⁸

The mass-production of the small painted scenes and hairwork compositions typical of so much eighteenth-century mourning jewellery also meant that “many of the standard motifs could be bought ready made”, sentimental in tone but perfunctorily generic enough to suit the general needs of most customers;²⁶⁹ pieces could then be personalised, if required, through the addition of an inscription, giving the name, age, and date of death, on the reverse. Some mourners might even go to the additional trouble and expense of having a piece “lettered to order”, inserting the name or initials of the deceased onto the urn or plinth in the composition, adding some additional hair-work, or composing their own dedicatory tag or verse, before the piece was set in its mount.²⁷⁰ A small selection of the memorial mottoes which were used, include examples such as: ‘WEEP NOT IT FALLS TO RISE AGAIN’;²⁷¹

²⁶⁶ G. Terry, *A Book of New & Allegorical Devices, for Artists in General, & Particularly for Jewellers Enamel painters Pattern Drawers &c. Containing Two Hundred Elegant Historical, Ornamental and Fancied Subjects designed and Engraved by Garnet Terry* (London: Bowles and Carver, 1795).

²⁶⁷ Becker, *Antique and Twentieth Century Jewellery*, p. 107.

²⁶⁸ Classified ads, *Oracle and Public Advertiser* (London, England), Saturday, November 26, 1796; Issue 19 489.

²⁶⁹ Scarisbrick, *Jewellery in Britain*, p. 263.

²⁷⁰ Bury, *Introduction to Rings*, p. 47; Bury, *Sentimental*, p. 41.

²⁷¹ V&A, Museum Number: 965-1888.

‘SACRED TO LOVE’;²⁷² ‘SACRED TO THE BEST OF HUSBANDS’;²⁷³ ‘I Mourn for them I Loved’;²⁷⁴ ‘I have lost my support’;²⁷⁵ and ‘Sacred Will I keep thy dear Remains’.²⁷⁶

An example of such tailored additions may also be read in a newspaper advert, which appeared in 1787, appealing for the return of a lost mourning locket: “Lost a small Mourning Locket for the Breast, containing an Urn in Hair, with the Letter N upon it, and engraved with an Inscription on the Back”.²⁷⁷

It has been suggested that the simultaneous success of a number of sentimental works of literature, most particularly Edward Young’s *Night Thoughts* (1742-5), Goethe’s *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (trans. 1779) and Laurence Sterne’s *A Sentimental Journey* (1768), captured the prevailing public mood and enthusiasm for a kind of melancholy sentimentalism, which was embodied in much of the Romantic literature and art of the period.²⁷⁸ Scarisbrick has also pointed towards the cultural impact of Classically-inspired works by artists such as Angelica Kauffmann and Benjamin West.²⁷⁹ Artistic imaginings and interpretations, depicting ‘Charlotte at the Tomb of Werter’ and Sterne’s disconsolate ‘Maria’, were widely reproduced, and even later satirised.²⁸⁰ Indeed, there is even evidence to show that some of the works which depicted the two female characters provided direct inspiration for the imagery used on a number of pieces of mourning and sentimental jewellery.²⁸¹

Arianne Fennetaux has even gone so far as to suggest that the popularised depictions of these two “female figures of grief” had a “seminal influence” in presenting and characterising mourning as a primarily feminine practice. She sees in the appearance of the grieving female, represented in countless memorial keepsakes, and in the enthusiastic reception of the depictions of Charlotte and Maria,

²⁷² V&A, Museum Number: 872-1888.

²⁷³ V&A, Museum Number: 908-1888.

²⁷⁴ V&A, Museum Number: 945-1888.

²⁷⁵ Museum of London, Museum Number: 62.120/55.

²⁷⁶ Museum of London, Museum Number: 62.120/65.

²⁷⁷ Classified ads, *Public Advertiser* (London, England), Thursday, August 2, 1787; Issue 16600.

²⁷⁸ Becker, *Antique and Twentieth Century Jewellery*, p. 88.

²⁷⁹ *Rings: Symbols of Wealth, Power and Affection*, p. 125.

²⁸⁰ For example, see: British Museum, Museum Number: 1877,0512.602; 1868,0808.2940; 1867,1212.151; 1872,1012.1607; 1948,0214.592; 1935,0522.7.155; V&A, Museum Number: FA.104[O].

²⁸¹ V&A, Museum Number: 942-1888; 937-1888; M.97-1969; Fennetaux, A., ‘Fashioning Death/Gendering Sentiment: Mourning Jewelry in Britain in the Eighteenth Century’, in *Women and the Material Culture of Death*, ed. M. D. Goggin and B. F. Tobin (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 40-42.

unquestionable evidence for the “fashionability of the female mourner in the 1780s”; this, in turn, is indicative, in her eyes, of “a moment when mourning, by being associated with sentiment rather than death, became both fashionable and gendered”.²⁸²

Certainly there is no denying the ubiquitous presence of the female mourner across countless miniatures, which became so popular a feature of the mourning jewellery of the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Whether this was reflective of a fundamental transformation in the “gendering of mourning practices”, however, is somewhat more debatable.²⁸³ Women (widows) had, even in the century before, predominantly assumed the greatest and most visible obligations associated with the demands of mourning, whilst into the 1780s, male figures even appeared as grieving individuals in some of these compositions, and there was still a varied choice of mourning jewellery produced, which was less ‘gendered’ in its design and appearance.²⁸⁴

One of the more curious variations on the painted miniature, which emerged towards the very end of the period, was the fashion for depicting a single eye.²⁸⁵ Though a relatively short-lived custom – c.1785-1830²⁸⁶ – that seems to have originated in France, eye portraits offered a unique and fashionable form of sentimental jewellery, with pieces utilised as both mourning and amatory keepsakes.²⁸⁷

Typically executed in watercolour onto ivory or perhaps even cut from existing portraits, these small naturalistic compositions were set in a variety of rings,

²⁸² Fennetaux, ‘Fashioning Death/Gendering Sentiment’, pp. 28, 40, 43, 46.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

Interestingly, however, Holm has also suggested that a “fundamental division between female and male spheres” in the eighteenth century, meant that “mourning became a female task”.

Holm, ‘Sentimental Cuts’, p. 139.

²⁸⁴ For mourning jewellery featuring male mourners, see: Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, Accession Number: 1928M327; Marsh (ed.), *Memorial Rings*, pp. 218, 223, 226.

²⁸⁵ Bury, *Jewellery 1789-1910*, p. 68.

²⁸⁶ It should be noted, however, that, contrary to customary dates typically associated with this fashion, there exists an earlier style of ring in the British Museum Collections, dated c.1690-1740, which is also set with an eye miniature, thus pre-dating other examples of this kind by several decades. It may be that the eye was a later addition, perhaps replacing an earlier *memento mori* or hair-work composition which was originally set beneath the faceted rock crystal bezel. See: British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1579.

²⁸⁷ For the most comprehensive study of these distinctive portraits, see: H. Grootenboer, *Treasuring the Gaze: Intimate Vision in Late Eighteenth-Century Eye Miniatures* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 2012).

clasps, brooches, and pins, often adorned with enamel work or featuring decorative and jewelled mounts.²⁸⁸

These highly personal and intimate tokens of affection were also “intensely private objects” in that the sole emphasis on the eye meant that it was “recognisable and meaningful” only to the subject portrayed and to the wearer who beheld it. Moreover, these jewels held a uniquely fascinating function in that they offered, as Grootenboer suggests, the expressive and emotive “portrayal of an [absent] individual’s gaze”.²⁸⁹

In the case of mourning tokens, this was a gaze from beyond the grave, and, indeed, from the evidence provided by dedicatory memorial inscriptions, Grootenboer contends that as many as one in five eye miniatures may have functioned as mourning jewels. Some of the mourning eyes may have been painted after the subject had died, but others were doubtless converted, with inscriptions posthumously inscribed on the back of a treasured personal memento.²⁹⁰

This gold and enamelled bordered ring, for example, features a round bezel set with the contemplative or, perhaps, wistful stare of a finely realised – and remarkably youthful, considering the biographical inscription – light brown eye; the back of the bezel reveals the eye to be that of: ‘Mary Dean Obt 27. Augt 1794 Æt. 73’.²⁹¹ [FIG. 109]

Some other eye miniatures made plain their mourning connotations through the addition of “materialised expressions of grief” in the form of small crystal or diamond ‘teardrops’ suspended beneath the glass. Grootenboer suggests that these ‘crying eyes’ were not just tokens of remembrance, but had a “performative” function, a “speaking gaze” from beyond the grave, in which the individual’s eye continued to address the bereaved, demanding that their absence be evoked and lamented.²⁹² [FIG. 110]

Another variation on the portrait miniature, which emerged during the 1770s, created by both amateurs and professionals, such as John Miers (1758-1821), was the more affordable silhouette or ‘profile’, which was often set into brooches or rings.²⁹³

²⁸⁸ Grootenboer, H., ‘Treasuring the Gaze: Eye Miniature Portraits and the Intimacy of Vision’, *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 88, 3 (September, 2006), p. 496.

²⁸⁹ Grootenboer, ‘Treasuring the Gaze: Eye Miniature Portraits’, p. 497.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 503.

²⁹¹ British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1732.

²⁹² Grootenboer, ‘Treasuring the Gaze: Eye Miniature Portraits’, p. 503; Grootenboer, *Treasuring the Gaze: Intimate Vision*, pp. 91, 108.

²⁹³ Scarisbrick, *Jewellery in Britain*, p. 271.

Some of these likenesses, like the miniature eye portraits, were probably executed when the subject was alive, but provided a suitably individual and poignant memorial token after death.²⁹⁴ [FIG. 111] In a similar vein, this intaglio ring features the finely wrought and carefully detailed portrait bust of a female, carved into the onyx-set bezel; the inscription set around the white enamelled band, indicates that the ring depicts the darkly ethereal profile of: ‘SARAH JERVIS OB:25 JULY 1777 ÆT. 23.’²⁹⁵ [FIG. 112]

Jewellery as Mourning Attire

*In black or in white I must always appear
As I mourn for a friend who was held very dear;*²⁹⁶

As the use and appearance of mourning jewellery had evolved and progressed over time, so too had the complementary custom of mourning dress. The wearing of particular clothing and accessories following a bereavement had long functioned as a useful means of publicly expressing “formal respect for the dead” as well as providing a staged and accepted medium for asserting a “personal sense of loss”.²⁹⁷

Debate surrounding the “propriety and protocols of mourning” had surfaced throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, concerning “who should mourn, how to mourn, and for how long mourning should be observed”.²⁹⁸

Certainly, before the eighteenth century, the general adoption of mourning dress – as distinct from funeral attire – had depended largely on “circumstance and personal choice”.²⁹⁹ It was an evolving etiquette, but the keeping of a significant period of mourning required a considerable financial outlay and was, thus, largely restricted to the wealthier sections of society.³⁰⁰ The customary and often complex prescriptions for mourning began in the Royal household and from there “percolated down” to the Nobility, Gentry, and beyond.³⁰¹

This portrait of Queen Anne of Denmark (1574-1619) is illustrative of the mourning accessories favoured by aristocratic women in the early seventeenth century. It is thought to have been painted sometime around 1612, following the

²⁹⁴ For examples of mourning silhouettes, see: Luthi, *Sentimental Jewellery*, p. 10; Nehama, *Death Lamented*, p. 62.

²⁹⁵ British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1657.

²⁹⁶ P. Puzzlewell, *A Choice Collection of Riddles, Charades, Rebusses, &c. Chiefly Original...* (London, 1794), p. 44.

²⁹⁷ Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family*, p. 248.

²⁹⁸ Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death*, p. 438.

²⁹⁹ Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family*, p. 250.

³⁰⁰ Gittings, *Death, Burial and the Individual*, p. 119.

³⁰¹ L. Taylor, *Mourning Dress: A Costume and Social History* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1983), p. 92.

death of Henry, Prince of Wales, and shows the Queen dressed in black, wearing muted accessories of pearl and black stone tear-drop earrings, and a black jewelled miniature case pinned to her bodice.³⁰² [FIG. 113]

Additionally, a portrait, painted around 1619, of Lady Elizabeth Grey, one of the Queen's "favoured attendants, who had walked in her funeral procession", shows her dressed in a similar fashion, and seemingly arrayed in mourning. Interestingly, the wearing of jewellery was evidently still acceptable, for Lady Grey sports a prominent necklace of heavy egg-shaped jet beads and a large pearl-drop earring. Furthermore, a ring – possibly mourning – is attached to a black ribbon or thread tied around her wrist, whilst a miniature case – perhaps a personal or posthumous gift from the Queen – which bears the crowned monogram of Queen Anne, is also prominently displayed.³⁰³ [FIG. 114]

Royal and aristocratic attire such as this shows that mourning could be just "as fashionable as any other form of dress" and was variously adapted to accommodate an assortment of fashionable accoutrements and styles.³⁰⁴ Nevertheless, modesty, decorum, and propriety, were recognised as the guiding principles dictating the appearance and deportment of individuals donning mourning garb.³⁰⁵

Certainly, as the period progressed, there was an increased level of "formalisation" and "complexity" associated with the requirements of 'appropriate' mourning attire.³⁰⁶ The adoption of mourning dress also called for the employment of a "whole range of mourning jewellery", which varied in colour and finish depending upon the stage and intensity of an individual's mourning.³⁰⁷ This jewellery, unlike the memorial rings and tokens bequeathed and distributed to friends and family, was not commemorative in and of itself, but was, rather, fashioned and worn in order to *accord* with the understood and accepted prescriptions of the day. It did not usually directly commemorate the dead but was made from materials and to a style that accommodated particular clothing needs and contemporary mourning requirements.

The "etiquette" of wearing such jewellery was "just as elaborate as that of the clothes themselves" and prompted the production of a variety of pieces suitable as

³⁰² 'Anne of Denmark' (c.1612), National Portrait Gallery, Accession Number: NPG 4656.

³⁰³ 'Lady Elizabeth Grey, Countess of Kent' (c.1619), by Paul Van Somer, Tate, Accession Number: T00398.

³⁰⁴ N. Penny, *Mourning* (London: HMSO, 1981), p. 57.

³⁰⁵ Llewellyn, *Art of Death*, p. 89.

³⁰⁶ Marshall and Dagleish (eds.), *Jewellery in Scotland*, p. 45.

³⁰⁷ Taylor, *Mourning Dress*, p. 228.

accessories to be worn whilst in mourning.³⁰⁸ During the deepest and most intense ‘First’ or ‘Full Mourning’, it was generally applied that no decorative jewellery was to be worn at all, whilst those accessories requisite for dress, such as buttons and buckles, were usually black or sometimes white, and demanded a suitably drab or “dulled finish”.³⁰⁹

In 1686, for example, Edmund Verney, whilst at Oxford, received news of his brother’s death, and was informed by his father of the mourning accessories which had been procured for him, including black shoe buckles, and “3 Payres of black Buttons for wrist and neck”.³¹⁰

Women’s mourning tended to be even more “complicated and extreme”, particularly for widows, and during the later seventeenth century the most austere mourning garb, worn in the initial early stages of deep mourning and sometimes beyond, largely precluded the possibility of displaying much jewellery at all.³¹¹ Aristocratic widows are depicted in a number of portraits sporting black and white mourning clothes, with hoods and veils and high necklines, hindering any display of necklaces or earrings.³¹² **[FIG. 115]**

During the second half of the seventeenth century, and certainly into the early decades of the 1700s, fairly clear and well developed periods of mourning had been established.³¹³ The keeping of a recognised period of mourning became more widespread and a “far stricter code of mourning dress” was progressively instituted.³¹⁴ In 1775, for example, an attempted highway robbery was notably hindered when the assailants found that the travellers were evidently in the early stages of mourning and were, thus, not wearing any jewellery:

They got quite into the coach, one of them, when he went to search my aunts fingers for rings...they felt our hands for rings, we told them we had none, we were in mourning, it was light enough for them to see that we were in mourning.³¹⁵

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 228.

³¹⁰ M. M. Verney, *Memoirs of the Verney Family from the Restoration to the Revolution, 1660 to 1696, Vol. IV* (London: Longmans, 1899), p. 375.

³¹¹ A. Ribeiro, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century Europe, 1715-1789* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1984), p. 139.

³¹² For examples, see: Dulwich Picture Gallery, Accession Number: DPG585; National Trust Collections, National Trust Inventory Number: 348072; 1210274; 851802 (significantly, this portrait appears to have had necklace and pendant painted out, perhaps in order to better accord with the staging of the subject as a mourner).

³¹³ Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family*, p. 249.

³¹⁴ Gittings, *Death, Burial and the Individual*, pp. 119, 209.

³¹⁵ Old Bailey Proceedings Online, January 1775, Trial of William Thomas (t17750111-27).

Typically, mourning was conventionally divided into several graduated phases or stages, in which the appropriate type and colour of mourning attire and accessories, might be observed. The early stages, of First or Full mourning, introduced a period in which the strictest rules were applied, but after an acceptable length of time, this gave way to an intermediary phase of ‘Second’ or ‘Ordinary Mourning’, in which some jewellery was reintroduced, but, was this was largely circumscribed to black and white gems and enamels. During the seventeenth century, either this tended to mean pearls, very much in fashion and which provided a suitably modest lustre, or black beads made from a fitting material such as jet or glass.³¹⁶ [FIG. 116] The final stage, of ‘Half-Mourning’, began to signal a return to normal dress, with the introduction of a broader colour palette, and the reappearance of diamonds, gemstones, and precious metals.³¹⁷

The length of these various stages and, indeed, the whole period of mourning, also varied depending upon the closeness of the relationship to the deceased, ranging from a whole year for the death of a spouse, to, perhaps, a few weeks for more distantly related kin.³¹⁸

Some mourning jewellery was shrewdly fashioned to provide not only a directly commemorative item but also had a more practical function, acting as a useful “adjunct to the mourning clothes conventionally required of the bereaved”.³¹⁹ Some buckles, studs, and cufflinks, for example, which were set with hair, provided a blending of the fashionable and the functional, as well as seeking to memorialise a loved one.³²⁰ In a similar style to the ribbon slides produced towards the end of the seventeenth century, this mourning buckle is set with panels of woven hair, overlaid with a biographical inscription worked in gold thread – ‘Eliz Harman / Obt 11 Ap / 98 Ata 27’ – and a small enamelled death’s head; the panels are topped by pieces of rock crystal, whilst the back of the buckle is delicately engraved with a pattern of scrolling foliage.³²¹ [FIG. 117]

In an addition to the mourning jewellery produced to commemorate the deaths of various royals, this mourning buckle, made from japanned brass, and decorated

³¹⁶ Taylor, *Mourning Dress*, pp. 229-30; Llewellyn, *Art of Death*, p. 90.

³¹⁷ Taylor, *Mourning Dress*, p. 230; Marshall and Dagleish (eds.), *Jewellery in Scotland*, p. 45.

³¹⁸ Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family*, p. 249.

³¹⁹ Bury, *Sentimental*, p. 36.

³²⁰ See, for example: British Museum, Museum Number: AF.2988; 2008,8007.5.a-b.

³²¹ V&A, Museum Number: M.91-1975.

See also: 1581-1902 and M.136-1975.

with two small skull and crossbones, was also made to mark the death of Queen Caroline in 1737.³²² [FIG. 118]

Mourning dress connected the boundary between private grief and public display and whilst mourning within the family might be strictly observed, public mourning which occurred following the death of a monarch or member of the royal family was also influenced by notions of display, deference, social distinction, and standing. The most complex mourning rituals were those at Court, and, by the eighteenth century, were precisely determined and regulated by the Lord Chamberlain's Office, together with instructions for 'General' or public mourning, issued by decree through the Earl Marshal.³²³

When George II died in 1760, for example, orders for the 'First Mourning', which lasted for around ten weeks, required men to remove all gold shoe buckles, buttons, and watch chains, and were instead instructed to wear black buckles.³²⁴ The onset of 'Second Mourning', spanning another six weeks, retained black buckles for the men, whilst ladies were now permitted to wear white necklaces and earrings.³²⁵

The publication of these orders also meant that the rules for Court and General mourning were more widely adopted, particularly by aspirational members of the middling sorts, keen to assume an appearance of position and refinement.³²⁶ Lou Taylor notes the chagrin with which one commentator, writing in the *Universal Spectator* in 1731, disdainfully complained that, "Women of inferior Rank, such as Tradesmen's wives" were donning mourning dress in an improper "Affectation of the Mode at St. James's".³²⁷ Nevertheless, as "Court and aristocratic practice percolated down to the lower ranks", the public mourning dress and jewellery of the eighteenth century became less an indicator of social distinction and more a symptom of social emulation and aspiration.³²⁸ By the end of the period for example, the wife of a "hair-dresser" could markedly list "a pair of mourning ear-rings, value 6d." amongst the items that had been stolen from her house.³²⁹

Whilst some areas of fashionable jewellery manufacture obviously found the limitations of style imposed by widespread public mourning detrimental to their trade

³²² V&A, Museum Number: M.8-1973.

³²³ Fritz, P. S., 'The Trade in Death: Royal Funerals in England, 1685-1830', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (Spring, 1982), pp. 305-6.

³²⁴ Taylor, *Mourning Dress*, p. 230.

³²⁵ Fritz, 'Trade in Death', p. 306.

³²⁶ Llewellyn, *Art of Death*, pp. 90-1.

³²⁷ Taylor, *Mourning Dress*, p. 108.

³²⁸ Fritz, 'Trade in Death', p. 315.

³²⁹ Old Bailey Proceedings Online, April 1798, Trial of Ann Ridley (t17980418-31).

interests, other later eighteenth-century jewellery sellers and producers were keen to take advantage of the opportunities it offered. John Fothergill writing in 1765 to his partner, the Birmingham ‘toy’ manufacturer Matthew Boulton, ominously reported the news that: “an express is gone through the Town with the news of the Death of the Duke of Cumberland. I am fearfull this will be detrimental to our plating Button Trade this Winter, as we begin already to want some orders for that Article”.³³⁰

Meanwhile, in early 1738, and possibly in response to the public mourning inaugurated by the death of Queen Caroline a few months before, Christopher Pinchbeck³³¹ informed readers that:

...the Nobility, Gentry, and Inhabitants of Westminster, may, during the Sitting of the Parliament be accommodated with all Sorts of Mourning Buckles, Buttons, Necklaces and Pendants, &c. particularly his Royal Mourning Buckles, [and] Buttons...³³²

Mourning buckles must have been made in considerably large numbers, and were produced for use on shoes, as well as to fasten clothing at the neck, knee, and bodice.³³³ Buckles were quite ubiquitous – “as common to the peasant as the peer” – used by both men and women, and by the eighteenth century, distinctive versions for mourning wear were being produced in large numbers in order to meet popular demand. In 1784, for example, a newspaper advertisement confidently announced the availability of a “great choice of mourning buckles...cannot find a greater variety of fine patterns or cheaper, any where”.³³⁴

Illustrative of this trend, a trial at the Old Bailey in 1791, relayed the events surrounding the theft of “a pair of silver shoe-buckles”, which had been stolen and

³³⁰ Quoted in: Robinson, E., ‘Eighteenth-Century Commerce and Fashion: Matthew Boulton’s Marketing Techniques’, *The Economic History Review*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (1963), p. 47.

³³¹ The eldest son of Christopher Pinchbeck, his father (1669/70 -1732), had gained repute as the inventor of ‘Pinchbeck’, a copper-zinc alloy that resembled gold, and provided a more affordable alternative. Christopher and his younger brother Edward were engaged in a lawsuit following their father’s death, with each advertising their business as the sole location at which to obtain items made from Pinchbeck’s “curious metal”. The quarrel between the brothers concerning their late father’s invention even inspired a satiric poem:

*In Fleetstreet we see, as we saunter along,
Two glittering Toy-shops that dazzle the Throng,
The Pinchbecks I mean, and sad is the Tale,
Tho’ Brothers, unkind, at each other they rail,
One will not to t’other in any wise truckle,
Tho’ Kit shews away with his new Mourning Buckle;
But who has the Secret, remains still a Doubt...*

News, *Daily Gazetteer* (London, England), Monday, November 28, 1737; Issue 757.

³³² Classified ads, *London Daily Post and General Advertiser* (London, England), Saturday, February 4, 1738; Issue 1020.

³³³ Bury, *Jewellery Summary Catalogue*, p. 229.

³³⁴ News, *Morning Herald and Daily Advertiser* (London, England), Thursday, April 1, 1784; Issue 1070.

pawned for “6s. 6d.”; the baker’s wife to whom they belonged, assumedly in replacing her accessories with those of a more sombre hue, had put the unsuitably reflective silver buckles away, stating: “I had no present use for the buckles, as I was in mourning”.³³⁵

Buckles were fashioned in a selection of decorative styles, but those worn for mourning tended to be made from a base metal, which was then ‘japanned’ or varnished black, whilst more ornate versions might also be set with stones of jet or paste.³³⁶ [FIG. 119]³³⁷ In 1764, for example, the items stolen from a house in London included the loss of: “two pair of mourning buckles, made of iron, value 4d.”, whilst nearly thirty years later, in 1792, a highway robbery occurred in which a gentleman was deprived of: “a pair of Mourning Buckles, double rimmed, rounded at the corners, and set with two rows of glass or jet”.³³⁸

Certainly, into second half of the eighteenth century, jewellery sellers were increasingly seeking to accommodate the needs of a broader range of customer, by offering a variety of mourning accessories for purchase. The items stolen from the window display of a ‘toy-shop’ in Westminster in 1778, for example, included a number of practical mourning accessories, comprising: “fourteen pair of mourning shoe-buckles, value 5s. 6d. seven mourning stock-buckles, value 3s....four cards of mourning sleeve buttons, value 2s.”³³⁹

The relatively narrow prescriptions which dictated the colour and appearance of the majority of jewellery worn as part of an individual’s mourning attire, unsurprisingly, also found a similar reflection in the personal memorial jewellery produced during the same period. There was undoubtedly a degree of synergy between the materials and colours used for both types of mourning jewellery, as can be seen in the preponderance of black and white enamels, the use of pearls and ivory, hair, and the later popularity of muted sepia-painted miniature compositions.

³³⁵ Old Bailey Proceedings Online, September 1791, Trial of Margaret Pitt (t17910914-16).

³³⁶ Phillips, *Jewels and Jewellery*, p. 56.

In 1741, for example, the London goldsmith John Curghey, provided an itemised bill which included a charge of 1s. “for blacking a sett of Buckles”.

British Museum, Museum Number: Heal,67.104.

³³⁷ See, for example: Wolverhampton Arts and Heritage, Object Number: SJ101; SJB56; Northampton Museums and Art Gallery, Accessions Number: 1962.202; L.247.14, NOMCM.

Thanks go to Rebecca Shawcross, Shoe Resources Officer, for finding these examples in the collections at Northampton.

³³⁸ Old Bailey Proceedings Online, September 1764, Trial of John Jourdan, otherwise Farrel (t17640912-23); Classified ads, *Public Advertiser* (London, England), Friday, May 25, 1792; Issue 18061.

³³⁹ Old Bailey Proceedings Online, April 1778, Trial of William Allen, Joseph Vaux, William Lattimore (t17780429-35).

The archetypal mourning ring, particularly those produced during the second half of the seventeenth century, featuring hoops characteristically embellished with black and white enamel, would have been largely distributed to the majority of mourners at the funeral of the deceased. It must be assumed, therefore, that these tokens of remembrance were exempt, at least initially, from the severe prescriptions of full mourning, which essentially forbade the wearing of decorative jewellery. The black and white enamelled hoop rings, prevalent in the decades after the Restoration and beyond into the eighteenth century, would at least have accorded with the directions applying to subsequent stages, for those individuals who chose to go into mourning.

Many other examples of mourning jewellery, however, are much more decorative and ostentatious in their design and appearance, with various examples lavishly set with diamonds or embellished with brightly coloured gemstones or pastes. An extravagant and opulent late eighteenth-century example of this kind of mourning ring – which is part of a pair, perhaps commissioned by two sisters in response to the deaths of their parents – can be seen in Figure 120. Surrounded by a vibrant border of amethysts, the silver urn in the centre of the bezel is brightly ornamented with diamonds, from which spill leaves and flowers in the form of vividly coloured rubies and emeralds. The back of the ring is engraved with a memorial inscription, dedicated to the memory of two – most likely related – individuals who died five years apart: ‘Cease thy tears, Religion points on high. CS. ob. 25 Jan. 1787. Æt. 70. IS. ob. 18 Sept 1792. Æt. 72.’³⁴⁰ **[FIG. 120]**

These pieces were likely the private commissions of individuals seeking to create and invest in a mourning keepsake that was fashionable, attractively ornamented, and which might be worn long after the funeral had taken place and the required period of mourning had come to an end.

Conclusion

Several jewellery historians have specifically pointed to the execution and subsequent mourning of Charles I as providing if not the beginnings then certainly the driving force for the great expansion in the amount and the extent to which mourning jewellery was consumed as part of early modern funerary and mourning practice thereafter.

³⁴⁰ V&A, Museum Number: M.164-1962 and M.163-1962.

Whilst the death of the King certainly had an impact in terms of encouraging the production of mourning jewellery which was made to commemorate the Royal Martyr and promote the cause of his son and supporters, mourning jewellery had already been in use for some time.

Whilst the commemorative and memorial tokens made to memorialise the King would have an impact in shaping how future monarchs were mourned – particularly at a popular level – and on the modelling of subsequent Jacobite material culture, it cannot be maintained that the mourning of Charles I supplied the main impetus for the expansion in personalised mourning jewellery which was evident in the years after the Restoration and beyond.

The amount of surviving and inscribed mourning jewellery certainly attests to an expansion, elaboration, and growth of the custom during the second half of the seventeenth century; this period also witnessed the emergence of recognisable forms and standardised sequential types in the mourning rings that were increasingly being subsumed to form part of the customary funerary and mourning practices of the gentry, professional and middling sorts.

Sentimental jewellery of all kinds was in a particularly flourishing state, as personalised and emotive tokens which marked and attested to the strength of relationships and affective attachments became ever more popular. As mourning jewellery grew in prominence and popularity, new forms emerged, standardised pieces were produced which sported recognisable and repeatable motifs and imagery, goldsmiths and jewellers responded to popular demand, supplying and creating pieces which could be bought ready-made or personalised to order. There was an increasing variety of items available to the early modern consumer, from a simple gold band, engraved and enamelled with a death's head to the more lavish and bespoke commissions, set with diamonds, intricately enamelled, or featuring miniature compositions made from gold, enamel, hair and silk.

Into the eighteenth century, mourning jewellery had become a recognisable social custom, and the pieces continued to evolve in form and function. As sentiment and personalisation continued to increasingly dictate how the jewellery was fashioned, the hair-working component predominantly included as part of many family-commissioned pieces became a central constituent to many compositions; towards the end of the period more inventive and stylised ways of incorporating the hair into standardised designs and compositions also emerged. The increasing

sentimentalism in design also saw the sweeping away of the more morbid imagery associated with the *memento mori*, so that by the last quarter of the eighteenth century a more delicate Neoclassical design aesthetic had recognisably emerged, introducing a new array of motifs and standardised iconography that would dominate the mourning jewellery until the end of the century.

CHAPTER 4. GIVING AND RECEIVING MOURNING

JEWELLERY: Observing the Claims of Family, Friendship, and Social Obligation

*Welcome thou presage of my certain doom:
I too must sink into the darksome tomb.
Yes, little prophet, thus my name shall stand,
In mournful record on some friendly hand.¹*

The place and significance of mourning jewellery within the funerary and commemorative practices of people across early modern England evolved markedly over time. Whilst mourning jewellery eventually came to be utilised by a diverse range of people, and employed for a variety of reasons, this chapter aims to look at the custom as part of an emerging tradition, from the later sixteenth century onwards.

In observing the proprieties and conventions which dictated the gift or endowment of mourning jewellery, as well as the intentions and concerns which lay behind the developing use of the funerary or memorial token, this chapter will also observe how interpersonal relationships and customary social requirements played a distinctive part in shaping this particular facet of funerary and memorial practice. The gift of mourning jewellery could fulfil several sundry functions, from a highly personal bequest that marked implicit relational ties and social obligations, to a perfunctory favour, customarily handed out to mourners at a funeral. In perceiving the varied ways in which the custom was applied and conducted, this chapter will look at how mourning jewellery came to carry meaning for both testator and recipient.

Testamentary evidence, in particular, provides direct and comprehensive information about the ways in which people used their wills to bequeath personal jewellery, or to make specific monetary provision for the creation and distribution of mourning rings following their deaths. The wills also reveal details about the various sorts of people who were giving and receiving mourning jewellery and the relationships between the deceased and their assorted legatees favoured with a token of mourning and remembrance.

¹ Anon., 'On a Mourning Ring, by a Lady to whom it was sent', in, *The Weekly Amusement*, January 12, 1765; British Periodicals, p. 32.

One of the earliest editions of this poem appeared in the early 1750s, but virtually unchanged versions were also published in 1776, 1778, 1787, and 1791.

In a testator's last instructions, explanations, and farewells, the reasons and motivations that might have lain behind the bequest of mourning jewellery can be uncovered and appreciated. The bequests reveal the various networks of family, friends, neighbours, and associates to be favoured with a personally-owned item of jewellery, or who should receive the provision of a mourning ring. In the bequests and directives issued by various testators, it is possible to uncover the influences of family, gender, social custom and obligation, as well as the different ways in which mourning jewellery was used and manipulated in shaping and negotiating the death and remembrance strategies of certain individuals.

Using Testamentary Evidence: Historiography

Several historians have employed wills as a valuable means of uncovering the material and mental lives of testators in the early modern period. Wills have been used as a window into the memory, remembrance, and commemorative observances employed by testators; they have revealed the relations, habits, and concerns driving and shaping different kinds of bequests and the use of personal possessions and objects employed in early modern post-mortem gift-giving.

Clare Schen, for example, analysed hundreds of wills from Reformation London in order to analyse attitudes and personal responses to religious change, and "the impact of new ideas and practices on the nature of community relations and parish life". In analysing the "pious" and "non-pious" gifts made by testators (including the use of mourning rings), Schen contends that wills, and the bequests contained within them, richly reveal the thoughts, practices, beliefs, and motives of testators.² Studying the evolving gift-giving strategies of will-makers, revealed the ways in which Reformation Londoners hoped to be "memorialised through their bequests"; that, increasingly, through private remembrance strategies and personal gifts to friends and relatives, commemoration practices and forms were adapting to "new pious expectations".³

David Cressy, as already discussed in Chapter 1, used wills to explore the funerary plans and preferences of Elizabethan gentry testators in Essex, which

² Schen analysed 685 London wills from 1500-1620, surviving in three courts: the P.C.C., the Commissary Court and the Archdeaconry Court. C. S. Schen, *Charity and Lay Piety in Reformation London, 1500-1620* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), p. 14.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 167-8.

included the distribution of mourning tokens.⁴ Ralph Houlbrooke, likewise, also made use of Elizabethan Essex gentry wills proved in the P.C.C., (as well as a later collection of wills from the Archdeaconry of Sudbury, c.1630-35) in drawing statistical conclusions about the evolving nature of funerary expectations and expenditure, including the recourse to and provisioning of mourning accoutrements, such as rings.⁵

J.S.W. Helt, also using Elizabethan Essex wills, studied the ways in which female testators marshalled gift-giving as a suitable means of sustaining personal memory and identity within their family, social, and community networks in later post-Reformation England.⁶

In a similar vein, Susan E. James has also used wills to consider the ways in which women of Tudor England approached death, revealing their “emotional and material” priorities, attitudes, and bequests. James suggests that women employed the will-making process and utilised their material culture - in the bequeathing of “mnemonic markers” - as a means of establishing a “public post-mortem identity”. As a source, James contends that the use of wills offers a new understanding of material culture, by revealing the human connections and “emotional context” of will-makers to their possessions, as objects (such as jewellery and mourning rings) are singled out, distributed, and passed on.⁷

Other historians have also highlighted the efficacy of wills (particularly, perhaps, in contrast to the sterility of inventory lists) in revealing attitudes, attachments, and personal investment in objects. Lisa Liddy, suggested that “wills remain the only documentary source of use for establishing evidence of *emotion*”, and

⁴ Cressy, D., ‘Death and the Social Order: The Funerary Preferences of Elizabethan Gentlemen’, *Continuity and Change*, Vol. 5, 1 (May, 1990), pp. 99-119.

⁵ R. Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family in England, 1480-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 269, 276.

⁶ Helt, J. S.W., ‘Women, Memory and Will-Making in Elizabethan England’, in B. Gordon and P. Marshall (eds.), *The Place of the Dead: Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 188-205.

Several historians – including Houlbrooke, Helt, Cressy, and Orlin – have all based their conclusions to some extent on the several printed volumes of Tudor Essex wills edited by F.G. Emmison. Similarly, Becker (discussed in the following chapter) also based her study of women’s will-making and testamentary giving on edited collections of printed wills from the Archdeaconries of Suffolk (1620-26) and Sudbury (1636-38).

⁷ Susan E. James, *Women’s Voices in Tudor Wills, 1485-1603: Authority, Influence and Material Culture* (Routledge, 2015) [Bookshelf Online].

that a will should be read not just as a formulaic legal record, but seen also as a “personalised and emotional document”.⁸

In her sample of 540 wills written in four York parishes between 1400-1600, Liddy contends that “testators transformed objects into carriers of emotions”, bequeathing their goods as “investments in affective relationships” amongst their family, friends and neighbours; essentially, that objects were “reflective, but also constitutive, of an emotional relationship between the deceased and his or her chosen recipients”.⁹

Liddy has particularly drawn attention to the ways in which testators often carefully and meticulously described and portrayed their possessions, not just in terms of their physical qualities, but also in providing a ‘biography’ or potted “history of ownership”, recounting how particular items had been acquired and previously used by the testator. Interestingly, in analysing these bequests, Liddy has also suggested that jewellery - as a personal object relating to the testator’s own body - usually had a more personal connection to the deceased than other domestic possessions.¹⁰ As such, bequests of these personal items could signify a “close emotional link between testator, object and recipient”, as the legatee, in wearing the ring, watch, or buckle, for example, was visibility and physically reminded of its former owner(s).¹¹

In a similar vein, Catherine Richardson has also suggested that personal jewellery tokens had the potential to be “powerful and communicative” in a way that other gifts, perhaps, were not;¹² that such bequests of personal adornment acted as “mnemonic vehicles”, which connected “individuals together with a physical bodily closeness”.¹³

In her study of wills and inventories from Kent, made between 1560 and 1600, Richardson used testamentary evidence to explore the domestic “material culture of memory”, and the “mnemonic role” of objects as “triggers for remembrance and

⁸ Liddy, L., ‘Affective Bequests: Creating Emotion in York Wills, 1400-1600’, in M. Champion and A. Lynch (eds.), *Understanding Emotions in Early Europe* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), pp. 274, 286-7.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 275, 279, 287.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 278-81.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 280.

¹² Richardson, C., “‘As my whole trust is in him’: Jewelry and the Quality of Early Modern Relationships”, in B. Mirabella (ed.), *Ornamentalism: The Art of Renaissance Accessories* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), p. 195.

¹³ Richardson, C., “‘Make you a cloak of it and weare it for my sake’: Material Culture and Commemoration in Early Modern English Towns’, in M. Penman (ed.), *Monuments and Monumentality Across Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Proceedings of the 2011 Stirling Conference* (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2013), pp. 68, 75.

commemoration” within family and community networks.¹⁴ She has particularly looked to uncover the *meanings* of jewellery – both social and affective – to be found in the testamentary record: the language it was described in, how it was bequeathed, and the role it played in “close emotional relationships”, particularly amongst middling sort testators.¹⁵

Richardson further suggested that wills are “actively engaged in negotiating the personal relationships between the testator and their recipients”, providing the historian with evidence about the early modern individual’s “affective relationships with goods”. In exploring the “material culture of wills”, the written document can help us to understand and uncover the meanings of these goods to the individuals who used them.¹⁶

Testamentary evidence can thus offer a suitable means of thinking about the role of material culture in remembrance and mourning strategies, and the ways in which testators engaged with their objects and possessions. In the object of the mourning ring or jewel, we can clearly see affective and economic value bound up together, and whilst Chapters 2 and 3 uncovered the evolving material and visual nature of the physical objects themselves, the wills also show *who* was giving and receiving these items, their relations to one another, as well as *how* and, perhaps, even *why* these objects were bequeathed, given, and used.

The wills give an insight into the ways in which this transaction of mourning jewellery, between testator and intended legatee, was performed and understood by contemporaries, its intended meanings, and the personal and individual context in which the gift occurred at a particular moment in time. It offers the historian a way into the “lived experience” of people in the past, a written source to provide context and put flesh onto the bones of the skeleton of the objects themselves.¹⁷

Seeking to interpret the meanings of early modern mourning jewellery, requires an approach combining both the material and written record, particularly, the wills with the objects themselves - i.e. the material traces resulting from the actual testamentary bequests and funerary provisions. Certainly, articles of mourning jewellery have an

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 68-9.

¹⁵ Richardson, “As my whole trust is in him”, pp. 182-90.

¹⁶ Richardson, C., ‘Written Texts and the Performance of Materiality’, in A. Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello (eds.), *Writing Material Culture History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), pp. 43, 52.

¹⁷ Hamling, T. and Richardson, C., ‘Introduction’, in T. Hamling and C. Richardson (eds.), *Everyday Objects: Medieval and Early Modern Material Culture and its Meanings* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), p. 13.

immediacy and vividness which the written record often lacks, and it is also fortunate that so many examples have survived in providing a direct comparison and visual aid to what is written in the wills (and other documentary sources).

At the same time, however, wills do let us hear from the principal actor engaged in the initial orchestration of many of these exchanges, and, as historians looking to engage with and interpret particular components of early modern material culture have noted, it is often only through the “discourse of documentary sources” that the “subtleties of personal responses to material goods” are revealed.¹⁸

Using Testamentary Evidence: The Wills of Earls Colne, Middlesex and Surrey, c.1500-1805

The main body of testamentary evidence used in this survey of mourning jewellery, focuses on will-makers from three areas of south-east England.¹⁹ The first sample of 472 wills, made between 1500 and 1800, focuses solely on testators living or holding property in the parish of Earls Colne, Essex. It includes wills from several courts, from the P.C.C. down to the majority at Archdeaconry level, providing a wide sample of testators living in a locality with links to London. In observing how the custom operated, these wills are particularly beneficial - through the possibility of record linkage of testators’ connections and associates, and reoccurring names - as to how the bequeathing and transmission of jewellery (both personal and mourning) may have typically operated at a family, parish and community level.

The other two will sets, made up of testators living in the counties of Middlesex and Surrey, were sampled at twenty-year intervals, covering a period from 1605 to 1805 during which the wills were probated. The sample of wills from Middlesex is made up of 2020 testators, reflecting a varied spread of occupations and individuals, whose wills were probated in several different courts, from the Consistory and Commissary Courts of London, to the lower Archdeaconries and Peculiar Courts of London and Middlesex. The Surrey sample is made up of 1159 wills, taken from the same collection of wills, with the majority probated in the Archdeaconry Court of Surrey and the Commissary Court of the Bishop of Winchester.

The wills reveal the attitudes, concerns, and bequests of an extensive assortment of people at different life stages living in these two counties: men and women,

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

¹⁹ A fuller description of the sampling, methodology, and scope of the wills can be found in Chapter 1.

married, widowed, unmarried, and representative of a comprehensive mix of occupations and professions, from gentlemen and yeomen, to merchants, tradesmen and labourers. These wills embody a broad cohort of the population as whole (not just those at the top, whose wills were typically proved in the P.C.C.), but also a great swathe of those ‘middling sorts’, both urban and rural, living close enough to London to feel the effects and influence of its population and commercial growth, and who increasingly dictated and shaped the popularity and spread of mourning jewellery into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

In the bequests of these men and women, we can see how they bestowed and passed on their own jewellery, and the ways in which they turned to and utilised mourning rings – dictating and making provision for their distribution – as a last token imparted to various family members, friends and acquaintances. The wills reveal what was considered most important to testators in making their final bequests and endowments, prescribing funerary provisions, and planning their commemorative and memorial strategies.

Leaving Mourning Jewellery: Terminology and Categorising Bequests

One of the principal challenges, however, of using probate materials to uncover and reveal trends in the types of people who were likely to give or receive mourning jewellery, is the repeated prevalence of some habitually unspecific or rather arbitrary terminology. In most wills, the occupation or social categorisation of testators is noted, but during the early modern period designations such as ‘widow’, ‘gentleman’ or ‘yeoman’ could conceal a “considerable degree of internal differentiation” in terms of social standing, communal recognition, and the degree of disposable wealth.²⁰

Similarly, when testators named their beneficiaries or indicated the intended recipients of mourning bequests, loosely defined familial denominations such as ‘cousin’, could imply both a direct blood-relative in the modern sense of the first cousin, or a more distantly related kin member or close personal acquaintance. Likewise, other “basic relational terms”, such as ‘brother’, ‘sister’, ‘daughter’, or ‘son’, could refer to a member of the immediate nuclear family, but were also used to refer to those relations connected principally through marriage; the language of kinship in early modern England was often “limited and loose”, habitually applied

²⁰ K. Wrightson, *English Society, 1580-1680* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 31-3.

“without precision or consistency”.²¹ Some legatees were identified only by name, often revealing little about the affiliation between the parties, whilst the vocabulary used to define more extended kin also appears “singularly unspecific”, with terms such as ‘kinsman’ or ‘friend’ employed by some testators, but generally lacking any further “specification concerning the exact nature [or degree] of that relationship”.²²

In thinking about what exactly constitutes a mourning bequest, the imprecise terminology or ambiguity of meaning, again, often presents further complications in the interpretation of wills as an historical source. When wills were used to bequeath personal items of jewellery, particularly when those items appear listed amongst other household objects or possessions, it can be difficult to determine precisely whether the ring or jewel in question was deliberately intended as a memorial token, or merely bequeathed as a recognised item of economic rather than sentimental worth. Of course, the way in which these bequests were interpreted at the time may also have differed in significance and prospective usage between donor and recipient.

In 1587, for example, Robert Jolly bestowed upon his daughter, “one gold ring that is to say the least of my two rings”, along with an additional forty shillings and one bullock, which she was to inherit upon her majority; it is unclear whether her father expressly envisioned the ring as a commemorative token, which would be worn in his memory, or if it was merely an asset of significant monetary worth, given in order to augment her inherited portion.²³

Similarly, in a nuncupative will of 1665, Nicholas Liveing, a cooper from Middlesex, whilst making various other bequests of money and wearing apparel, also stipulated that: “I will give my Mother A great Gould Ring”. The circumscribed detail contained within this particular bequest of jewellery, leaves the intended meaning unclear as to whether it was a ring the testator owned, whether it was to be passed on as a sentimental token, a valuable article of his moveable goods (or a combination of the two), or whether it might even have implied that a ring was to be purchased and given to his mother after his death.²⁴

When Jane Wood, a spinster from Surrey made her will in 1704, amongst other monetary bequests to several relatives, she also singularly bequeathed to her sister:

²¹ Cressy, D., ‘Kinship and Kin Interaction in Early Modern England’, in, *Past & Present*, No. 113 (Nov., 1986), pp. 65-6.

²² Wrightson, *English Society*, p. 54.

²³ Earls Colne, ERO D/ACW2/253: Robt Jolly, 20.6.1587.

²⁴ Middlesex, MS 9172/58; Will Number: 165.

“my Silver Porringer, one Silver Spoon & two gold Rings”.²⁵ Perhaps these rings were intended as mourning keepsakes, or were bequeathed as personal and treasured possessions, which she specifically wished to pass on to her sister; alternatively, they may have been merely objectively viewed as possessions of some monetary worth and expense, which she owned and made sure to confer upon a close relative.

George Cann, a Middlesex farrier, seemed to take a fairly prosaic approach when making his will in 1724, expressing little demonstrative attachment in passing on his personal items of jewellery: “...my Gold and stone rings and all my plate unto my sons William Cann and John Cann to be Equally Devided Betweene them part and share alike”.²⁶

Other unclear or somewhat indefinite expressions relating to the bequest of mourning jewellery also scatter the wills, with monetary sums occasionally stipulated for the purchase of “a token”²⁷ or “for a remembrance”.²⁸ Customarily, this may have been understood by contemporaries to imply the purchase of a mourning ring or other jewel, but these rather vague expressions are open to interpretation.

In 1625, for example, Grace Hill, a widow from Surrey, left several monetary bequests to her executor, overseers, and brother “for A token”, as well as twenty shillings to her mother-in-law, “for A token of Remembrance of my Love”.²⁹ Likewise, in 1664, Edmond Browne, a compass-maker from Middlesex, left twenty shillings to his cousin and joint executor, “as a Remembrance of my love”.³⁰

Thomas Spier, a Middlesex yeoman, made an almost identical bequest in 1663, leaving ten shillings apiece to his two friends and overseers, “as a remembrance of my love”, desiring that they might aid and assist his two daughters, whom he had appointed executrixes, and “afford them their best advice”.³¹

Equally, many wills are routinely filled with the bestowment of token bequests – often of around 10 or 20 shillings – to various friends and relations. Coincidentally, this was a sum typically bestowed by testators who *did* expressly make provision for the purchase of mourning rings, and, thus, though many wills do not directly stipulate

²⁵ Surrey, DW/PC/5/1705; Will Number: 26.

²⁶ Middlesex, DCP/K/C/06/MS 25628/66; Will Number: 6.

²⁷ Middlesex, MS 9172/73; Will Number: 135.

²⁸ Surrey, DW/PA/5/1625; Will Number: 244.

²⁹ Surrey, DW/PA/5/1625; Will Number: 115/02.

³⁰ Middlesex, MS 9172/57; Will Number: 65.

³¹ Middlesex, MS 9172/59; Will Number: 14.

that the money bequeathed is to be used for such a purchase, it may have been agreed upon beforehand or of such a customary nature that it was implied in the bequest.

In 1665, William Turpen, a yardkeeper from Middlesex, made provision that three of his “very Loveing friends,” (two of whom also acted as witnesses, and two who were appointed overseers) were to each receive “a Twenty Shilling piece of Gould”.³²

A mourning ring was conceivably also implied in 1703, when William Ryde, a Surrey yeoman, in using his will to provide large legacies for the maintenance of his children, also made the specific provision of “twenty shillings a peice” to the four men he named as executors (one of whom was also his father-in-law).³³ A few years later, William Auger, a saymaker from Earls Colne, perhaps anticipating the purchase of a mourning ring in his memory, also used his will primarily to leave sums, ranging from 5, 10, or 20 shillings, which were bequeathed to a minister, one other named individual, and five particular “cousins”.³⁴

Into the eighteenth century, testators could be just as vague in their token bequests; in 1764, Richard Spier, a Middlesex farmer, specified that his daughter and son-in-law should each receive one guinea only, in lieu of his daughter “having received what I intended her before this my will”.³⁵ A year later, Thomas Wells, a baker living in Middlesex, in a brief will which left all of his effects to his wife, also inserted a succinct provision that his two brothers should receive, “One Guinea each”.³⁶ In both wills, it is not difficult to suggest that the token bequests of one guinea (around 21 shillings) were a gesture which implicitly provided for the purchase of a mourning ring. This contention is further strengthened due to the fact that in the sampled wills from both Middlesex and Surrey for the year 1765, of those testators who left mourning rings in which a price was stated, all specified a value of one guinea for a ring.

Certain ambiguously phrased bequests contained in some of the later sixteenth- and seventeenth-century wills, in particular, also leave room for interpretation, where it is not always apparent if a ring is willed merely as part of a testator’s moveable goods, or, rather, intended as a mourning token. In 1559, for example, Thomas Pullen,

³² Middlesex, MS 9172/59; Will Number: 79.

³³ Surrey, DW/PA/5/1705; Will Number: 82.

³⁴ Earls Colne, ERO D/ACW23/209 D/ACR12/125: Wm Auger, 06.10.1707.

³⁵ Middlesex, MS 9172/166; Will Number: 37.

³⁶ Middlesex, MS 9172/166; Will Number: 135.

affirmed: “I make my said wife and Thos Bridge my executors to see all things done according to my desire and I give unto my wife a gold ring and to Thos Bridge 20s”.³⁷ Perhaps the ring was one that had belonged to Pullen and he passed it on to his wife as a memorial keepsake, but the bequest could conceivably also have signified a more cursory gift, permitting his wife the *purchase* a mourning ring at a cost similar to the sum given concurrently to his second executor.

The will of Reginald Heygatt, composed a few years before, in which he instructed: “I give to my sister Pagett a ring of 40s”, was as problematically concise.³⁸ Again, it may have been a testamentary stipulation allowing for the procurement of a bespoke mourning ring, or it may have been a bequest which simply referred to an existing ring of known monetary value already in the testator’s possession.³⁹

In 1662, Sarah Shenton, a Middlesex widow, whilst leaving several monetary bequests including twenty shillings apiece to her son-in-law and two overseers with which to “buy them Rings to weare in Remembrance of mee”, also made a somewhat ambiguous legacy of £3 to her “loving Kinsman,” Thomas Shenton, “to buy him something or things to Remember mee by”.⁴⁰ With this generous gift, Sarah Shenton was perhaps affording her kinsman the choice of a more ornate ring or jewel to those bequeathed at 20 shillings price, but possibly also the option to invest in silver or plate.

Several testators were just as frustratingly succinct in their bequests, giving “a gold ring” or “a ring” to a named individual, with no further elaboration as to its intended meaning or purpose, or even whether it was a token to be bought or a piece which would be found amongst the testator’s own jewellery. In 1685, for example, Thomas Denton inserted a bequest giving to each of his three sons, Thomas, Henry, and John Denton, “one Gold Ring”.⁴¹ In 1663, Margaret Francke, a widow from Middlesex, whilst leaving a detailed will containing monetary bequests to family members, gloves to her overseer, and instructions concerning her burial, also specified that her three daughters-in-law and her sister would also each receive “a gold ringe” with their money.⁴²

³⁷ Earls Colne, ERO D/ACR5/213: Thos Pullen, 16.11.1559.

³⁸ Earls Colne, ERO D/ABW18/129: Reginald Heygatt of Feering, 02.08.1552.

³⁹ Consequently, this may be the earliest instance of a specific bequest intended for a memorial ring, within the Earls Colne collection of wills.

⁴⁰ Middlesex, MS 9172/56; Will Number: 62.

⁴¹ Surrey, DW/PA/5/1685; Will Number: 38.

⁴² Middlesex, MS 9052/15/1; Will Number: 107.

In 1704, Mary Ballinger, from Middlesex, whilst leaving “my Mother’s Wedding Gold Ring” to her brother (also joint executor of her will), also made separate provision that five other named individuals – including her father-in-law (also an executor), a “kinswoman”, and the daughter of a “good friend” – should each receive with their legacies, “one of the Gold Rings that I have by me”.⁴³

It would seem most likely that these rings were left as commemorative bequests, but it is difficult to determine exactly from the wording of these generalised donations whether they were rings to be handed out from amongst the testators’ own collection of jewellery, or merely understood by the appointed executors of the wills to imply the giving of a number of specially bought gold mourning rings (which in Mary Ballinger’s case had already been apportioned and set aside for the purpose).

This is an issue also highlighted in the will of Surrey widow, Mary Venus, who in 1693 made bequests of twenty shillings apiece to nine separate individuals – including four nephews, a niece and her two daughters, the man she appointed overseer, and her sister – “to buy them a ring”, whilst also leaving her wedding ring to the wife of her appointed executor. However, preceding these bequests, Mary had also stipulated that her “cousin” and her three eldest daughters were to have “one ring of gold a piece which said rings are tied up together for them”.⁴⁴

Like Ballinger, Mary Venus – though “being infirme and weak in my Body” – had prudently made appropriate provision so that all of her intended legatees would be supplied with a ring after her death. The instructions of both Ballinger and Venus might indicate that mourning rings had been acquired in advance of their own deaths and set aside in preparation, or, more likely, that these female testators had given some forethought to the supplying of a memorial ring and were making judicious use of both their own jewellery combined with the employment of custom-made mourning rings.⁴⁵

Similarly, when Richard Marsh, a retailer of strong waters, instructed in his will of 1704: “unto my wifes Son John Rose a Gold Ring as my wife shall think fit,” he

⁴³ Middlesex, MS 9172/97; Will Number: 7.

⁴⁴ Surrey, DW/PA/5/1695; Will Number: 77.

⁴⁵ Bower Marsh did suggest that one example in the Crisp Collection of memorial rings (No. 272) was likely made during the lifetime of the elderly woman commemorated in the inscription: “E : Legge . born . 3 . Sep : 1670 . aged . 84”, as the lady in question actually died six years later, at the age of 90. It is supposed that the ring, which is also set with hair, was commissioned to allow Elizabeth Legge to settle upon a suitable design and to personally distribute the ring(s) to family and friends. B. Marsh (ed.), *Memorial Rings: Charles the Second to William the Fourth, in the Possession of Frederick Arthur Crisp* (Grove Park Press, 1908), pp. 5, 95.

may have been leaving the procurement of a suitable mourning ring for his stepson to the discretion of his wife (as the executrix of his will), or - as the inheritor of his remaining “Gold Silver Jewells” - may have thought it merely proper for his wife to choose from amongst his own personal jewellery a suitable token bequest for her son.⁴⁶

Doubtless, the testators of these brief bequests thought it likely that they would be easily understood, and their stipulations straightforwardly fulfilled by their executors and beneficiaries, and thus the need for further elucidation was considered unnecessary.

However, in analysing the bequests, one of the most striking features throughout the sampled wills is not only the fact that practically all of the testators specified that a ring, rather than any other item of mourning jewellery should be purchased, but also that very few testators directly termed or labelled these bequests as “mourning rings”. Whilst the majority of testators certainly took care to specify the individuals who should receive a ring, and how much each ring should cost, in terms of the terminology used – particularly in the first half of the seventeenth century – explicitly denominating these objects as articles of “mourning” was fairly intermittent.

In Earls Colne, whilst two early wills of 1603 left orders to supply personalised memorial rings – Roger Harlakenden leaving instructions to “make every of them a ring of gold in remembrance of me”⁴⁷ and William Harlakenden bequeathing several gold rings “with death’s head and letters for my name”⁴⁸ – it was not until 1659 that an Earls Colne testator actually first specifically used the term “mourning ring” (the spinster Martha Langford, who left “my two rings” to her female cousins, and an additional seven “mourning rings” to various family and friends).⁴⁹ More typically, in 1634, William Stephens had left his son “40s to make him a ring”, and subsequent testators from the Earls Colne sample, such as Ann Scroggs in 1641, and Henry Ennewe in 1649, left money to various kin with which “to buy them rings”.⁵⁰

This was the method most testators adopted, merely specifying the amount allotted “for” or to “make” or to “buy” a ring. Within the sampled Middlesex and

⁴⁶ Middlesex, MS 9172/98; Will Number: 86.

⁴⁷ Earls Colne, PROB11/101/302-303v: Roger Harlakenden, 2.1.1603.

⁴⁸ Earls Colne, PROB11/109/12: Wm Harlakenden, 10.2.1603.

⁴⁹ Earls Colne, PROB11/291/329: Martha Langford, 10.02.1659.

⁵⁰ Earls Colne, ERO D/ACW12/20: Wm Stephens, 20.12.1634; Earls Colne, PROB11/187/77: Ann Scroggs, 28.08.1641; Earls Colne, ERO D/ACW15/276: Hen Ennewe, 20.11.1649.

Surrey wills the situation is much the same, as early testators rarely referred to the rings they bequeathed as “mourning rings”. For example, in 1602, Bridget Tucke, a Surrey widow, left ten shillings each to her two granddaughters, “to make them rings wthall”, and to her daughter-in-law, another “twentie shillinge in money to make her a rynge wthall in remembrance of me”.⁵¹ In 1625, Ellis Ellyott, a Middlesex gentleman, left three pounds to his friend and overseer, “to make him a Ringe to weare for my saike”, as well as another forty shillings to his overseer’s wife “to make her a Ringe”.⁵² In the same year, John Smith, a ship carpenter, left twenty shillings to his cousin and namesake, “to buy him a Ringe for to weare in my Remembrance”.⁵³

Occasionally, testators might also allude to the design of their intended rings making their memorial function more explicit, in that they might feature a death’s head or the engraving of an appropriate motto or posy. This was the case in 1625, as Matthew Harte, a Middlesex yeoman, bequeathed to either of his “good frends” and overseers, “a ringe of Gould wth a deathes hed of forty shillings”.⁵⁴ Over a century later, in 1743, Joanna Eccles, a widow living in Surrey, passed on two rings to her niece: “my mourning enamelled Ring and a Gold enamelled Ring with a Death’s Head upon it”.⁵⁵

It is not until the wills are sampled in 1665, however, that the term “mourning ring” is first used in both the Middlesex and Surrey samples. Thomas Barker, a Middlesex goldsmith, bequeathed fifteen shillings apiece to his two daughters and son-in-law (also a joint executor) entreating them, “(if they please) to buy...mourning Rings”.⁵⁶ In the same year, Henry Young, a shipwright, not only left “my seale ringe” to his wife (as well as several items of inscribed silver to his mother and children), he also gave twenty five shillings to both of his overseers “to buy them mourning ringes”.⁵⁷ In a nuncupative will of 1665, William Rowe, a Surrey bachelor, “gave unto his Mother a Mournige Ringe to weare in Remembrance of him”.⁵⁸

Moreover, it was not until 1724, that William Holland, a brewer from Middlesex, employed the even more uncommonly used term “memorial ring” in his bequest of rings costing 18 shillings apiece to 34 different individuals - 27 men and 7

⁵¹ Surrey, DW/PA/5/1605; Will Number: 91b.

⁵² Middlesex, MS 9172/37.

⁵³ Middlesex, MS 9172/35/2; Will Number: 212.

⁵⁴ Middlesex, MS 9172/34; Will Number: 257.

⁵⁵ Surrey, DW/PA/5/1745; Will Number: 28.

⁵⁶ Middlesex, AM/PW/1665/002.

⁵⁷ Middlesex, MS 9172/58; Will Number: 231.

⁵⁸ Surrey, DW/PC/5/1665; Will Number: 99A.

women - which included a “Brother”, “Sister”, “Brother in Law”, 3 “Nephews”, 4 “Kinswomen”, and both his joint executors.⁵⁹

In thinking about the purpose or occasion where these tokens would be handed out to mourners or had been acquired by their recipients, some testators – predominantly in the later seventeenth and early decades of the eighteenth century – also used terms such as “funeral ring” and “burial ring” to refer to their bequests. In 1704, for example, Elenor Harrison, a Middlesex widow, whilst leaving twenty shillings apiece to either of her trustees “to buy them a Ring”, amongst the possessions she bequeathed to her son and executor, was also “one funerall Ring of Gold”.⁶⁰ In 1689, Richard Tyler, a Surrey yeoman, whilst leaving twenty shillings to either of their husbands, also specified that two days after his death his sisters should have “my two Buriall Rings now in the house”.⁶¹

For the most part, however, what the wills certainly do fail to capture is the mourning jewellery that was commissioned exclusively by the bereaved, either handed out at the funeral or made separately for individual mourners. This memorial jewellery was not discernible as a testamentary bequest or created outright to satisfy some post-mortem directive issued by the deceased; it was made solely at the personal volition of particular individuals who saw mourning jewellery as an expedient, appropriate, and worthwhile commemorative endeavour.

Furthermore, whilst testators may have made bequests to provide funds for the supplying of rings, it does not necessarily follow that the recipients of these gifts chose to actually spend the legacies they had received - sometimes months after the actual death of the testator - on the mourning ring which had been stipulated in the will.

A silver and gilt beaker in the V&A, commissioned by William Bromley and inscribed to the memory of his friend Robert South who had died in 1716, highlights this very issue;⁶² whilst a codicil to South’s will had included “some small pledge (at least) of my Respects to some of my particular friends”, including Bromley, who were all to receive “five Broad carolus pieces of Gold to buy each of them a Ring to remember me their poor friend and servant by”, Bromley must have chosen, rather, to

⁵⁹ Middlesex, MS 9172/124/1; Will Number: 54.

⁶⁰ Middlesex, MS 9172/97; Will Number: 142.

⁶¹ Surrey, DW/PC/5/1689; Will Number: 42.

⁶² V&A, Museum Number: M.3-2008.

invest the money not in a ring, but instead to commission a piece of commemorative plate in his friend's memory.⁶³

In 1785, Middlesex spinster Arabella Culpeper had made provisions for something similar; whilst she left several monetary bequests, as well as “my diamond ear-rings &...my gold watch” to the two daughters of a male cousin, she also made donations of five guineas apiece to five females including a “cousin” and her “good friends”, with which “to buy them rings *or* pieces of plate to keep in remembrance of the friendship between us”.⁶⁴ A century earlier, in 1685, Augustine Leake, a Middlesex victualler, had also made care to note that the twenty shillings he bequeathed to his godson could be used either “to buy him a silver cup or Gold Ring”.⁶⁵

On the other hand, some family and friends must also have chosen to directly ignore the wishes of the deceased, by commissioning a piece of mourning jewellery, sometimes contrary to the wishes of the testator themselves. In the Crisp Collection of memorial rings, Bower Marsh noted the 1779 will of Serjeant-at-Law, James Foster, who had instructed: “No Rings be given but to my Children”; the surviving mourning ring (No. 602) personalised with Foster's initials, however, is decorated with an urn, above which is the word “Friendship”. This would seem a rather anomalous motto for his children to have chosen, so it would seem that a friend of Foster either commissioned or was given the ring when he died in 1780.⁶⁶

Some testators were obviously aware that any stern directives issued in the hope of providing for and securing their own memorial legacy might go unheeded and thus chose to word their bequests accordingly; in 1685, Benjamin Taylor, a Middlesex shipwright, left bequests of twenty shillings apiece to seven different individuals – including his two sisters, three male friends (two of whom also acted as witnesses) and two of their wives – “for a ring or what [they] please to weare in my Remembrance”.⁶⁷

Mourning Jewellery: The Ties of Family and Kinship

Before the second half of the seventeenth century, the majority of testators who could afford to concern themselves with the generous provision of bespoke

⁶³ PROB 11; Piece 553.

⁶⁴ Middlesex, MS 9172/175; Will Number: 224.

⁶⁵ Middlesex, AM/PW/1685/046.

⁶⁶ Marsh (ed.), *Memorial Rings*, p. 189.

⁶⁷ Middlesex, MS 9172/73; Will Number: 149.

mourning rings for their legatees were predominantly restricted to members of the nobility, gentry, wealthy yeomanry, and the richer professional and middling sorts. As the period progressed, however, tokens of “personal remembrance grew more important”, increasingly favoured by well-placed testators as a useful means of acknowledging the respective bonds of sentiment and esteem, and providing an appropriately affective sign of mourning and commemoration.⁶⁸

In a studied sample of the P.C.C. wills of gentry and merchant testators from Elizabethan Essex, Houlbrooke observed that “kinsfolk” were by far the “largest category of recipients” likely to be favoured with the bestowal of a mourning ring.⁶⁹ This is largely borne out by the small number of wills leaving jewellery which were made by the testators from Earls Colne, as well as a very limited sample from Middlesex and Surrey, for the same general period. However, “kinsfolk”, whether as members of the immediate nuclear family, or those encompassing a wider range of relations, including cousins, in-laws, nephews, nieces, and grandchildren, make up a great bulk of the beneficiaries who were bequeathed a mourning ring or an item of personal jewellery, in the sampled wills from across the entire period under study. Whilst testators were, as a rule, generally keen to favour their immediate family in their larger legacies, mourning rings also afforded a gift of remembrance which could fittingly acknowledge the broader ties and obligations of kinship and regard.

A good example of this can be seen in the nuncupative will of Susanna Allis, a widow from Middlesex, who in 1665 left twelve shillings apiece to her “father and mother, my brother and sisters...to buy them rings”; Allis also bequeathed “my little ring” to “my nurse that that now attends on me,” her wedding ring was given to a female who witnessed the will, and she bequeathed a further six shillings to another female witness “to buy her a ring”.⁷⁰ Thus, it was a mixture of close family members, and the female neighbours who were nursing and attending on Allis during her final weeks, that she chose to favour with the bestowal of a ring.

In 1704, Mary Newton, another widow from Middlesex, also utilised her will to recognise and remember a wide range of kin and acquaintances, bequeathing mourning rings to sixteen different individuals; the most expensive rings priced at 40 shillings went to her two daughters, another at 20 shillings to a “son”, whilst the rest

⁶⁸ Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family*, p. 252.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 252.

⁷⁰ Middlesex, MS 9172/59; Will Number: 35.

were priced at 10 shillings, and were passed to several named individuals, including five grandsons.⁷¹

In 1685, John Masters, a tiler and bricklayer from Middlesex, also used his will to pass on gold mourning rings to a range of different family members; all priced at twenty shillings, the rings “to weare in remembrance of me”, were bequeathed to eight individuals, which included two “Cousine” (one of whom also witnessed the will) and their wives, as well as two “Brothers” and their wives, his “Sisters”.⁷²

The evidence provided by wills and testamentary bequests offers an invaluable “index of the importance of kinship in the past”, providing an insight into the “distance and direction of family sentiment”, and the influence and import of familial ties in the formation of remembrance strategies and the uses and significance of testamentary gift giving.⁷³ For Pointon, the gift of a mourning ring between testator and legatee, was a “formal recognition of kinship”, which was explicitly and materially “enacted through the bequest of a sum of money to buy an mourning ring”.⁷⁴

Though the primary focus for most testators, in making their wills and passing on property, was typically on the nuclear family, broader kinship recognition in early modern England was often “flexible”, liable to vary a good deal from person to person; some testators, understandably, acknowledged only a narrow and shallow pool of kinship ties, whilst others might be more inclined to recognise a broader range of kin, encompassing a “wide-ranging cousinage”.⁷⁵

This can be seen in the bequests of mourning rings made by William Coaker, a Middlesex yeoman, in his will of 1665 in which he stipulated: “Rings of a noble a peece shalbe given to these friends & relations heerafter mencioned To my Cozen Symon Peck & to his Children; To my Cozen Land & his wife & Childe And to my Cozen Smyth & her Brother & Sister each of them a Ring”.⁷⁶

In the same year, the widow Margaret Porter left seven rings of twenty shillings to two female “cozen” and another three male “cozen” and two of their wives.⁷⁷ This

⁷¹ Middlesex, MS 9172/97; Will Number: 86.

⁷² Middlesex, MS 9052/25; Will Number: 58.

⁷³ A. Macfarlane, *Reconstructing Historical Communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 176.

⁷⁴ M. Pointon, *Strategies for Showing: Women, Possession, and Representation in English Visual Culture, 1665-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 44.

⁷⁵ Wrightson, *English Society*, pp. 53-6.

⁷⁶ Middlesex, MS 9172/57; Will Number: 74.

⁷⁷ Middlesex, MS 9052/15/5; Will Number: 282.

was in sharp contrast to the rather more limited bequests of William Hazard, a citizen and glover of London, who in making his brief will of 1665, named only three legatees: he left twenty shillings to his brother Joseph Hazard, “to buy him a Ring”, another forty shillings was given to his sister, whilst the remainder of the estate went to his wife and sole executrix.⁷⁸

Consequently, there is a great deal of variation between some of the wills providing mourning jewellery, in which some testators restricted their bequests to one or two pieces given to immediate family members, whilst others made detailed provision for mourning jewellery to be passed on to various friends, colleagues, neighbours, and extended kin.

As an example, in 1704, Elizabeth Tourney, a widow from Middlesex, provided an exhaustive list giving the names and places of residence of the twelve women and seven men (seven of whom were presumably also neighbours as they resided within the same parish as the testator) who were each to receive rings (fourteen priced at 20 shillings and five at 10 shillings);⁷⁹ in contrast, a few months later, Middlesex farmer John Blay, whilst dividing his wealth between his wife and son, bequeathed just one “Ring of gold”, costing ten shillings, to his “loveing father” whom he had also appointed sole executor of his will.⁸⁰

As Cressy comparably noted in his study of kinship and kin interaction in early modern England, that whilst numerous “will-makers chose not to mention many of their relations”, others, conversely, were at great pains to “acknowledge selected members of their wider circle of kin”. This acknowledgement could find expression in the form of a “token legacy”, such as a mourning ring or a monetary sum intended for a remembrance; the writing of the will and the inclusion of considered token bequests to various family members and acquaintances had in itself a unifying effect, acting to “revive dormant links as well as to reward active connections”.⁸¹

In 1665, for example, Ralph Davis, a Middlesex gentleman, bequeathed to his widowed sister the sum of ten shillings “to buy her a Ring to weare in remembrance of me”; Davis hoped that the ring would not only be a token of personal remembrance, but that it would also act as a material reminder of his family’s

⁷⁸ Middlesex, MS 9172/57; Will Number: 115.

⁷⁹ Middlesex, MS 9172/97; Will Number: 90.

⁸⁰ Middlesex, DCP/K/C/06/MS 25628/46; Will Number: 22.

⁸¹ Cressy, ‘Kinship and Kin Interaction’, p. 61.

continued links to one another even after his death, a token given in the hope that it would remind his sister “to bee kind and loving to my Wife”.⁸²

William Whitehead, a glover from Surrey, bequeathed an item which commemorated both himself and his deceased wife; when he gave “unto my first wifes Sister” items of clothing and a ring which had previously belonged to his now dead wife, he was also acknowledging the bonds which still existed between the surviving family members, marked and observed in this token bequest.⁸³ Mathew Turner, a widowed turner from Surrey, probably intended something similar, in passing on a token which would commemorate both himself, his wife, and the ties which bound the remaining family members together, when he stipulated in his will of 1665: “to my sister Anne Charles I give my late wives gold Ringe”.⁸⁴

In 1625, John Stanbridge, a chandler from Middlesex, also bequeathed a mourning ring which marked and traced various connections and links amongst his kinship group: “I give unto...John May my Cosin a ringe of gould wth a deathes head on it wch my said brother in law his father at the tyme of his decease gave unto my wife Anne Stanbridge”.⁸⁵

In terms of using mourning jewellery to maintain and preserve ties and attachments between kith and kin, tokens were also bequeathed to those living in places distant from the testator, a sign, perhaps, that these legatees were recalled and acknowledged despite the vicissitudes of distance and time. In 1725 Elizabeth Auger, a spinster from Middlesex, devoted much of her will to the bestowment and distribution of eight mourning rings (as well as “my little Stone Ring”) at four different values, ranging from ten shillings up to a guinea in price. As well a widowed female who was appointed her joint executor, and the wife and daughter of her other male executor, three of the rings were also given to two women and one man who were living at separate locations “in Cambridge”. The fact that the male legatee – “Nathaniel Auger of the Petty Cary in Cambridge” – was clearly a relation, suggests that the three were, perhaps, her brother and two married sisters, and though “being Sick”, Elizabeth Auger had made sure to remember these relations still living in her native city, in the time shortly before her death.⁸⁶

⁸² Middlesex, MS 9052/15/1; Will Number: 87.

⁸³ Surrey, DW/PC/5/1665; Will Number: 117.

⁸⁴ Surrey, DW/PC/5/1665; Will Number: 112.

⁸⁵ Middlesex, MS 9172/36; Will Number: 156.

⁸⁶ Middlesex, DCP/K/C/06/MS 25628/66; Will Number: 51.

In 1705, Joshua Lister, a Middlesex victualler, left mourning rings of fifteen shillings apiece to six individuals, including the five men whom he appointed executors and trustees of his will. Three of these men all lived in the same parish as the testator, whilst another three – two of whom although described as “my very good freinds” were at least related to Lister, in that they shared the same surname – were noted as residing in the “county of Yorke”. Lister certainly owned land in West Yorkshire – specifically, in East Morton (where two of his executors lived) as well as nearby in Otley – which was bequeathed to his two nephews. Again, it seems likely that Lister was, perhaps, originally from Yorkshire and bequeathed these tokens as a means of maintaining his familial links, but also as a way of utilising and acknowledging the “care and trouble” of his executors/Yorkshire cousins in sorting out his affairs up north.⁸⁷

When Middlesex victualler, Robert Blatchford made his will in 1782, he particularly requested that his young nephew, the son of his brother George Blachford a labourer living in Devon, should receive “my Silver Watch which I desire he may have at my decease,” together with his two prayer books. Seemingly without children himself, Blatchford – though being “weak in body” and dying the following month – was obviously keen in the making of his will to use these personal tokens of remembrance as a means of observing the kinship links existing between the male members of his family, attentively providing for his brother’s child, despite these two relations living at some distance from the testator and his wife, who was to act as his sole executor.⁸⁸

It was not just extended kin and cousins who were granted these token bequests. Mourning rings might also be utilised and given amongst the more immediate members of the nuclear family, both to those still at home or even to those living at some distance from the testator. Mourning rings, or at least money given for their purchase, was a useful way, especially for fathers, of bestowing an affective legacy upon their adult children. This seems to have been a particularly apt approach for those testators seeking to remember and acknowledge children who had already been provided for, particularly in the case of adult daughters who had married, had dowries and inheritances conferred upon them, and were now living away from the parental home.

⁸⁷ Middlesex, DCP/K/C/06/MS 25628/46; Will Number: 37.

⁸⁸ Middlesex, MS 9172/175; Will Number: 252.

Taking seventeenth-century Earls Colne clergyman, Ralph Josselin as a prime example of this approach, it is also clear that a restricted recognition of wider kinship ties noticeably shaped and influenced the manner in which he composed and distributed his testamentary bequests in his will of 1683, primarily limiting them to his own nuclear family or “intimate kin”.⁸⁹

Interestingly, he did leave token bequests of ten shillings apiece to two of his surviving daughters, Elizabeth and Rebecka: “to buy them rings as my last legacy to them”.⁹⁰ Neither his wife, nor his son, or other two daughters, were specifically granted mourning rings, though they did each receive more sizeable legacies as part of Josselin’s testamentary endowments. In Josselin’s will, “the bulk of the property was divided between daughter Mary, son John, and wife Jane”, however, the other daughters had already received settlements of land or property before their father’s death, as well as their earlier marriage portions.

Indeed, most notably, Josselin’s youngest child, Rebecka, had acquired a particularly generous dowry of £500, which had been presented less than a month before her father came to make his will.⁹¹ In this context, the nominal bequest of only ten shillings for a ring, when set against the more substantial testamentary legacies given to Josselin’s other children, makes much more sense. In granting an inheritance early, probably in anticipation of his death, Josselin subsequently used his will to bequeath a token sum for a remembrance, a material acknowledgement and a symbolic gesture of his lasting paternal care and affection for his adult daughters.

This kind of token bequest of a mourning ring from father to adult children was similarly employed in 1725, when Richard Medley, a Surrey waterman, “Being Sick and Weak in Body”, attempted to make sufficient provision for his wife, mother, sister, and the six children he mentioned in his will. Whilst his son John was to inherit the lease of Medley’s messuages and property, on the condition that he would pay the monetary legacies of his brother and two unmarried sisters, he also bequeathed mourning rings of twenty shillings apiece to his son Henry, his married daughter, Alice, and her husband, as well as to his daughter, Isabella, who was to act as joint executor:

⁸⁹ A. Macfarlane, *The Family Life of Ralph Josselin: A Seventeenth-Century Clergyman* (New York & London: W. W. Norton, 1977), pp. 149, 153-159.

⁹⁰ Earls Colne, ERO D/ACW20/79 D/ACR10/144: Ralph Josselin, 01.06.1683.

⁹¹ For a comprehensive breakdown of the transmission of Josselin’s wealth to his wife and children, see: Macfarlane, *Family Life of Ralph Josselin*, pp. 64-67, 93-4.

I Give to my Son Henry Twenty Shillings to Buy him a Ring not being able to Give him more and in regard he will be the best provided for of all my children being Intituled to the Copyhold Lands...from the Death of his Mother, Item I Give and Bequeath to my Son in Law Charles Bostock and His Wife and my Loving Daughter Isabella and to each of them Twenty Shillings to buy them Rings in Remembrance of me in regard I was not able to Do more for them And I Do hereby nominate and appoint my said Son in Law...and my said Daughter Isabella Medley Executors of this my last Will Desiring them to be aiding and assisting my said Wife in Discharge of the said Mortgage and the Management of the rest of her affairs.⁹²

Medley used the bequest of a mourning ring, like countless other testators, as a small gift to acknowledge the ties of affection and regard amongst the significant members of his kinship circle. More specifically, the mourning rings granted in this instance, not only acted as a thankful acknowledgement of the services required of his son-in-law and daughter in acting as his appointed executors, but the rings also clearly offered Medley an affordable and patent signal of remembrance and fatherly care, even whilst he lamented the fact that he could not provide a more substantial legacy for all his children.

The bequests of rings by both Josselin and Medley were evidently utilised as a small symbolic gesture of remembrance, given to those children who had either already received their primary inheritances or dowries before the making of the will, or who would not receive any additional help which the testator could ill afford. Thus, the giving of mourning rings in a will as a token gesture, particularly to adult children or immediate kin already comfortably settled or established, can reflect the often “gradual process” by which land and property was passed on during the early modern period.⁹³

As Cressy relatedly noted, the writing of the will was often the concluding stage to a series of “*inter vivos* wealth divestments” that had been taking place over a number of years.⁹⁴ The final bestowal of a mourning ring, or a bequest given for the purchase of a small token of remembrance, was a useful post-mortem provision, allowing testators to effectively acknowledge their personal ties of kinship and regard.

In 1704, for example, Surrey yeoman, Richard Snelling, “being aged and infirme”, made generous provision for his three sons and four daughters; in a similar fashion to Josselin, however, he also made a separate provision of twenty shillings apiece to two of his remaining adult daughters, in order to buy each of them a mourning ring. The daughters were presumably both married, and in the case of his

⁹² Surrey, DW/PA/5/1725; Will Number: 87.

⁹³ Macfarlane, *Family Life of Ralph Josselin*, p. 64.

⁹⁴ Cressy, ‘Kinship and Kin Interaction’, p. 60.

eldest, he openly admitted the ring was imparted in lieu of his having “already given and paid to her husband the full of her portion”.⁹⁵ Similarly, in 1725, a Middlesex victualler, Francis Spawton, whilst leaving his estate to his wife and sole executrix, also left a guinea apiece to his two married daughters, “to buy each of them a Ring (they having already Received their full portions and been by me advanced and settled in the world)”.⁹⁶

Mourning jewellery presented testators with a suitably convenient and practical means of acknowledging and articulating the various pressing claims of kinship, care, and affection. Particularly for those testators unable to afford to leave several substantial legacies or with numerous individuals to remember, bequeathing mourning rings or passing on intimate tokens of personal jewellery, offered a simple and convenient mode of remembrance and a sign of the testators’ forethought and acknowledgement of the importance of the relationship between donor and recipient.

The giving of a mourning ring as a symbolic legacy, and in apologetic recompense that the testator was unable to offer anything more than a token gesture, was also evident in the 1574 will of Edmund Staunton, a gentleman from Essex. To his father he bequeathed “my signet of gold wherein my arms are graven” and to his mother he gave “my cross of gold”. However, in a codicil to his will he also added the bequest: “To my well-beloved mother [in-law?] Mistress Felton a death’s head [ring] of gold weighing two angels, humbly beseeching her to accept this gift”; in giving this memorial ring, however, Staunton – in a similar tone to Medley in his will of 1725 – also apologetically explained that it was all he could bestow “considering the poor estate of my wife [who would inherit the remainder of his estate and act as joint executrix] to her calling”.⁹⁷

Other testators also judiciously and conscientiously bequeathed mourning rings and personal mementoes to selected members of their kinship circle. In 1662, Elizabeth Case, a Surrey widow, whilst leaving the remainder of her estate to “the husband of my Grandaughter”, also made only one other bequest, ensuring that her son, a mariner, would receive “one Gimmell Gold ring”.⁹⁸ A few years later, in 1665, Millicent Lunn, a widow from Surrey, whilst leaving the lease of her house and

⁹⁵ Surrey, DW/PA/5/1705; Will Number: 88.

⁹⁶ Middlesex, AM/PW/1732/024.

⁹⁷ F. G. Emmison, *Elizabethan Life: Wills of Essex Gentry & Yeomen, Vol. 5* (Chelmsford: Essex Record Office, 1980), p. 71.

⁹⁸ Surrey, DW/PC/5/1665; Will Number: 24.

the rest of her goods and chattels to her “Sonne in Lawe” who was to act her sole executor, also bequeathed another four rings to various family members:

...unto my Loving Cousin Elenour Townsend one gold Ring with a stone in it...Also I give and bequeath unto my loving Brother Edmund Ellis twenty shillings...to make him a mourning Ring...unto Alice the wife of my sayd Brother Ellis one Gimball [gimmel] Ring...Also I give unto my Granddaughter...my Thumbe=Ring.⁹⁹

In 1705, Edward Elder’s short will was dominated by the bequests of mourning rings which were to go to various family members. Whilst the Middlesex victualler lay upon his death bed, “Being indisposed in Body”, he made provision for his wife and mother, but was also concerned that his two brothers and three sisters would all receive “twenty shillings a peice to buy Each & evey of them a Ring in Remembrance of me”.¹⁰⁰

In the same year, the widow, Elizabeth Billingsley, used the disposal of her small personal trinkets and jewellery as a means of acknowledging those closest to her, bequeathing “to my Daughter Marianne Billingsley and my Daughter Anna Maria Emmet each of them a ring of mine which of them my Daughter and Executrix... shall think fit”. It is, perhaps, telling that Billingsley was concerned that her burial should be “in a plain manner and with little expence”, and was, thus, using her personally owned rings as an economical way of remembering her daughters, providing them with a small intimate token, particularly as they may have already benefitted from earlier settlements, their mother preceding her bequests with the proviso that she had “already by Deed...given and disposed of my Messuages and Tenements”.¹⁰¹

In 1784, one Middlesex testator, John Gilling, whilst leaving the residue of his estate to his wife and sole executrix, also made succinct bequests of rings, perhaps as a way of leaving a mark of his having formally recognised and acknowledged the claims and interests of his adult daughters when he came to make his will: “To my Eldest Daughter Mary Gibson One Guinea for a mourning Ring...To my youngest Daughter Ann Chips one Guinea for a mourning Ring...”.¹⁰²

In Josselin’s case, of course, the combined use of both his unique diary and his will allows for a more complete picture of the reasoning which informed and

⁹⁹ Surrey, DW/PC/5/1665; Will Number: 69B.

¹⁰⁰ Middlesex, AM/PW/1705/036.

¹⁰¹ Middlesex, AM/PW/1705/008.

¹⁰² Middlesex, MS 9172/175; Will Number: 213.

underpinned his bequest of mourning rings, helping to eliminate some of the omissions and “distortions” inherent in relying upon just one source to appreciate the various intricacies of family relations and inheritance strategies.¹⁰³ Nevertheless, the sampled wills do give us the most accessible means of uncovering and understanding the motivations and concerns deciding and determining who would (and wouldn’t) receive a gift of mourning jewellery.

Though in most cases the bequest of these tokens was a simple line or two in the will detailing the name of the beneficiary and the intended cost of a ring, the wills also tell us about the form of relationships and attachments between testator and recipient, sometimes the testators’ sentiments regarding the bestowal of a piece of mourning jewellery and why it was being given, and, particularly in the case of personal items of jewellery, a description of the piece, sometimes accompanied with a brief biography of its ownership within the family. These bequests not only give some indication as to the testators’ frame of mind when it came to composing their wills and formulating their bequests, but also the sympathies, considerations, and attachments which fed into, influenced and guided them in the making of their mourning bequests and claims for remembrance.

Whilst major property naturally descended within the nuclear family, a wider range of kin – “siblings, cousins, nephews, in-laws, and step-relations” – might also be recognised through the bestowal of a “token gift”, such as a mourning ring.¹⁰⁴ The range of relations and acquaintances who might be gifted with a mourning ring was immensely wide, with practically every sort of kinship connection mentioned in the wills at some point.

In 1616, David Gosse, a mariner residing in Southwark, made a will which was filled with the bestowal of small gifts of remembrance amongst his wider network of kin; this included gloves for his father and brother, his “late wives weddinge ringe” was passed on to a female “Cosen”, whilst his “ring wth a deathes head” was given to the wife of his “neighbour” and joint executor. It was not just personal tokens of jewellery which were given away by Gosse, mourning rings of ten shillings each also found a place amongst his bequests, as he took care to acknowledge his “sisters”, as well as familial bonds which had not yet been formally ratified, leaving a ring to his prospective brother-in-law:

¹⁰³ Macfarlane, *Family Life of Ralph Josselin*, p. 64.

¹⁰⁴ Cressy, ‘Kinship and Kin Interaction’, p. 64.

I give and bequeath to my Sister Elizabeth Simpson widowe [previously married to the brother of Gosse's wife] ten shillings to buye her a ringe And to Richard Walker wch is to be her husband (if God permitt)...ten shillinge to buy him a ring...to my Sister Burrett wife of John Burrett Bricklayer [also joint executor] ten shillinge to buye her a ringe".¹⁰⁵

In 1671, Mary Arnold, a spinster living in Betchworth, took a much more straightforward approach to the difficulties of deciding who, amongst her family and kin, would receive a mourning ring; directing that £120 should be expended about her funeral, she appointed that part of this sum was to ensure that: "all my kindred and relacons in Betchworth...shall have each of them A Moorning Ring of Gold".¹⁰⁶

Being "very sick and weake" had, perhaps, prompted Arnold to be more circumscribed and to the point in making her bequests of mourning rings, whilst other testators were at great pains to carefully name each and every relation or individual whom they wished to receive a ring or a piece of their own jewellery. This was certainly the case with Susanna Williams, a widow from Bermondsey, who had made her will a few years before Arnold, in 1664; though she had directed that a smaller sum for her funeral of "thirty pounds or more to be expended upon that occasion", she also left an exhaustive list of precisely stipulated monetary bequests, which included sums of twenty shillings apiece to at least 23 named individuals, specifically, "to buy them rings". The directives issued by Williams, itemised rings for 12 men, 9 women and 2 children, and included the wife and sister of one of her executors, a nephew and his wife, as well as "severall friends", whilst her "husbands gold Seale ring" was also bequeathed to a Mr Enderby.¹⁰⁷

These token bequests were a mark of attentive recognition, typically granted by those testators keen to commemorate and reinforce the bonds of family and friendship. Though mourning rings were often granted to close family members, they also afforded a mode of remembering individuals who, whilst perhaps "held in affectionate regard", were either "insufficiently close to benefit from major bequests or inheritance" or, as was the case with Josselin's and Spawton's married daughters, had already received their principal legacies.¹⁰⁸

Indeed, in some instances the bequeathing of a mourning ring may have also carried certain undertones, that it was not just a simple token of remembrance, but, rather, bequeathed with a certain weight of expectation and understanding, a token

¹⁰⁵ Surrey, DW/PA/5/1616; Will Number: 59.

¹⁰⁶ Surrey, DW/PA/5/1671; Will Number: 2.

¹⁰⁷ Surrey, DW/PA/5/1665; Will Number: 61.

¹⁰⁸ Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family*, p. 252.

bequest which was representative of the sometimes strained relations within families. For example, in 1745, Isabella Neale, a widow from Bermondsey, whilst inserting the succinct bequest of “my Gold Ring” which was to be given to her sister-in-law, also rather curtly specified that it would act “as her full share”, her niece also receiving just one shilling “as her full part & share”. The bequest of this ring carries a tone that it may have been a financially expedient move on the part of Neale rather than a sentimental one, a token bequeathed to her surviving family in the hope of making it explicitly clear that they would have no further claim upon, nor trouble her neighbour and executrix who was to inherit, the remainder of the estate.¹⁰⁹

In 1685, another widow, Anne Shillito, had also made several bequests of mourning rings, including those to her executrix, her landlord (also an executor), his wife, and a male witness to her nuncupative will; in granting a ring to her brother, living “in Yorkeshire”, however, she ordered that he might only have the ring upon the condition “if he brings me my mony”.¹¹⁰

Bequests of Mourning Jewellery: Occupational Ties, Pledges of Friendship and the Bonds of Gratitude and Support

Mourning rings were not just given to close family members or only to those friends and relations attending the burial. Memorial rings were also bequeathed and given by testators to acknowledge those professional and personal bonds formed through work and day-to-day relations. For example, in 1665, John Fromanteel, a silk thrower, citizen and clothworker of London, left rings of twenty shillings apiece to his brother and the “loving friends” he appointed to act as his overseers; with a separate bequest of twenty shillings, however, he also marked a relationship that had been formed and obviously maintained over several years with the man “who was formerly my Apprentice...to buy him a Ring to weare in Remembrance of mee”.¹¹¹

Such occupational and professional ties are also often evident in the work-related groupings and links found between the neighbours and individuals which certain testators chose to leave rings to, or whom they appointed as the executors and overseers of their wills. The importance and influence of occupational and business networks and associations can be seen through the bequests of William Parkin, a

¹⁰⁹ Surrey, DW/PA/5/1745; Will Number: 58.

¹¹⁰ Middlesex, MS 9172/73; Will Number: 112.

¹¹¹ Middlesex, MS 9172/57; Will Number: 80.

grocer from Southwark, who made his will in 1745. His brother, Daniell Parkin (also a grocer) living in Sheffield, received a guinea (possibly for a mourning ring) and a set of his “plane silver buckles”; he gifted a further six mourning rings, including those to two men also working as grocers, living in two different parishes, St John the Evangelist, Westminster and St Clement Danes, nearby in Middlesex.¹¹²

The influence and importance of these cooperative and commercial networks meant that mourning rings might be left to friends and business associates with whom the testator had formed close links with, intermarrying, trading, living and working in close proximity to one another in their daily lives. In 1683, for example, Joseph Kettle, a blacksmith living in Shoreditch, whilst leaving only a nominal sum of one shilling to each of his brothers and a sister, did, however, give one guinea mourning rings to the “trusty & wellbeloved friends” he appointed as his overseers; these tokens were not only a mark of friendship, the two men – one an ironmonger and the other a brasier – also worked in professions related to Kettle’s occupation as a blacksmith, and thus the rings reflect the many strands – family, friendship, work, and custom – which often fed into and moulded the making of such a gift.¹¹³

In a curious variation on these small gifts of remembrance, one testator turned not to mourning rings as a means of visibly marking these shared collective associations, but used instead a much more modest but perhaps more pertinent funerary gift to be given out to a select few of his funeral attendees. In 1665, William Bax from Southwark, in ordering that five pounds was to be disposed and laid out on his funeral, also requested in his nuncupative will that four “leather Aprons” were to be given to the “fower Coopers whoe my Desire is shall carry me to Church”.¹¹⁴

Whilst Bax also left bequests of ten shillings apiece to his brothers and his sisters-in-law (possibility for rings), the aprons to his bearers performed a much more visible and identifiably symbolic role than the wearing of rings ever could in this funeral procession. Significantly, whilst Cressy notes that “carrying the corpse was an act of intimacy”, it was often also a “menial task” (it being rather the pallbearers singled for this “mark of honourable fellowship and peer respect”) and it is interesting that Bax does not name or specify who these four men should be.¹¹⁵ For this

¹¹² Surrey, DW/PA/5/1745; Will Number: 63.

¹¹³ Middlesex, MS 9052/25; Will Number: 53.

¹¹⁴ Surrey, DW/PC/5/1665; Will Number: 12.

¹¹⁵ D. Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 436-7.

unmarried man, whilst the token bequests of ten shillings given to family members were a mark of kinship and recollection, the aprons as mourning remembrances were an important indicator of corporate solidarity, a kind of occupational livery which proclaimed and marked Bax's professional identity.¹¹⁶

In marking the more functional day-to-day relationships, some affluent testators also left mourning rings as a mark of thanks or as a personal acknowledgement to the various servants, tradesmen, and dependants whom they encountered in the milieu of their domestic sphere. In 1665, Richard Bowney, a barber surgeon living in Southwark, whilst leaving his personal and valuable "houre Watch" to his "Brother" and joint executor living in Norwich, also made several bequests of mourning rings, which were categorised into three discrete price bands, dependent upon the beneficiary; the most expensive ring at 20 shillings was given to his mother-in-law, a further four priced at 13s4d were to go to his overseers, whilst Bowney also requested that "each and every of my servants at the tyme of my decease" would receive a cheaper mourning ring priced at 6s8d.¹¹⁷

A few testators might even remember and acknowledge the servants living and working within the households of other friends and family members, whom they must have come into regular contact with, choosing to acknowledge these individuals with a ring as a mark of sociable remembrance, which also spoke of the testator's largesse and benevolence, whilst additionally acting as a mark of respect to the individual who employed them.

In 1672, for example, Jane Cocke, a widow from Wandsworth, filled her will with detailed instructions concerning her funeral, including copious bequests of mourning rings, naming the 85 individuals who were each to be invited and receive rings of at least ten shillings; this exhaustive list included rings for her overseer, his wife, his little daughter, as well as his "maid servant"; also included were a "Robert Smith and his servant William Cox...Mr George Pawlett and his servant Charles Brickston", whilst a further nine "Loveing freinds", which included Mary, a "maid

¹¹⁶ In a similar manner, Cunnington and Lucas noted the conspicuous part costume played in the interment of a man in 1735, who had worked as a cook in a London tavern, in which it was reported that his pall was: "supported by six cooks dress'd in white napkin Caps...green Aprons with white ones tuck'd up half-way". P. Cunnington and C. Lucas, *Costume for Births Marriages and Deaths* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1972), p. 136.

¹¹⁷ Surrey, DW/PC/5/1665; Will Number: 20.

servant to my brother Ives”, were also each to receive ten shillings apiece “as a Remembrance of mee”.¹¹⁸

In a similar, yet slightly less extravagant fashion, Hannah Bennett, another widow from Surrey, in making her will of 1730, also filled it with numerous bequests of mourning rings; whilst the 23 “good Gold Rings” valued at twenty one shillings apiece were all otherwise given to individually named family members - including a brother, niece, nephew, sister, daughter, daughter-in-law, grandchildren and great grandchildren - also included amongst these bequests of mourning rings, “to wear in Remembrance of me”, was “Elizabeth Foulger, servant to my Daughter Elizabeth Buckett [whose husband was also chosen to act as executor]”.¹¹⁹

In a curious case of role reversal between master and servant, Emmison noted the 1588 will of William Smyth, an upper-servant, whose generous bequest of mourning jewellery, aptly illustrated the “sincere or sycophantic regard for the gentry” which existed among some old family retainers: “to my very good friend [and loving young master struck through] Mr John Rochester of Terling, my master’s son, an angel of gold to help him make a jewel”.¹²⁰

Samuel Johnson’s faithful servant and his residual legatee, Francis Barber, was recorded in James Boswell’s biography of the English writer and critic, also as having directed the fashioning of a mourning ring memorialising his old friend and master, following Johnson’s death in 1784. Boswell relates the story that when Johnson’s wife had died in 1752, her husband had afterwards preserved her wedding ring “with an affectionate care, in a little round wooden box, in the inside of which he pasted a slip of paper...inscribed by him” which recorded the name of his wife, the date of their marriage and of her death; it was this ring, or “memorial of tenderness”, which Barber subsequently offered to Mrs Johnson’s daughter, “but she having declined to accept of it, he had it enamelled as a mourning ring for his old master, and presented it to his wife”.¹²¹

Elsewhere, mourning rings were also gifted to everyday acquaintances who had provided useful services for a handful of testators, such as Frances Greene, a widow from Islington, who gave three rings in her will of 1685, including the generous sum

¹¹⁸ Surrey, DW/PC/5/1672; Will Number: 7.

¹¹⁹ Surrey, DW/PA/5/1731; Will Number: 10.

¹²⁰ F. G. Emmison, *Elizabethan Life: Home, Work and Land, Vol. 3* (Chelmsford: Essex Record Office, 1976), p. 130.

¹²¹ J. Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson* (London: Penguin Classics, 1986), p. 70. [first published in 1791].

of ten pounds to “the vintner that usually served mee with wines”, with which to “bide him a Ringe”.¹²²

Similarly, in 1780, Susanna Gregory set forth comprehensive instructions detailing her specific burial arrangements, leaving meticulous directives concerning the distribution of mourning accoutrements, which included a “Memorandum of Relations and Friends I desire may have Guinea Rings given them at my Decease if They Survive me”; the list of twenty two individuals she wished to receive rings included not just a sister and several nephews, but also a “Cornelius Launder Esq.r and his Lady” and “The Rev.d Mr. Stanley of Linby”. The rings given in this instance were not only tokens of mourning and remembrance, but were also given as an appreciative gesture and a thankful acknowledgement of the solicitous and considerate actions of her acquaintance, remembering that they: “frequently bring me Game and I think have a right to this small return for their Favour”.¹²³

Evidently, mourning jewellery might also be a favour used to honour the close bonds of friendship and regard, or as thanks for personal support and service. In 1664, Ann Bowers, a widow from Hackney, instructed that her male friend should have “my best gold Ring for him to take his choyce wch of the four he likes best”; this gift of one of her personal rings, she noted, was to stand “for a testimony of my thankfull Respects unto him”.¹²⁴

In 1725, the widowed Martha Beecher from Twickenham, also left a ring to a male acquaintance, bequeathing a guinea to her “worthy and good friend” not only in the hope that he would be “aiding and assisting” to her two brothers whom she had appointed as the trustees and executors of her will, but also as “a small token” thanking him “for his continuall services”.¹²⁵

Frances Hallett, another widow from Middlesex, in her will of 1691, left all her goods to her sole executor, who was working at that time as an apprentice tailor, but whom she had clearly known since infancy, as she emphasises that he was her “Late nurse Child”. Hallett had evidently formed this close bond and maintained the relationship over several years - like Fromanteel had done with his former apprentice - and bequeathed to him her household possessions, foremost amongst which was a

¹²² Middlesex, MS 9172/73; Will Number: 82.

¹²³ Lincolnshire Archives, [Orders concerning her funeral and burial by Susanna Gregory] 2-PG/5/9/13, April, 1780.

¹²⁴ Middlesex, MS 9172/59; Will Number: 91.

¹²⁵ Middlesex, AM/PW/1725/127.

“Gold Ring”; these personal tokens were given with a fulsome declaration of “the true love and kindness” she bore towards her sole legatee, but she also noted that the ring and other personal keepsakes were given “more especially for divers good and valluable kindnesses and Considerations Received and Done unto me”.¹²⁶

From the sampled wills it is clear that mourning rings and jewellery were remembrance tokens utilised by both male and female testators, exchanged and “given out to both genders without discrimination”. Susan E. James has further suggested that the development of the mourning ring in particular - with which testators were able to bequeath “sexually undifferentiated objects” amongst their beneficiaries - served to “broaden the potential scope of physical commemoration” during the early modern period, allowing both men and women to straightforwardly access and employ this form of ritual gift-giving as a means of acknowledging friends and family with a small token of post-mortem remembrance in their wills.¹²⁷

Accordingly, male testators also turned to mourning rings as a bequest with which to thank friends and acquaintances for services performed and acts of support. In 1765, for example, John Marnes, a victualler from Chelsea, whilst using his short will to ensure that his wife should inherit all his personal goods and estate, also bequeathed a single mourning ring to a “much esteemed” female friend, stating that the gift was but a “small acknowledgement of the many favours which I have received from her”.¹²⁸

A few testators also specifically left mourning rings to the female neighbours and helpers who had attended on them during their final sicknesses and infirmities. These bequests are indicative, perhaps, of the concerns of those testators – at their most vulnerable and likely in discomfort – to thank and acknowledge those individuals who had provided care and succour, and who were, perhaps, foremost in these testators’ thoughts as they composed their wills and ordered their bequests.

The earlier example of Susanna Allis, who in dictating her endowments in 1665, included the gift of a personal ring to the “nurse” who was tending her. Similarly, in 1784, Mary Bacharach, a widow from Middlesex, willed – along with some of her wearing apparel – “one Guinea for a Mourning Ring, or to dispose of as she shall think proper” to Mary Gutteridge, a female neighbour, who was living in the house of

¹²⁶ Middlesex, MS 9172/97; Will Number: 5.

¹²⁷ James, *Women’s Voices* [Chapter 2].

¹²⁸ Middlesex, AM/PW/1767/009.

the male friend she appointed sole executor of her will; lying “weak in Body”, Bacarach acknowledged that the ring was given in recognition of the services performed by her neighbour, leaving a mourning token which thanked Gutteridge “for her great care and attendance on me”.¹²⁹

In a similar fashion, in 1724, Richard Crumbleholme, a married joiner living in Holborn - though “being sick and weake of body” and dying four months after the making of his will - had, nevertheless, also taken the time to thank the woman “now tending of me” with the gift of his own “Diamond Ring”. Though Crumbleholme was evidently concerned with the social niceties of mourning etiquette and display, leaving an additional five pounds to both his mother and to this nurse with which to buy themselves “Mourneing”, the ring, he noted, was given expressly in appreciation of the “Exterordinary Care and paines” undertaken in caring for him.¹³⁰

Other social relationships and associations were also observed with the bequest of a memorial ring or a token of remembrance. Living arrangements saw landlords included amongst the donations of a few urban-dwelling testators. In 1684, for example, Joane Sharpe, a widow living in Surrey, left an assorted collection of six personally-owned rings to her granddaughter, as well as a diamond ring to her great granddaughter; mourning rings of ten shillings apiece were also given to a male cousin and her grandson (who were to act as her joint executors), as well as to her “Landlord”.¹³¹

In 1725, Ursula Kinkid, a widow living in St Giles in the Fields, gave nine mourning rings which were to cost one guinea apiece, to seven male and two female beneficiaries; the recipients of these rings included the man she appointed as both her executor and the trustee and guardian of her niece. The son and daughter of her executor were also to have rings, as were, she stated, “my Landlord”, “my Landladdy” (his wife), as well as the grandson of her landlord.¹³²

When Anne Shillito, mentioned previously, had voiced her wishes in her nuncupative will of 1685, one of the witnesses to her will (also a joint executrix) is recorded as having sent for her landlord (also appointed as joint executor), who along with his wife, were all to have rings.¹³³ Similarly, when Nicholas Singleton, a

¹²⁹ Middlesex, MS 9172/175; Will Number: 308.

¹³⁰ Middlesex, DCP/K/C/06/MS 25628/66; Will Number: 19.

¹³¹ Middlesex, AM/PW/1685/068.

¹³² Middlesex, AM/PW/1730/035.

¹³³ Middlesex, MS 9172/73; Will Number: 112.

chandler from Middlesex, had made his will in 1665, he left “my Goald Ringe” to a Mrs Brace, who was presumably the wife of Singleton’s “deare frend & Loving Landlord Mr Philip Brace,” whom he had also appointed as the executor to his will.¹³⁴

Particularly close friends, visiting the testator often in their final sickness and sometimes in acting as the witnesses to the will were also expressly chosen to receive mourning rings, a token often bequeathed with the testator’s thankful respects and an appreciative leave-taking of their acquaintance.

In 1640, John Shermandyne, a gardener from Battersea, gave twenty shillings to his “lovinge friend,” who was also one of the witnesses and signatories to his will, in order to “buy him a ringe in remembrance of me”; as a clerk living nearby in Wandsworth, it is reasonable to assume that this friend had not only witnessed but, perhaps, had also helped Shermandyne to transcribe and draw up his will, as he was also called upon to oversee the accounts made up and performed according to Shermandyne’s wishes after his death. It is interesting to note, however, that the mourning ring bequeathed in this instance was given not in recompense for the subsequent responsibilities of this chosen friend, nor “for his paines to be taken”, but was rather, as Shermandyne stressed, a ring given as a remembrance “of my love to him”.¹³⁵

In 1705, another male testator, a married victualler living in Middlesex, whilst “Being sick and weak in Body” had made his short will in which he had bequeathed everything to his wife and sole executrix; making only one other bequest, however, William Venner also directed that his “Loveing friend” - a man who lived in the same parish, and was both a neighbour and witness to his will - would receive “one Gold ring for the Love and affection that I bear unto him”.¹³⁶

This involvement and presence of family, friends, neighbours, and servants around the deathbed or remembered by the testator in their final bequests, reveals the often “fragmented and diverse character of the household group” in early modern England. Vanessa Harding has particularly drawn attention to the “urban characteristics” of death and dying, where migratory patterns meant that individuals

¹³⁴ Middlesex, MS 9172/59; Will Number: 8.

¹³⁵ Surrey, DW/PA/5/1645; Will Number: 47.

¹³⁶ Middlesex, AM/PW/1705/116.

often lacked the support of nearby kin and habitually “lived with people to whom they were not related by blood”.¹³⁷

In seeking to understand the influence of kinship and the expression of these affective bonds in the context of death and dying during the early modern period, Andrea Brady has similarly depicted the existence of an extended vision of the ‘family’, in which the household operated as part of a “ritual family”. Stressing the blurred division between public and private within the domestic sphere, emotional relationships, social bonds and communal expectations, were articulated and enacted as family, servants, dependants, friends and neighbours came to witnesses and participate in this final rite of passage and its attendant ceremonies.¹³⁸

For example, John Gray, a married labourer living in Whitechapel, bequeathed three rings amongst his female neighbours and attendants when he made his will in 1665; “one Sealed Ring” was given to the daughter of a surgeon living in the same parish, another “Hoope Ring” was bequeathed to a married female also of the same parish, and, whilst being “sicke & weake in body”, he gave a final “Thumbe Ring” to a female “now being with me” by the name of Grace Cox.¹³⁹

Brady further suggests that the “healthcare networks” in which women – such as those remembered by Allis, Crumbleholme and Baccarach – assisted as nurses and carers, helped also to reaffirm and consolidate social bonds within households and communities. This “practical care was read by contemporaries as a form of emotional attachment”, and emphasises the role played by other members of the household or “ritual family” in the physical care and spiritual support of the sick and dying during the early modern period.¹⁴⁰

Urbanisation, geographical mobility and changing family patterns often resulted in a reliance upon “non-kin” in sickness and in death, and it is unsurprising, therefore, that several testators chose to remember the “ties of apprenticeship, service and affection”.¹⁴¹ The ministrations of nurses and carers, the assistance of trusted servants, and the presence of friends, landlords, and neighbours were all relationships marked

¹³⁷ Harding, V., ‘The Last Gasp: Death and the Family in Early Modern London’, in, J. Kelly and M. A. Lyons (eds.), *Death and Dying in Ireland, Britain and Europe: Historical Perspectives* (County Kildare: Irish Academic Press, 2013), pp. 86-7, 92.

¹³⁸ Brady, A., “‘A share of sorrows’”: Death in the Early Modern English Household’, in, S. Broomhall (ed.), *Emotions in the Household, 1200-1900* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 185-202.

¹³⁹ Middlesex, London Metropolitan Archives and Guildhall Library Manuscripts Section, Clerkenwell, London, England; Will Number: 14.

¹⁴⁰ Brady, ‘Death in the Early Modern English Household’, pp. 187-199.

¹⁴¹ Harding, ‘Last Gasp’, pp. 86-7, 92.

and appreciated with the bequest of a mourning ring in the testators' wills of Middlesex and Surrey.

Networks and Connections: Bequeathing Mourning Jewellery in Earls Colne

Nevertheless, the ability and motivation to include personal bequests of mourning jewellery would also have been governed to some extent by the life-cycle stage and economic circumstances of the testator in question.¹⁴² Several factors, such as the age, gender, marital status, household composition, occupation, social position and wealth of the testator, had a significant bearing upon the range of kin acknowledged and the number of other individuals likely to be favoured with the bestowal of a token of remembrance.

The bequest of mourning jewellery was, as has been seen, perhaps not always a direct reflection of fervent sentiment, but it might be indicative of a recognised “relationship of effective kinship” or of a practical involvement between donor and recipient.¹⁴³ The gift of mourning jewellery functioned to acknowledge and reinforce these shared networks of kinship, association and collective group identity.

Whereas the wills of Middlesex and Surrey do provide information on the occupations of male and female testators, the kinds of bequests being made, the number and price of mourning rings typically bequeathed, and the categories of people to receive them, the sample from Earls Colne, additionally offers an opportunity to *concurrently* compare and contrast the process and practice between contemporary individuals at a parish or community level. The surviving wills, coupled with the possibility of record linkage, illustrate and reveal the networks and connections in the bequests between neighbours and community members over a sustained period of time.

In thinking about the influence and significance of kinship links and family relations in shaping and informing the way in which mourning jewellery was bestowed, the testamentary evidence from Earls Colne offers a particularly accessible and analysed corpus of material; this discrete body of evidence relating to one parish community highlights the various interconnections and ties between families and individuals over successive generations, whilst Alan Macfarlane's detailed study of the diary of seventeenth-century Earls Colne clergyman, Ralph Josselin, provides

¹⁴² Cressy, 'Kinship and Kin Interaction', p. 58.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

further insight into how relations and associations were operating within and between members of this parish community during the second half of the seventeenth century.

Josselin's diary presents an unrivalled representation of family and community life in early modern England, offering a further insight into the everyday activities and attitudes of this pivotal individual within the parish of Earls Colne, and his various dealings with family, kin and neighbours.¹⁴⁴ This can be read in conjunction with his will (and those of many of his fellow parishioners), providing added information and insight into the influences and obligations which perhaps affected and shaped the ways in which testamentary bequests of mourning jewellery were realised and understood by those donors and recipients who gave and received these objects.

For example, in looking to understand the social world and bearing of kinship ties upon Ralph Josselin, Macfarlane's analysis of the frequency and extent of references to and interactions with kin in the diary, suggested the existence of a rather modest and restricted "kinship universe". The range and recognition of Josselin's "kinship ties and obligations" was actually fairly circumscribed, with Macfarlane suggesting that certainly beyond the nuclear family, there was apparently "no effective kin 'group' in Josselin's world".¹⁴⁵

There was, of course, potential for marked social variation in the strength and appeal of kinship sentiment and attachment, and particularly amongst the gentry and wealthy elite of early modern England, "kinship was undoubtedly a matter of great practical significance".¹⁴⁶ This variation in the extent of kinship recognition and attachment certainly finds reflection in the contrasting bequests of mourning jewellery to be found within some of the wills of the testators from Earls Colne.

Whilst the apparent absence of an extended kinship network meant that Ralph Josselin – a relatively prosperous yeoman-cleric – concentrated his limited bequests of mourning jewellery upon his nuclear family, other affluent residents were much more inclined to consider a broader range of relations as suitable recipients of their

¹⁴⁴ Josselin moved to Earls Colne in March 1641, and remained vicar of the parish until his death in August, 1683.

A. Macfarlane, *The Family Life of Ralph Josselin: A Seventeenth-Century Clergyman* (New York & London: W. W. Norton, 1977).

The entire transcript of the diary can be read at:
<http://linux02.lib.cam.ac.uk/earlscolne/diary/index.htm>.

¹⁴⁵ See particularly PART III of Macfarlane's study, which looks at relations within the nuclear family, wider kinship ties, as well as relations with godparents, servants, friends and neighbours.

¹⁴⁶ Wrightson, *English Society*, p. 56.

testamentary remembrances.¹⁴⁷ Whilst Josselin bequeathed only twenty shillings to his daughters for the purchase of two memorial rings, his direct contemporary and friend, George Cressener, was much more open-handed in conferring mourning rings upon various “cousins” and other members of his cognatic and affinal kin.

Though Cressener was an acquaintance of Josselin, and of a similar age, he was also head of one of the wealthiest families in the village and, significantly, was identified as a “gentleman” in his will of 1677. Unlike Josselin, however, Cressener obviously had a keen sense of his wider kinship ties and obligations, and made detailed monetary provision for the generous distribution of over twenty memorial rings – ranging in price from 10, 20, to 21 shillings – to be given to various relations after his death:

I give to my dear cousins their children and their husbands each of them a ring of 21s price with this motto I am gone before...to my sons in law the like sum of 20s apiece to buy them rings...I give to my brother Sibley a ring...I give to my cousin Webb and his wife a ring of 10s apiece to my cousin Rich Freebody and his wife the like to my cousin Mary Davis and her sister Eliz the like sum of 10s apiece for rings to my cousin Hen Woodward 20s to buy him a ring...

The need for a material remembrance that commemorated social bonds and familial connections, was clearly a significant motivating factor for George Cressener, influencing the memorial provisions he carefully set out within his will. Though he died less than two months later, the conscientiously detailed endowment of rings and “mourning” bequeathed to his relations was obviously an important preparation, made in anticipation of his impending demise. Not only did he leave instructions for mourning rings to be given to various cousins and in-laws, which would commemorate his own death, but he also allocated a large sum of around fifty pounds, in order that his children might each acquire, “a piece of plate...in remembrance of their brother”. Whilst mourning rings were given to more distant kin, his children were more generously favoured with a piece of plate, created to memorialise Cressener’s eldest son, and namesake, who had died the year before. The plate, he instructed, was to commemorate his “dear child”, George, and was to have “his coat of arms and name and also a deaths head engraven upon it”.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ In judging Josselin’s economic position, Macfarlane placed him “just below the leaders in wealth”. Taking the 1671 Hearth Tax assessment of 6 hearths as representative of his position, he was “among the top dozen families in the village”. Richard Harlakenden was the richest man in the village with 20 hearths, followed by George Cressener with 11 hearths.

Macfarlane, *Family Life of Ralph Josselin*, p. 78.

¹⁴⁸ Earls Colne, PROB11/354/83: Geo Cressener, 19.05.1677.

Cressener was obviously keen to ensure that both he and his son were satisfactorily commemorated within the wider family, and the distribution of mourning rings and personalised tokens of remembrance served not only to evoke the memory of the deceased, but also stood as an emotive testament to the enduring bonds of family sentiment and regard.

For members of the gentry such as Cressener, “their community was the country society made up of their approximate social equals”, which, coupled with their “habit of marrying within that society” meant that “extensive kinship links” characteristically existed within the gentry community.¹⁴⁹ The recovery of the testamentary record in the reconstruction of the historical population of Earls Colne, supports a certain degree of record linkage, allowing for the rudimentary identification of recognisable connections between the various testators. It is unsurprising to find, owing to the shared familial and communal associations that typically existed between the leading members of the parish, that the same individuals and family names habitually reappear in the wills that incorporated bequests of mourning jewellery into their testamentary provisions.

Indeed, it would appear that, as the customary bequest of a “ring for a remembrance” became ever more widespread and familiar, the gift of mourning jewellery provided testators with a standard and formalised means of acknowledging the ties of kinship and community. Tacit social obligations and the pressing claims of friendship and family were recognised and reinforced through the routine provision and distribution of mourning rings and other jewellery. It was a custom mutually reciprocated within and between members of the most influential families of the parish, employed and perpetuated as a conventional means of observing and remembering the individuals and relations who made up a testator’s collective social network.

In 1603, for example, Roger Harlakenden, esquire, made particular provision for the supply of five mourning rings, which were allocated to specific members of his family:

I give unto Wm Harlakenden my brother...a ring of gold price 3li or else 3li in money to make him a ring in remembrance of me to be paid within a month next after my decease...I give unto my son in law mr Clem Stonard and to Mabell Stonard his wife and to Franc Stonard their son the sum of 3li apiece to make every of them a ring of gold in remembrance of me to be paid to every of them within one year next after my decease...I do give unto my nephew Geo Harlakenden of Yeldam the sum of 3li

¹⁴⁹ Wrightson, *English Society*, p. 56.

to make him a ring of gold in remembrance of me to be paid to him within two years after my decease.¹⁵⁰

Just over a month later, William Harlakenden, himself, made his own will, and, perhaps guided by his brother's careful memorial provisions, he also made lavish and precisely detailed arrangements for the distribution of around sixteen mourning rings to various relations, including reciprocal gifts bestowed upon the children of his brother, Roger:

I do give unto my nephews Rich and Thos Harlakenden also to my good niece Mabell their sister...as also to my nephew mr Clem Stonard to either of them one gold ring with a death's head on them or the arms of my father and mother of the value of 20s apiece also to the wives of my three nephews Rich Thos and Geo Harlakenden to either of them a gold ring with a death's head of the value of 13s4d.¹⁵¹

The next generation of Harlakendens retained the custom, subsequently using their own wills to leave bequests of mourning jewellery to various relatives and social acquaintances. Their fellow villagers, relations, and members of their collective social group in turn also used their own wills to return the favour, perpetuating and encouraging the reciprocal exchange of mourning rings within and between members of the leading families of Earls Colne.

In 1641, for example, spinster, Ann Scroggs, who appointed as her executor her brother-in-law, William Harlakenden, left monetary bequests for the provision of at least nine mourning rings – specifically priced at either 12, 20 or 40 shillings – not just to sisters, nieces and nephews, but also to those relations connected exclusively through marriage, including Richard Harlakenden and his wife.¹⁵²

The following year, Mary Nevell (*née* Harlakenden and who also appointed Richard Harlakenden as one of her supervisors) bequeathed “a gold ring with a diamond stone set in it” to her granddaughters and executrices, whilst leaving to her son, “an enamelled ring with this res *remember the dead*”.¹⁵³

Moreover, a decade later, Thomas Harlakenden also bequeathed to his brother and appointed supervisor, William, his “sealed gold ring with the arms of the Harlakendens or another of the price value of 20s at his choice”;¹⁵⁴ this was possibly

¹⁵⁰ Earls Colne, PROB11/101/302-303v: Roger Harlakenden, 02.01.1603.

¹⁵¹ Earls Colne, PROB11/109/12: Wm Harlakenden, 10.02.1603.

¹⁵² Earls Colne, PROB11/187/77: Ann Scroggs, 28.08.1641.

¹⁵³ Earls Colne, ERO D/ACW13/317: Mary Nevell of Chappel, 30.05.1642.

¹⁵⁴ Earls Colne, PROB11/225/24: Thos Harlakenden, 22.09.1652.

the same ring which had first been bequeathed by William Harlakenden in his will of 1603.

Richard Harlakenden, esquire, himself the aforementioned recipient of earlier bequests of mourning jewellery, made ample monetary provision for the bountiful bequest of mourning, including the allocation of over forty memorial rings, the majority priced at 20 shillings, to various nieces, nephews, cousins, and in-laws:

I give unto every one of my sister Nevell's children which was my eldest sister 20s apiece to make them rings for so many of them as shall be alive at the time of my decease and to my brother Eden and his children 20s apiece to make them rings...and to my sister Clenche's daughter Jeane that lives with me 40s and to my cousin Ellen Josselyne's two sons 10s apiece...to my brother Hen Mildemay's children 20s apiece to make them rings...to my cousin Wm Harlakenden esq and to his brother Rich my cousin 20s...and to my cousin Clem Stonard and his wife 20s...to every one of mr Shepherd's children in New England 20s...and mr Woodcok my son's tutor 20s all which monies I will shall be paid unto them to buy them rings within six months after my decease if they be then living.¹⁵⁵

Some of these particular individuals, in turn, later used their own wills to bequeath mourning rings amongst other surviving members of this shared social circle of kith and kin, with conspicuously recurrent names – Harlakenden, Cressener, Josselin – which linked testators and legatees into a communal network incorporating some of the most prominent families of the parish.

In 1662, for example, Jane Clench, mentioned in the will of both Richard Harlakenden and Ann Scroggs, as the recipient of token remembrances valued at 40 and 10 shillings respectively, herself left two payments for the supply of mourning rings, including ten shillings to Ralph Josselin, “to buy him a ring”.¹⁵⁶ Similarly, just as George Cressener made bequests of mourning rings in his will of 1677, both he and his wife had also formerly been the recipients of comparable token bequests, named, for example, as two of the nine individuals who were each to receive a memorial ring in the nuncupative will of a spinster “cousin” in 1659.¹⁵⁷

Moreover, in 1671, the widow Bridget Mathew – also an acquaintance of Ralph Josselin – bequeathed sixty shillings to her “loving friends” George Cressener (who was also a witness to the will) and his wife, that it would “buy them rings to wear in remembrance of me”.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ Earls Colne, D/DU256/6: Rich Harlakenden, 30.07.1660.

¹⁵⁶ Earls Colne, ERO D/ABR6/309v: Jane Clench, 30.09.1662.

¹⁵⁷ Earls Colne, PROB11/291/329: Martha Langford, 10.02.1659.

¹⁵⁸ Earls Colne, ERO D/ABR9/210: Bridget Mathew, 09.10.1671.

The Gift of Mourning Jewellery: Proprieties and Social Custom

The testamentary bequest of mourning jewellery and the provision of memorial rings distributed to funeral-goers both commemorated the dead individual whilst also acknowledging and celebrating the implicit and binding ties of sentiment and association. These material mementoes sought not only to secure remembrance for the deceased, but they also discernibly “singled out” and acknowledged friends and kin for “special notice”. The particular bequest or gift of mourning jewellery “sealed” and “affirmed the value of these relationships”, establishing a “precious link between the dead and the living” whilst also attesting to the loss of a valued individual within the wider and collective social web of community life.¹⁵⁹

In examining some of the social and cultural aspects of the funeral in Elizabethan England, Cressy proposed that the practice and display of “mutual gift-giving” amongst members of the Essex gentry acted as a conspicuous means of “reciprocating memory and obligation”;¹⁶⁰ a feature also evident from the interconnected and mutual bequests of remembrance tokens amongst testators from the foremost families of Earls Colne.

The giving of such token remembrances had the potential to make implicit “statements about past, present, and future relationships”, operating as material “indicators of intimacy” and articulating “varying degrees of attachment, commitment, and intention,” in the relationship towards both the dead individual and the surviving members of the communal, social, and family group.¹⁶¹

Similarly, for Richardson, the post-mortem gift of a ring performed a role in “negotiating status with wider kin”, articulating the dynamics of “family identity”, and acting as a tangible signal of “continuation and continuity between the generations”. The mourning ring was a multifaceted material token, whose physical and conceptual qualities imbued it with both an emotive and an economic value, a bequest which simultaneously seemed to “fuse considerations of status and affect”.¹⁶²

The bequest of mourning jewellery, or the gift of a ring dispensed to mourners as part of the wider funeral obsequies, could indicate both the “degree of closeness to the dead” as well as towards “his or her surviving heirs”. Mourning jewellery and funerary gifts subtly evinced these “overlapping hierarchies of status, kinship,

¹⁵⁹ Cressy, ‘Death and the Social Order’, pp. 113, 116.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

¹⁶¹ E. Hallam and J. Hockey, *Death, Memory and Material Culture* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), pp. 164-5.

¹⁶² Richardson, ““As my whole trust is in him””, pp. 188-9.

friendship, and regard”. Whether intentionally designed to or not, mourning jewellery and the material tokens of remembrance, which became an increasingly essential part of ‘respectable’ early modern funerary custom and display, “made numerous and visible distinctions among the participants”.¹⁶³

Indeed, by the latter half of the seventeenth and into the early eighteenth century, mourning jewellery and other funerary accoutrements, such as gloves, hatbands, and scarves, were habitually bestowed with a careful and knowing “eye to the recipient’s rank and the closeness of the relationship” to the deceased.¹⁶⁴ The diarist Samuel Pepys, for example, made comprehensive arrangements for the distribution of 123 mourning rings, following his death in 1703. Somewhat “invidious distinctions” were made, with the rings arrayed into three discrete price bands, ranging from 10, 15, to 20 shillings, with some mourners even receiving “two sorts of rings”.¹⁶⁵ All the recipients of the intended memorial tokens were classified and named, and included various “relations, godchildren, domestics, former servants and dependants”, as well as the more distinguished individuals of his social and professional circles, including members of the “Royal Society, Admiralty, and associates from Oxford and Cambridge”.¹⁶⁶

Mourning jewellery was not just a mark of remembrance and commemoration, but also, potentially, a “finely graded token of friendship and regard”. Samuel Pepys bequeathed his memorial rings with a conscientious judgement and a keen concern for the impinging niceties of formal funerary custom, the proprieties and conventions of social obligation, and with an attention to the “reciprocal bonds” of favour and esteem.¹⁶⁷

Over a period of eight years, from 1661 to 1669, Pepys himself had made reference in his diary as having received at least eight mourning rings at the various funerals of acquaintances and colleagues, and it is logical to assume that he must also have wanted to maintain and reciprocate the custom amongst the members of his

¹⁶³ Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family*, p. 282, 293.

¹⁶⁴ N. Llewellyn, *The Art of Death: Visual Culture in the English Death Ritual, 1500-1800* (London: Reaktion, 1991), p. 86.

¹⁶⁵ Cunnington and Lucas, *Costume for Births Marriages and Deaths*, p. 192.

¹⁶⁶ Pointon, Marcia, ‘Jewellery in Eighteenth-Century England’, in *Consumers and Luxury: Consumer Culture in Europe, 1650-1850*, ed. M. Berg and H. Clifford (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), pp. 127-8.

¹⁶⁷ Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family*, p. 293.

wider social circle, perhaps even seeking to better the display staged at the funerals of the metropolitan professionals and elites he had witnessed over the years.¹⁶⁸

For Pointon, the manner and extent of mourning ring-bequests for professional men such as Pepys, as for members of the gentry and wealthy middling sorts, clearly illustrates the principles of “reciprocity and obligation attached to present-giving” and the multifaceted etiquette involved in the bestowal of a token remembrance.¹⁶⁹ The giving of specially selected mourning rings evoked relations between the donor and recipient as well as amongst the wider social group included in these collective distributions; they were markers of social distinction and value between people.

In her study of gift-giving in early modern England, Ben-Amos has similarly noted that these funerary offerings “helped to single out webs of personal ties” whilst the quality and type of gift also delineated impulses of obligation and custom; distributing mourning rings (as well as gloves, hatbands and scarves) to a wider range of relations, friends, associates and neighbours helped to demarcate not only the “scope and boundaries of the social networks of the deceased,” but also “the distinctions within them along the lines of rank, friendship and degree of closeness to the deceased”.¹⁷⁰

These concerns for appropriate funerary gift-giving were similarly echoed in some of the memorial provisions of the seventeenth-century testators from Earls Colne, such as William Harlakenden, who, as early as 1603, made individual bequests of separately valued mourning rings, ranging in price from the cheapest at 6s8d, to those at 13s4d, 20 shillings, 30 shillings, and up to the most costly, with a bequest for 40 shillings.¹⁷¹ Likewise, the bestowal of memorial tokens in Richard Harlakenden’s will of 1660, included the most lavish gift for a mourning ring of five pounds, so that his daughter-in-law might buy herself “a diamond ring to wear for my sake”; the other more inexpensive bequests for mourning rings were typically valued at 20 shillings apiece, but were still carefully allocated to named and listed individuals.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸ Richard Smyth, who like Pepys was part of the professional urban class in London, had also specifically noted mourning rings as having featured in at least seven funerals taking place over a period of ten years from 1664 to 1674, amongst the notable and familiar individuals who were known to him. Ellis, Henry (ed.), ‘The Obituary of Richard Smyth, Secondary of the Poultry Compter, London: Being a catalogue of all such persons as he knew in their life: extending from A.D. 1627 to A.D. 1674’, *Camden Society*, 44 (1859), pp. 62, 90, 93, 95, 96, 98, 103, 104.

¹⁶⁹ Pointon, ‘Jewellery in Eighteenth-Century England’, p. 128.

¹⁷⁰ I. K. Ben-Amos, *The Culture of Giving: Informal Support and Gift-Exchange in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 165-6.

¹⁷¹ Earls Colne, PROB11/109/12: Wm Harlakenden, 10.02.1603.

¹⁷² Earls Colne, D/DU256/6: Rich Harlakenden, 30.07.1660.

Even as early as 1575, Thomas Hewet, a citizen a clothworker of London, filled his will with bequests for the distribution of 32 rings to a variety of close family, “frendes and cosens”; most of these rings were priced at 30 or 40 shillings, his children receiving rings at the upper-end of this scale, whilst his executor and wife, as well as Hewet’s own wife received the most expensive of the mourning rings bequeathed, valued at three pounds apiece.¹⁷³

For the will-makers of Middlesex and Surrey, there was a significant variation between some of the testators in respect of the cost and numbers of rings bequeathed in the sampled wills, 1605-1805. In terms of numbers given (including both personal and mourning rings, and where a figure could be confidently established) it ranged from 40 down to just 1 ring, although the majority limited their donations to around 1-3 rings, with the average in Middlesex being 3.03 rings per testator and for Surrey 2.77 rings across the whole sample. The price of a ring also varied significantly between testators, the maximum bequeathed for a ring in Middlesex valued at £10 and the cheapest at 5 shillings, and in Surrey £3 was the most expensive ring bequeathed and the cheapest valued at 6s8d.¹⁷⁴

For those Middlesex and Surrey testators who bequeathed several mourning rings at once, some also looked to vary the value and kind of mourning ring the intended recipient would receive dependent upon their relationship to them. The previous example of Richard Bowney, the barber-surgeon who made his will in 1665, included rings at three prices, in which the cheapest sort were given to his servants, whilst family and friends received a better class of ring at double the price or more of those given to his employees.¹⁷⁵ Likewise, Mary Newton, in her will of 1704, also made distinctions amongst her kinship group; she gave two rings priced at 40 shillings to her daughters, whilst the least expensive, but most numerous category of rings priced at 10 shillings, went to another thirteen named individuals, including friends and other relatives such as her her daughter-in-law and five grandsons.¹⁷⁶

In 1625, John Fawkes, a citizen and clothworker of London, bequeathed rings at four separate values, ranging from £3 to 20 shillings; the most expensive of these was a ring given to his brother living in Warwick, another 30 shillings he gave to his uncle

¹⁷³ Clay, J. M. (ed.), ‘North Country Wills: Being abstracts of wills relating to the counties of York, Nottingham, Northumberland, Cumberland, and Westmorland at Somerset House and Lambeth Palace 1558-1604, Volume II’, *Surtees Society*, Vol. 121 (1912), pp. 76-79.

¹⁷⁴ The quantitative results of the sampled wills are discussed in further detail in Chapter 5.

¹⁷⁵ Surrey, DW/PC/5/1665; Will Number: 20.

¹⁷⁶ Middlesex, MS 9172/97; Will Number: 86.

“to make him a ring” and the same to his two male friends whom he appointed overseers, whilst the less-expensive rings of 20 shillings were given to his niece, a widowed female neighbour, and a scrivener, “to make him a ring”.¹⁷⁷

The strength and closeness of the relationship between testator and recipient obviously played a decisive part in dictating the quality of the ring bequeathed, as did the role and intended responsibilities ascribed to the legatee. For example, in 1685, John Bickerstaff, a gentleman from Middlesex, bequeathed six mourning rings, designated at either 10 or 20 shillings, amongst his extended kin; his brother and brother-in-law – tasked with the greatest responsibility in acting as his overseers or supervisors – were given the most costly rings at 20 shillings “for their care and paines”, whilst 10 shillings apiece for another brother and his wife, as well as to the wives of his overseers was “to buy each of them a Ring to weare in remembrance of me”.¹⁷⁸ Similarly, in 1625, Ellis Ellyott, another gentleman from Middlesex, left the generous provision of £3 for a ring to his “Loveinge Frynd”, appointing that he was also to act as an overseer to his will; as an additional courtesy to his overseer, Ellyott also allowed a further but lesser sum of forty shillings as a consideration with which to buy the wife of his overseer a ring as well.¹⁷⁹

Some testators reserved their most precious and expensive possessions for their immediate family, turning to specially-commissioned mourning rings only as a means of acknowledging extended kin and acquaintances. In 1705, for example, Samuell Wigdon, a waterman from Middlesex, whilst he left ten shillings apiece to his two sisters with which to buy each “a Ring to wear in remembrance of mee”, his son and daughter received, instead, personal items of inscribed and initialled family silver – a silver tankard to the former and two silver cups for the latter – which amounted to a much larger legacy of around six pounds for each child.¹⁸⁰

In 1684, Elizabeth Bent, a spinster living in Dorking, chose not to include mourning rings amongst her bequests at all, but gave, rather, thirty shillings each to a nephew and two nieces instructing that it was to be used to buy them “a silver cupp”, whilst smaller token sums of five shillings were also given amongst her two brothers and a married sister.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁷ Middlesex, MS 9052/6; Will Number: 130.

¹⁷⁸ Middlesex, AM/PW/1685/004.

¹⁷⁹ Middlesex, MS 9172/37.

¹⁸⁰ Middlesex, MS 9172/98; Will Number: 74.

¹⁸¹ Surrey, DW/PA/5/1685; Will Number: 7.

Elizabeth Buggin, a spinster from Middlesex – like George Cressener had done in 1677 – left a mixture of monetary bequests, mourning rings, and pieces of plate amongst the members of her kinship group in her will of 1685; sisters-in-law, their children, a variety of “cousins” and other named individuals received rings costing either ten or twenty shillings, whilst more generous bequests of £5 to £10 went to a brother, sisters, and nieces, and to a nephew the more personal bequest of: “the piece of plate which I bought with the money bequeathed mee by my mothers will”.¹⁸²

Edward Wray, a married vintner from Surrey, whilst in making his will of 1704 left the residue of his personal estate to his wife and sole executrix, he also made just two other bequests, the first of which fondly gave £10 to furnish his married daughter with a piece of plate, whilst her husband was to receive only the more modest endowment of a standard mourning ring:

I give and bequeath unto my Daughter Elizabeth Paine (now wife of Henry Paine of London) tenn pounds as a token of my Love and affection to her to buy her a peece of Plate in remembrance of mee her Father Item I give and bequeath unto her husband my sonne in law one Guinea for a Ringe.¹⁸³

Nevertheless, into the latter decades of the seventeenth century and certainly by the beginning of the eighteenth century, an ample funeral for a member of the gentry, a wealthy widow, or a prominent urban professional could involve the distribution of a sizable quantity of mourning rings, which were being dispensed in ever larger numbers. Where a particularly generous quantity of mourning rings had to be obtained for the funeral, usually at relatively short notice, “mass-produced” or “off the shelf” varieties probably tended to suffice, possibly personalised with the inclusion of a memorial inscription, but typically manufactured to a set pattern or standardised design.¹⁸⁴

The establishment of recognisable or prevailing ‘types’ – first the *memento mori*-style of ring, followed by the broad categories of surviving mourning rings from around the mid seventeenth century onwards – as well as a repetition in common motifs and design-styles, shows that a standardised and uniform pattern of memorial

¹⁸² Middlesex, AM/PW/1685/006.

¹⁸³ Surrey, DW/PA/5/1705; Will Number: 102.

¹⁸⁴ C. Oman, *British Rings, 800-1914* (Totowa: Rowman and Littlefield, 1973), p. 73; Pointon, ‘Jewellery in Eighteenth-Century England’, p. 128.

ring must have been readily available for consumers to order and purchase as the period progressed and the custom became increasingly prevalent.¹⁸⁵

Richard Smyth, for example, recorded the death of John Looker, a clerk of the Company of Coopers on the 28 March 1673, but noted that at his London funeral on 2 April, just five days later, “rings engraven, I. L. obit Mar. 28.” had been obtained in time for the burial.¹⁸⁶ Other testators in making arrangements for the supply of several different mourning rings, as well as relatives tasked with the procurement of a sufficient quantity of rings to be handed out to mourners and funeral attendees, obviously also found it easiest in some instances to allocate everyone with the same class of ring.

Although Susanna Williams individually listed in her will of 1664 the twenty-three friends and relatives who were each to receive a ring, the bequests were all designated at a set price of twenty shillings apiece.¹⁸⁷ In the same way, William Holland’s bequest of thirty-four memorial rings in his will of 1724, named an assortment of family members – including a brother, brother-in-law, sisters, nephews, several kinswomen, as well as his executors – but judiciously declared that “Each and every of them” would have a ring of “Eighteen shillings value”.¹⁸⁸ In 1672, the widow, Jane Cocke, in listing the eighty-five individuals whom she stipulated should be invited to her funeral, also even-handedly made no distinctions amongst them as to the sort of ring they would receive:

I doe will order and appointe that all and every of the severall psons hereafter pticularly named or menshined shalbe Invited unto my funerall, And I doe give & bequeath unto each and every one of the same...hereunder named one Mourneing Ring of Gould of the value of Tenn shillings at the least, to be delivered to them respectively on the day of my Buriall...¹⁸⁹

Likely in an effort to allay any resentment and prevent umbrage amongst the members of their social circle and kinship group who were chosen to receive a mourning ring - as well as making funerary arrangements easier for their executors - testators such as Williams, Holland, and Cocke, adopted a simplified and broadly inclusive approach towards their donations of mourning rings.

¹⁸⁵ The stylistic evolution in iconography and design styles is discussed in further detail in Chapters 2 and 3.

¹⁸⁶ Ellis, ‘Obituary of Richard Smyth’, p. 98.

¹⁸⁷ Surrey, DW/PA/5/1665; Will Number: 61.

¹⁸⁸ Middlesex, MS 9172/124/1; Will Number: 54.

¹⁸⁹ Surrey, DW/PC/5/1672; Will Number: 7.

Pointon, has also drawn attention to the potential subtleties inherent in the consumption of such items, their place within accepted social practice, and their wider social meanings.¹⁹⁰ The characteristic mourning ring – formally given out as part of a recognised element of customary funerary practice – had “a function on a particular occasion”, so that essentially in this instance “consumption is tied to ritual”. In thinking about the *function* of mourning rings, Pointon has highlighted a distinction between the more expensive “individual and private” rings commissioned by close family (those featuring hair, gemstones, elaborate enamel work and memorial compositions) in contrast to the more “functional” and “disposable” simple gold bands handed out more generally to mourners at the funeral.¹⁹¹

Whilst the *long-term* significance and importance of a mourning ring may have differed for the recipient once the funeral was over, Pointon has also stressed that the physical and material qualities of a ring did not necessarily undermine or negate the emotive meaning or ceremonial purpose of the object itself. This seeming dichotomy which Pointon has drawn attention to recognises that whilst a mourning token certainly had an evident economic value, this did not preclude the “ritual or sentimental worth” of the object, but, rather, each “complemented” the other.¹⁹²

Bequeathing Personally -Owned Jewellery

Naturally, however, the mourning jewellery that was bequeathed or given to particularly close friends and intimate kin, was often “distinguished by superior workmanship” or composed from a more precious metal, or might even include enamelling, hair-work, diamonds, or pearls.¹⁹³ Members of the nuclear family, or particularly close relations of the deceased, were also most likely to inherit those personal items of jewellery which were considered most valuable, or were the treasured and cherished keepsakes and heirlooms that held particular sentimental meaning.

Liddy has suggested that these carefully selected bequests of personal items of jewellery acted as “carriers of emotion” and “investments in affective relationships”, signifying and singling out special associations or close emotional links between the

¹⁹⁰ Pointon, ‘Jewellery in Eighteenth-Century England’, p. 123.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 128, 131-33.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 131-2.

¹⁹³ Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family*, p. 252.

testator and their chosen recipient.¹⁹⁴ Although rings were by far the most common items of jewellery – of which there were a great variety bequeathed, encompassing seals and signets, posies and wedding rings, thumb-rings, enamelled and inscribed rings, fede- and gimmel-style rings, rings with diamonds, gemstones, and semi-precious stones – a number of other pieces were also bequeathed, including necklaces, bracelets, buckles and watches.

For example, in 1665, Michael Stedman, a married gentleman from Middlesex, as well as leaving bequests for the procurement of mourning clothes for his family, from amongst his possessions also gave to his son, “one gold enamelled Ring with nine sparkes of Diamonds in the same,” and to his “deare mother” he left “one Toadstone Ring”.¹⁹⁵

In 1674, Dame Hester Honywood specifically made provision to ensure that her most lavish and expensive items of jewellery were passed on to her immediate and close family members: “I give to my daughter Honywood my diamond bracelets containing thirty tablets...I give to my said daughter...dame Eliz Cotton a picture of queen Eliz in an agate jewel”.¹⁹⁶

Likewise, in 1697, Essex gentleman, Edward Ingram, after making specific monetary mourning provision for individually named kin, and bestowing upon his wife, “all my plate rings jewels”, also conferred his most personal and prized accessories upon his grandson and namesake: “I give and bequeath unto my grandson Edward Ingram...my watch and my gold ring with the Turkey stone and my ring with the blue and red stone which I much value”.¹⁹⁷

In 1665, Ambrose Andrews, a carver from Whitechapel, whilst leaving mourning rings of forty shillings to a female cousin and two more mourning rings of twenty shillings apiece to each of his overseers, he also earmarked an assortment of seven further family and personal rings, which he passed on to his granddaughter:

I give devise and bequeath to Jane Myres my Grandchild fiteene peeces of silver plate...besides a silver whissell and chaine And three gold rings left to her by her mother also I give and bequeath to her more fower gold rings (that is to say) one greate seale ring, one deaths head ringe and one ring with a stone in it & one hoope ringe.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁴ Liddy, ‘Affective Bequests’, pp. 268-7.

¹⁹⁵ Middlesex, AM/PW/1665/071A.

¹⁹⁶ Earls Colne, PROB11/368: Dame Hester Honywood of Markshall, 05.05.1674.

¹⁹⁷ Earls Colne, ERO D/ABR14/24: Edw Ingram of Halstead, 18.06.1697.

¹⁹⁸ Middlesex, MS 9172/57; Will Number: 127.

In 1794, Robert Bunnett, from Middlesex, also bequeathed a variety of personal accoutrements – including buckles, rings, buttons, seals, as well as his own watch – to various family members:

Unto John Robert Lambert, my God Son [and nephew]...my Watch Silver nee buckles, and my silver set stock buckle...and the plain stock buckle RB on it, to Bartholomew [brother] to keep in remembrance of my Grandfather...to Susan Lambert, [sister and joint executrix] my silver Buckles, and unto Elizabeth my sister a Ring, and a pair of set sleeve buttons, on Condition that shee do not part with Them, as they are family things, and to Susan my neice my silver buttons...unto Melinda Dunham...my silver picetooth Case to keep in remembrance of me...[codicil] unto Susannah Lambert my sister my best Gold Ring, that is set with hair, also to John Lambert my God Son my Gold Seal, and Watch key...to Robert Lambert my God Son my Gold shirt pin marked M:R not to dispose of it on any account what Ever, my silver seal to...John Lambert...¹⁹⁹

These personal and “family things” were clearly items which held a special significance for the testator, the import and meaning of some pieces evidently reinforced by the addition of hair or personalised inscriptions, leading Bunnett to ensure that these generational tokens of remembrance were passed on and stayed within the family.

Conversely, the often rather formulaic bequests for the procurement of “a ring” suggests that some testators, in issuing such concise directives, were seemingly more concerned with stipulating the price of a mourning ring and naming the intended recipients than in offering any effuse statements regarding the sentimental import of such gifts. This is sometimes in pointed contrast to the bequests of items of personally-owned jewellery, which were often much more descriptive, not just in terms of clearly identifying the piece in question, but also in expressively conveying some sense of the emotional significance of the bequest for both the testator and their intended legatee.

In 1664, Elianor Hughes, a widow from Middlesex, distributed four particular rings amongst her most intimate kin, marking her relationships with them as well as the continued connections within the kinship group, leaving her most individual and personalised rings to her daughter-in-law and joint executrix:

To my Son in Law John Shurman my husband[‘s]...sealed Gold Ring And to Margreat his wife [joint executrix] my wedding Ring and my Diamond Ringe with my with my name in itt...unto my Cosen Margrea Billingsly [joint executrix] one Dyamond Ring...²⁰⁰

In thinking about contemporary responses towards this personal kind of mourning jewellery, the significance of the language used in the making of these

¹⁹⁹ Middlesex, DL/C/438; Will Number: 119.

²⁰⁰ Middlesex, MS 9052/15/3; Will Number: 189.

bequests, and the descriptive details supplied, Richardson has also particularly highlighted the specific use of the possessive pronoun in defining and bestowing personal rings and jewellery; these items were the testator's own possessions rather than generic objects, and likely the ones to which individuals felt most personally attached, thus, singling out the receiver in a close and personal way.²⁰¹

James, has similarly suggested that in characterising these remembrance tokens through the use of expressions such as “my ring” or “the ring I now weare” suggested a degree of “emotional intimacy” between giver and receiver, and particularly where a bequest made direct reference as having been worn upon the testator's own body, served, moreover, to create a “tactile connection” between its successive owners.²⁰²

In 1605, Jane Man, a widow from Shoreditch, bequeathed to Jane Broome, “a little Gould Rynge enamelled wch I use to weare on my litle finger,” as well as a “Sealle Rynge of Gould marked wth an R and an M” to her grandson, which had formerly belonged to her husband.²⁰³ In the same year, Elizabeth Newman, another widow from Middlesex, gave to her son, Rowland, a coin which she had seemingly adapted into a necklace, leaving him: “one Angell of Gould wch I now weare about my necke”.²⁰⁴ Forty years later, in 1645, widow, Mary Richards, whilst giving ten shillings to her “loving sonne in law” and twenty shillings each to her two male overseers, also left the particular rings she wore to two of her female acquaintances:

unto my loveing freind Anne Ward one gold Ring with a Counterfeite Stone in it which I now weare on one of my fingers...I give to Alice Cox [the wife of one of her overseers]...another gold ring wch I usually weare on my left hand.²⁰⁵

Into the eighteenth century, testators carried on bequeathing rings and other significant items of personal jewellery which they typically owned and even wore on a day-to-day basis. In 1701, Elizabeth Smith, a widow from Southwark, whilst making the generous provision of thirty shillings apiece to buy “a Gold Ring” for both her friend - and the overseer of her will - and his wife, also left an item of jewellery with much closer personal associations; to her “Loveing sonn” and sole executor, she

²⁰¹ Richardson, ““Make you a cloak of it””, p. 74; Richardson, ““As my whole trust is in him””, pp. 186-7.

²⁰² James, *Women's Voices* [Chapter 2].

²⁰³ Middlesex, MS 9052/26; Will Number: 25.

²⁰⁴ Middlesex, MS 9052/2C; Will Number: 35.

²⁰⁵ Middlesex, MS 9172/52; Will Number: 121.

requested that he should particularly receive: “my Gold Chaine which I usually Wear about my neck”.²⁰⁶

These kinds of personal ornaments, recognisably associated with the body and appearance of the deceased, were a graphic and material memento, indicating not only the testator’s close association with the new wearer but also publicly recalling the original owner’s social image and “visual identity” within the family and wider community.²⁰⁷ Though not specifically created as memorial jewels, these objects very often had a clear “visual relationship with owner’s identity” and their bodily person, so that they acted as powerful carriers of individual memory.²⁰⁸

James has suggested that bequeathing these objects acted to reinforce individual remembrance, with legatees provided with a kind of secular “reliquary of memory”;²⁰⁹ Liddy came to similar conclusions, suggesting that these kinds of personal gifts not only symbolised the importance of the relationship between testator and recipient, but also functioned as a link or an “aide-de-memoire” each time the article was worn or used.²¹⁰ Of course, some items of bespoke mourning jewellery, conspicuously personalised with emotive posies, biographical inscriptions, or incorporating the hair of the deceased, could also function in a similar manner, working as a tangible stimulus which evoked memories and fostered commemoration of the dead individual.

Additionally, Richardson has also pointed to the way in which some testators specifically chose to draw attention to the “family provenance” of a particular item of jewellery, providing a biography of ownership as part of their bequest, consequently stressing the decided significance and affective value of the piece for the intended recipient. These items of jewellery bestowed as tokens of remembrance amongst members of the nuclear family or wider kinship group, helped to create a kind of “domestic mnemonic culture” by passing on distinctive family heirlooms to the next generation; in some cases testators were fulfilling the wishes of a predeceased spouse or family member who had also left items in trust, expecting them to be passed on

²⁰⁶ Surrey, DW/PA/5/1705; Will Number: 84.

²⁰⁷ Richardson, ““Make you a cloak of it””, pp. 70, 74-7; Richardson, ““As my whole trust is in him””, pp. 186-7.

²⁰⁸ Richardson, ““Make you a cloak of it””, p. 70.

²⁰⁹ James, *Women’s Voices* [Chapter 2].

²¹⁰ Liddy, ‘Affective Bequests’, p. 279.

again, and, particularly where testators had remarried, by ensuring that children received the personal pieces previously owned or gifted by a dead parent.²¹¹

In 1685, Richard Goodyear, a married yeoman living in Middlesex, in leaving “the other rings to my wife”, ensured that his daughter – seemingly the child of a previous marriage – would inherit “the gold ring and pinn cushion that was her mothers”.²¹² Similarly, in 1705, Giles Grene, having also remarried, used his will to ensure that his daughter would inherit, along with some items of inscribed family silver, personal rings associated with his former wife, including: “her mothers Wedding Ring and a Cypher Ring of her Mothers Hair”.²¹³ In 1704, John Johnston, a married gentleman living in Middlesex, carefully bequeathed five rings amongst his three daughters; to his eldest daughter he left “two small gold rings”, to his daughter, Mary he gave “one Gold Ring” noting that it had belonged to “her mother...my first Wife”, and finally, “a haire Ring and a Gold Ring” to his daughter Elizabeth, observing that both rings had also previously belonged to her mother.²¹⁴

James Dansey, a married waterman from Bermondsey, likewise, also sought to pass on mourning tokens and items of family jewellery to his children; amongst the itemised bequests he left a “hand in hand gold ringe” to his daughter (a *fede* ring which may have previously functioned as a marriage or love token exchanged between mother and father), whilst his son received a personal family ring, which would also commemorate both Dansey and his deceased wife: “to my said sonn my seale ring yt was his mothers”.²¹⁵

In 1703, John Graffham, a married yeoman from Cranleigh, though certainly in a less conscientious and expressive manner than Dansey had done, also bequeathed tokens of mourning amongst his family; whilst his son-in-law received “one gold Ring” valued at twenty-five shillings as a customary token remembrance, Graffham also requested that his son and daughter would inherit “all my first wives Ringes,” which were to be divided equally between the two.²¹⁶

In 1665, John Eldridge, a victualler from Southwark and citizen of London, though married, did not mention any children in his will, choosing instead to leave to

²¹¹ Richardson, ““Make you a cloak of it””, p. 71.

²¹² Middlesex, AM/PW/1685/027.

²¹³ Middlesex, AM/PW/1705/044.

²¹⁴ Middlesex, AM/PW/1706/060.

²¹⁵ Surrey, DW/PC/5/1665; Will Number: 41.

²¹⁶ Surrey, DW/PA/5/1705; Will Number: 42.

his brother “my golden Seale Ring which I usually did weare upon my finger”.²¹⁷ In the same year, Richard White, a widower and porter living in Southwark and apparently without children himself, along with other small bequests of remembrance, also laterally passed on a family seal ring, leaving to his “mother Ursula Weaver One Seale Gold ring wch was her husband’s”.²¹⁸

Certainly, in terms of jewellery which was bequeathed to family members as a mark of close personal remembrance, one of the most individual and treasured items which customarily tended to be given to the eldest son or future male heir, was the family seal or signet ring. In describing this kind of bequest, James has emphasised the significance of the token, not only as a “generational memento” symbolically passed on from one family member to the next (though not always passed directly down from father to son, nor merely the preserve of male testators), but also as a physical “emblem of household authority”.²¹⁹

Depicting family arms or crests, or often featuring initials and cyphers, this kind of mourning ring served not only as a highly individualised token of remembrance, it also carried explicit information about personal, familial, and social identity; it was a conduit of the owners’ power and authority, which had, significantly, probably also been used to authorise the will containing the bequest of this final personal legacy, perhaps given also as a mark of continuity to the legatee who now carried the family name and lineage.²²⁰

In 1603, for example, in addition to the several memorial rings he bequeathed, William Harlakenden also specified that his nephew – and joint executor to his will – should receive his, “signet or seal ring of gold”.²²¹ Similarly, George Cressener, who had also made numerous bequests of mourning rings to his extended kin, specifically intended that his son should inherit, “my sealed gold ring”, which, remarkably, already had commemorative connotations, having also once, he stated, formerly belonged to “my elder brother Edw”.²²²

The concerns of several testators in bequeathing the family seal or signet are apparent in their wills, the ring clearly having acquired a weight of significance, acknowledged as an appropriate hereditary token of remembrance, and its narrative of

²¹⁷ Surrey, DW/PC/5/1665; Will Number: 45.

²¹⁸ Surrey, DW/PC/5/1665; Will Number: 129.

²¹⁹ James, *Women’s Voices* [Chapter 2].

²²⁰ Richardson, ““Make you a cloak of it””, p. 73.

²²¹ Earls Colne, PROB11/109/12: Wm Harlakenden, 10.02.1603.

²²² Earls Colne, PROB11/354/83: Geo Cressener, 19.05.1677.

ownership recounted as it was passed on down through the family. In 1558, Thomas Babbington, esquire, appointed that his son and heir should receive “my sealinge ring of gold that was lefte to me by my grandfather”.²²³ In 1584, John Bentley, interestingly bequeathed two separate seal rings, the first of which was his own “great ring of gold that I daily wear, having a seal of a maiden’s head graven upon it,” which he gave to his son; the other – “my old-fashioned ring with a seal of RB upon it which was sometimes my father’s and grandfather’s” – he instead gave as a more fitting family token to his “brother Robert Bentley”.²²⁴ In 1625, Julius Marsh, a shipwright from Whitechapel, expressed a particular concern that his personalised seal ring would remain within the family, bequeathing to his son and namesake, “my Seale Ring of gould wth an *I* and an *M* ingraven therein,” but imploring, moreover, that “after his decease” the ring would then pass “unto my son John Marsh”.²²⁵

These were exclusive, highly emotive and personal items of jewellery, intimately associated with their former owners; when Zach Rogers bequeathed to his son, “my gold ring with my coat of arms graven thereupon”, it is not hard to imagine that his son appreciated it as a poignant memorial memento to be worn in remembrance of his father.²²⁶ John Reeve, a gentleman from Middlesex, made a similarly intimate bequest, when he left to his son, “my Sealed Ring with my Coat of Armes Cutt in it,” in his will of 1665.²²⁷

Indeed, it was not just familial connections that were made implicit in the bequeathing of this particular genre of ring, bound up within the signet or seal were also elements of the owners’ everyday business, occupational and professional lives. When William Rosewell, “a Doctor in physick”, made his will in 1691, amongst the rings he left to his wife and two sons, was “one Cornelion Ring with the Apothecaryes Coate of armes cut in it”; it is significant that Rosewell chose to bequeath this particular ring to his younger son, along with “all the medicines in his shop...and other Instruments”, a token which not only connected father and son together, but also acknowledged their shared occupational ties, and, perhaps, approved of a son following in his father’s professional footsteps.²²⁸

²²³ Clay (ed.), ‘North Country Wills, Volume II’, p. 10.

²²⁴ Emmison, *Elizabethan Life, Vol. 5*, p. 105.

²²⁵ Middlesex, MS 9172/35/1; Will Number: 79.

²²⁶ Earls Colne, ERO D/ACW24/152: Zach Rogers, 26.06.1702.

²²⁷ Middlesex, AM/PW/1665/062.

²²⁸ Surrey, DW/PA/1692; Will Number: 72.

Nevertheless, men were not always the only donors or even sole inheritors of this especially emotive form of mourning ring. In 1705, for example, Ann Seaton, a widow from Surrey, not only bequeathed a guinea apiece to two male friends, that they might buy, “a Ring in memory of me”, but she also specified that a particular male cousin was to inherit: “my Seale Ring as a Token of my affection to him”.²²⁹ In 1685, Mary Hill, a widow from Southwark, as well as leaving her overseer and his wife twenty shillings each “to buy them rings”, gave to the son of her cousin and sole executrix, “my late husbands Seale ring”.²³⁰ Even towards the end of the period, in 1782, the apparently widowed Henry Chalmers, chose not to confer his “cornelian gold ring with the family arms” upon his son, but instead left it, along with “all my family pictures”, to his sister, Rachel Katherine Chalmers.²³¹

In a similar vein, close female kin, particularly the daughters and granddaughters of widowed female testators, were natural beneficiaries for the bequest of a wedding or betrothal ring, however, children also typically tended to inherit the wedding rings that had once belonged to their dead mothers, kept in trust and subsequently passed on by attentive fathers in their own wills.

Very often the object most closely associated with married female identity, the wedding ring was a testament of the affective ties between legatee and recipient, but also formerly between the couple involved in the original customary exchange of the ring at another fundamental point in the life-cycle. It was a rather intimate bequest, the inside of the hoop perhaps also personalised with addition of a posy, and a valued keepsake which James has suggested “carried a special concentrated power...the aura of family history as well as the mark of individual identity”.²³² In 1708, for example, Samuel Price, a married barber from Surrey, bequeathed to his daughter: “her late mother Sara’s Wedding ring with this posy vizt (*in the Lord put I my trust*)”.²³³ In 1665, Alice Hyham, a widow from Holborn, whilst leaving five pounds to her son, also gave her “Deare Sister...my Weddinge Ring”.²³⁴

Surprisingly, wedding rings were sometimes also gifted between the sexes, bequeathed by widows to sons or to other male relatives. In 1685, Brigett Porter, a widow from Whitechapel, in bestowing her possessions amongst her friends and

²²⁹ Surrey, DW/PC/5/1705; Will Number: 23.

²³⁰ Surrey, DW/PA/1685; Will Number: 67.

²³¹ Earls Colne, ERO D/ACR 18/251: Hen Chalmers, 27.11.1782.

²³² James, *Women’s Voices* [Chapter 2 and 5].

²³³ Surrey, DW/PA/1718; Will Number: 88.

²³⁴ Middlesex, MS 9052/15/3; Will Number: 193.

relatives, instructed that her “kinsman” was to receive “my wedding ring”.²³⁵ In 1641, Ellen Edshaw, from Surrey, chose to leave her wedding ring, not to her daughter or granddaughters, but instead to her grandson.²³⁶ In 1729, Mary Daws, also bequeathed “my Wedding Ring” not to her sister, but conferred it rather upon her brother and joint executor, along with another “Gold Ring” which was given to another brother.²³⁷ In 1763, Hannah Hopkins, a widow from Whitechapel, interestingly chose to bequeath her wedding ring to her son John Hopkins, despite having a daughter whom she appointed as the sole executrix to her will.²³⁸

However, one of the most interesting exchanges of a wedding ring, possibly already converted for memorial purposes but certainly intended as a wearable mourning keepsake, occurred between a father and son, when Speaker Lenthall requested in his will of 1662, that: “my son will weare his mother’s wedding ring about his arme in remembrance of me”.²³⁹ Rather poignantly, in 1518, Brian Stapleton, knight, amongst the personal items of jewellery which he passed on to his children, also left a token which commemorated his marriage, bequeathing to his daughter: “a ryng of golde graved with fedders, which was the last token betwixt my wyffe & me”.²⁴⁰

Other valued items of personally-owned jewellery also often appeared in the wills of wealthy testators, with particularly lavish, unique, or costly items, such as diamonds and watches, habitually bequeathed and designated to close family members.

In 1679, Dorothy Burrish, a widow from Surrey, allocated six rings, including twenty shillings apiece to two of her sons to buy each a mourning ring, and another four personally-owned rings she gave out amongst her other children; in appointing her daughter and namesake as executrix, she passed on to her, “my wedding ring”, two other daughters received rings, including “my diamond ring”, whilst another son was to have, “the diamond ring that his father gave mee”.²⁴¹ In 1722, the widow of an esquire, Sarah Nicoll, also stipulated that her son was to receive twenty shillings “to

²³⁵ Middlesex, MS 9172/73; Will Number: 29.

²³⁶ Surrey, DW/PA/1645; Will Number: 10.

²³⁷ Surrey, DW/PC/5/1745; Will Number: 5.

²³⁸ Middlesex, MS 9172/166; Will Number: 74.

²³⁹ Quoted in, D. Scarisbrick, *Jewellery in Britain 1066-1837: A Documentary, Social, Literary and Artistic Survey* (Norwich: Michael Russell, 1994), p. 223.

²⁴⁰ Raine, J. (ed.), ‘Testamenta Eboracensia: A Selection of Wills from the Registry at York, Volume V’, *Surtees Society*, Vol. 79 (1884), p. 94.

²⁴¹ Surrey, DW/PA/5/1685; Will Number: 21.

buy him a Ring”, but to her female relatives she bequeathed her most lavish and expensive pieces of jewellery, giving to her two daughters, “my Diamond Eareings” and “my Diamond Ring”, whilst her granddaughter was to have, “my Necklace of Pearle”.²⁴²

In 1744, Mary Sedgley, a spinster living in Epsom, bequeathed just one ring, appointing that her brother and sole executor should have “my diamond Ring” which she hoped he would accept as a “Token of my Affection to Him”.²⁴³ Susannah Bentley, a widow from Middlesex, also bequeathed a particularly distinctive and feminine Rococo-inspired diamond ring in her will of 1744, bestowing upon her granddaughter the rather sentimental bequest of, “my Diamond heart Ring”.²⁴⁴

When the widowed Elizabeth Cressener made her will in 1731, along with the bequest of 20 shillings apiece for the procurement of sixteen mourning rings, given to various “cousins” and acquaintances, she also made personal and individual gifts of jewellery to a number of specifically chosen female relatives:

I give unto my cousin Mary Sewell...my silver watch...I give unto my nephew Edw Lockey’s daughter my diamond ring...I give unto my loving sister Cressener my gold watch and chain...I give unto my niece Bird my father’s and my brother’s and my sister Duckinfeild’s and my niece Martha Lockey’s pictures...²⁴⁵

In 1674, Dame Hester Honywood, along with the extravagant jewels given to her daughters, had also ensured that her grandson should inherit: “the double gilt gold watch enamelled with black which was his uncle and godfather’s Thos Honywood esq deceased”.²⁴⁶

Watches became a more common bequest of jewellery into the eighteenth century, these exclusive and often sentimental items typically designated as family tokens, particularly amongst male testators, to be handed on within the family. When Francis Boitault, a victualler from Southwark made his will in 1745, as well as leaving “one Guinea for a Mourning Ring” to each of the two male relations he appointed as joint executors to his will, he also specifically requested that his young son – and namesake – should receive: “the Watch which I Generally wear about me”;

²⁴² Middlesex, MS 9172/124/2; Will Number: 127.

²⁴³ Surrey, DW/PA/5/1745; Will Number: 68.

²⁴⁴ Middlesex, MS 9172/152; Will Number: 274.

²⁴⁵ Earls Colne, ERO D/DU234/2: Eliz Cressener widow of Jn, 05.03.1731.

²⁴⁶ Earls Colne, PROB11/368: Dame Hester Honywood of Markshall, 05.05.1674.

this personal bequest was to be a post-mortem paternal gift, delivered to Francis, when he reached the age of twenty-one.²⁴⁷

Sabastian White, a labourer from Malden, in making his will in 1749, not only gave mourning rings to his sisters-in-law, but also envisioned that in bequeathing his watch, it would stand as a family token to be passed on down the male line, first to his brother and afterwards to his nephew: “unto my brother John White...my Watch, (which with care will I hope, last to be handed down to his son)”.²⁴⁸

Several other eighteenth-century testators also took pains to ensure that the watch which they either personally used or which they had, themselves, inherited, was bequeathed again in turn to remain within the family. In 1724, for example, Cassandra Meere, whilst leaving mourning rings to her female relatives, also ensured that “an old fashioned Silver Watch” would be given to her “Kinsman”, it having previously belonged to his uncle.²⁴⁹ In looking to pass on items with strong personal associations, Anne Osbourn – in a similar fashion to those parents willing the wedding or signet rings of a predeceased spouse to their children – also bequeathed items intimately bound up with associations of memory and personal identity, in leaving to “my late Husbands Daughter...her late Father’s Silver Watch and Seal”.²⁵⁰

In 1745, Anne Bidwell, a widow from Middlesex, along with all her “plate Rings Ear Rings and Personal Ornaments”, also gave to her cousin, with whom she lived and who was also appointed sole executor of her will, “the Silver Watch which my late Husband...wore ‘till his deathe”, not only as a mark of remembrance, but also in recognition of “his and his Wife’s care of me in my illness and his undertaking of my Burial”.²⁵¹

For testators of rather more limited means, the careful and restrained bequest of perhaps one or two personally-owned items of jewellery, to specifically named individuals, provided a practical but, nevertheless, intimate gesture of acknowledgement and distinguished remembrance. This was certainly in contrast to some of those later seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century testators and their heirs, who sought to distribute large numbers of newly commissioned mourning rings as a

²⁴⁷ Surrey, DW/PA/5/1745; Will Number: 11.

²⁴⁸ Surrey, DW/PC/5/1749; Will Number: 16.

²⁴⁹ Middlesex, AM/PW/1725/095.

²⁵⁰ Middlesex, DL/C/429; Will Number: 18.

²⁵¹ Middlesex, AM/PW/1745/059.

means of social display and reciprocity, without much careful thought or consideration as to the recipients.

In sampling the wills of middling sort testators from early modern Kent, c.1560-1600, Richardson, moreover, concluded that of those testators making bequests of jewellery, “almost 50 percent left only one item and 85 percent left between one and three items”. Similarly, as discussed earlier in this chapter, for the majority of the testators from Middlesex and Surrey who bequeathed rings in their wills, c.1605-1805, over three-quarters also typically limited their bequests to the donation of between 1 to 3 rings. Thus, it may be surmised that in many cases the bequest of jewellery or mourning rings must have been a “very significant act”, in that being the only beneficiary or even one of a small number of recipients, gave the impression of having been “singled out” by the testator for special notice.²⁵²

In 1599, for example, Thomas Smith, a tanner, requested that William Adhams, the vicar of Earls Colne, as well as the joint supervisor and witness to his will, should receive, “for his pains taken herin...my gold ring”.²⁵³ Over a century later, a Surrey woman, Mary Allaby, made careful token remembrances of one shilling apiece to three “loving kinswomen”, whilst also bequeathing to her “Loving Friend”, whom she also appointed as sole executor, the gift of “my broad Stone Ring”.²⁵⁴ When Susana White, a widow from Middlesex, made her will in 1665, she also bequeathed just one ring, singling out her overseer with the bequest of “a Gold Ring with a Carniall Stone in it (that my Sonne Joseph while in his life time used to weare)” also stating that she gifted this particular ring “as a token of remembrance to weare for my sake”.²⁵⁵

Thanking Executors, Overseers and Supervisors

Evidently, the bequest of mourning jewellery, or a ring for a remembrance, served as a useful and progressively accepted customary means of fittingly acknowledging and valuing the intended efforts and obligations characteristically assumed by the overseers, trustees, supervisors, and executors of a will, on behalf of the testator, after they had died. Indeed, executors and overseers (though often also chosen from amongst members of the testator’s wider kinship group) were markedly

²⁵² Richardson, ““As my whole trust is in him””, p. 187.

²⁵³ Earls Colne, ERO D/ACW4/43: Thos Smith, 26.10.1599.

²⁵⁴ Surrey, DW/PA/5/1705; Will Number: 5.

²⁵⁵ Middlesex, MS 9172/58; Will Number: 18.

and persistently one of the most common beneficiaries of mourning rings throughout the period.

Recognising the role of those who had witnessed the will, appointing trustees and overseers, and appreciating the added responsibilities executors would have to shoulder in their appointed roles, saw all these pivotal players involved in the administration of the will and testament (as well as their wives and children in some instances) acknowledged with the bequest of a mourning ring.

In 1725, for example, William Bates, a shoemaker from Hounslow, bequeathed two guineas to his nephew and joint executor, “to buy him a Ring”, it was a token accompanied by Bates’ respectful entreaties that his nephew should assume “the burthen and cair of Execushipp with my Wife”.²⁵⁶ In the same year, John Jackson, a victualler from Middlesex, in appointing his wife as the sole executrix to his will, and with a daughter still in her minority, also made prudent arrangements in bequeathing “a Ring of the Value of a Guinea” to the “loving friend” whom he appointed as his overseer and trustee; in hoping “to see this my will performed” the mourning ring which Jackson offered was also a bequest which was used to observe and materially acknowledge his overseer’s future “pains & Trouble therein”.²⁵⁷

In 1685, Vinsant Silke, a labourer from Middlesex, had also appointed his wife as his sole executrix, but in common with many other married male testators, he also assigned overseers to act in providing any additional support and assistance should his wife require it; mourning rings costing eight shillings apiece were given to the two men Silke nominated as his overseers (one of whom was also his landlord), and bequeathed with the expectation that both men would see the will performed, “for the good of my said wife & child as my trust is in them”.²⁵⁸

When Nathaniel Aptel, a trunk-maker from Middlesex, made his will in 1665, his wife, whom he also appointed sole executrix, seems to have been pregnant at the time, and so it was, perhaps, with a pressing sense of urgency and impending necessity that he chose to bequeath rings of twenty shillings each, in engaging his two brothers-in-law to act as his overseers; the memorial rings were given in the belief that his overseers would see the will “performed according to the true meaning thereof”, solemnly binding the two men to the promise that they would see his “child

²⁵⁶ Middlesex, AM/PW/1726/046.

²⁵⁷ Middlesex, MS 9172/124/2; Will Number: 149.

²⁵⁸ Middlesex, MS 9172/73; Will Number: 77.

or children if any shall happen to be born and live, plentifully & comfortably provided for". The mourning rings were a kind of binding seal to this contractual obligation, but also a material acknowledgement which formerly recognised and thanked his overseers "for their pains & Christian care (whereof I doubt not)" in undertaking their customary responsibilities.²⁵⁹

Richardson, has correspondingly observed that the bequest of rings and jewellery must have obviously functioned as an appropriate gift for those individuals who, though perhaps outside of the family, had been given an "executive role" to play in administering the estate of the deceased and seeing the wishes and commitments of the testator fulfilled. In characterising these particular exchanges, Richardson, has pointed to the bequeathing of jewellery and rings as part of a broader "mnemonic process" by which a kind of "trusting relationship" is "commemorated and sustained" between testator and the recipient(s) tasked with the responsibilities of executorship or supervision of the will.²⁶⁰ Indeed, the form of this relationship is made abundantly clear in the conveyance of mourning rings to his joint executors in John Breese's will of 1665, who explicitly states that the rings are given: "as tokens of my Love to them and for their kindness in accepting this *Trust*".²⁶¹

Here, the mourning ring, or personal jewel is not just an affective token of remembrance, but also a fitting "symbol of trust" and "reciprocity" conferred upon the individual tasked with the status and responsibility of representing and furthering the interests of the testator and their heirs. Moreover, Richardson has further suggested that in wearing and displaying the memorial ring or piece of the deceased's own jewellery bequeathed to them, the recipient not only advertised a tacit acceptance of these apportioned responsibilities, but that the mourning ornament also acted as a "badge of association and involvement" publicly broadcasting the connection and bond of service between the living and the recently deceased.²⁶²

Executors, in particular, were crucially important, especially worth remembering and thanking as part of one's testamentary provisions, for it was they who were essentially responsible for guiding a will to probate and seeing the instructions fulfilled, debts and expenses disbursed, and the funeral adequately

²⁵⁹ Middlesex, MS 9172/56; Will Number: 152.

²⁶⁰ Richardson, "Make you a cloak of it", pp. 75, 77.

²⁶¹ Middlesex, MS 9172/124/2; Will Number: 83.

²⁶² Richardson, "Make you a cloak of it", pp. 76-77; Richardson, "As my whole trust is in him", pp. 188-9.

arranged and accomplished.²⁶³ A mourning ring might provide a useful material prompt to an executor, a visible prick to the conscience, ensuring that instructions were adhered to, and obligations fulfilled; an acutely relevant consideration for those testators with a large estate to be prudently handled, or numerous dependants to be taken care of.

Testators utilised mourning rings as a fitting means of recognising the individuals they appointed not only as executors but also those they had tasked with the additional and extended charge of acting as guardians, trustees or executors in trust for their children and wards; this was a weighty responsibility, possibly protracted over several years, and the mourning rings could embody various commitments conferred upon their recipients, such as being entrusted with the upbringing and education of children, the management of their affairs, or the administration of the estate until they came of age to inherit.

In 1665, for example, Edward Cugley, a widowed gentleman from Clerkenwell, left three mourning rings of twenty shillings apiece to his late wife's sister and his own sister (who were also both appointed joint executrix), as well as to his brother-in-law, marking the responsibilities he had tasked them with in administering the messuages and tenements, in addition to a legacy of one hundred pounds, which he left to his daughter; the mourning rings he bequeathed were a clear material acknowledgement of the trust he was placing in his relatives, in committing "ye Charge and Care of breeding & bringing up of my said daughter" during her minority.²⁶⁴

In 1685, John Bark, a victualler from Southwark, had also made similar prearrangements in seeking to reassure himself as to his daughter's continued wellbeing and safekeeping after his decease. Since he was "sick and weake in body," Bark appointed his two "trusty and welbeloved friends" to act as "Executors in trust dureing the Minority of my welbeloved daughter", giving to them "Gold Rings" of ten shillings apiece in recompense "for their advice, assistance and dirrection in the manadgm.t of her affaires".²⁶⁵

When Elizabeth Longden, a widow from Middlesex, composed her will in 1704, the bequest of "a Guinea for a Ring" was inserted into the closing paragraph of her

²⁶³ Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family*, p. 81.

²⁶⁴ Middlesex, MS 9172/15/5; Will Number: 263.

²⁶⁵ Surrey, DW/PA/5/1685; Will Number: 19.

will as she appointed her executor; though the bequest seemed almost an afterthought, Longden had particular cause to acknowledge this man, in that he was not only her executor, but that her grandson (to whom she had left a substantial legacy of twenty guineas and a silver tankard once his apprenticeship was completed) was also “apprentice with him”. Hence, the bequest of this mourning ring was not just a token remembrance gifted to her executor, but also an acknowledgement of the trust bestowed in him in his pivotal role in overseeing the instruction (as well as the clothing) of her grandson during the term of his apprenticeship.²⁶⁶

Acknowledging Spiritual Obligations and Commitments

Clearly, mourning jewellery was not just intended merely as a simple means of recognising the various ties of kinship and family, it had a much broader appeal, and a conveniently applicable efficacy as an appropriate commemorative and remembrance strategy for those confronting their own mortality. Testators and the bereaved inventively manipulated mourning jewellery to their own ends. In some cases, it might serve as a useful shorthand for the recognised and expected acknowledgment of the various ties of kinship and regard, following the death of a prosperous individual. For the bereaved, mourning jewellery might be offered and worn as a sincere way of expressing genuine grief and a “personal sense of loss”.²⁶⁷

As Cressy perceptively observed, the gift-giving and wearing of memorial jewellery and other token mourning accessories at the funeral and afterwards, emphasised and illustrated the “range of effective kinship” extending outside the boundaries of the nuclear family.²⁶⁸ In thinking about the role and meanings of jewellery in exhibiting and recognising these relationships, Catherine Richardson has similarly pointed to the bequest of rings and mourning jewellery as a means of “advertising the strength of connections...even across the boundary of death”, stressing the potential role of jewellery bequests in the “highlighting and strengthening of affective ties”.²⁶⁹

For some explicitly devout testators, mourning jewellery might also offer a way of acknowledging and bolstering the more tenuous ties of “fictional” or spiritual kinship, through the recognition and token remembrance of godchildren or fellow

²⁶⁶ Middlesex, DCP/K/C/06/MS 25628/46; Will Number: 20.

²⁶⁷ Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family*, p. 254.

²⁶⁸ Cressy, ‘Death and the Social Order’, p. 107.

²⁶⁹ Richardson, “‘As my whole trust is in him’”, pp. 189, 197.

members of their congregation.²⁷⁰ Though infrequently acknowledged across all the wills of the period, some testators, such as William Harlakenden - who seemed to exhibit strong Puritan sensibilities - did bequeath rings and token monetary sums to at least ten different godchildren, as well as leaving donations to fifteen separate preachers and ministers, and the gift of over twenty-five personally inscribed Bibles or other religious texts.²⁷¹

Interestingly, in 1665, whilst Francis Raworth, a vicar from Shoreditch, left eight gold rings at ten shillings apiece to his “mother”, “sister”, “aunt” and “brother” as well as to his four overseers, conversely, to his three godchildren whilst he also bequeathed ten shillings apiece, it was not to buy mourning rings but instead (perhaps, considering them more appropriate gifts in this instance) “three Bibles wellbound”.²⁷²

In 1683, Joyce Browne, a widow from Middlesex, bequeathed three rings, including a bequest which fittingly recollected her godson, (also the son of a cousin) leaving to him “my greate Bible and a small gold ring”.²⁷³ In 1705, Winifred Ogle, a spinster from Middlesex, in bequeathing to her widowed cousin the gift of “a gold hair ring”, also recalled her daughter, Winifred – and Ogle’s goddaughter (perhaps named in honour of her godmother) – with the bequest of ten shillings “for a mourning ring”.²⁷⁴

Around a twenty years later, William Willmott, a hat-dyer from Surrey, not only ordered that all attendees invited to his funeral should receive gloves, but he also made precise provision for the purchase of six individually allocated memorial rings, as well as the gift of “a folio Bible and the Book of parables” to his brother-in-law and joint executor (who also received a ring of twenty shillings). In addition to this, and perhaps allocated as a token sum to allow for the purchase a mourning ring, Willmott also expressly requested that: “there be given to the minister whom my

²⁷⁰ Silver spoons – an item traditionally associated with baptisms and christenings – were also a popular token bequest given by testators, and were typically priced at around ten shillings (in similarity to some mourning rings). It does seem that rings may also have been used to mark baptisms (not just marriage and death) during the early modern period, as in 1625, John Cox, a farrier from Middlesex, bequeathed to his son and namesake: “one knobbed Gould Ring, wherein is Insculpt (*John Cox was baptized the 15 of Julie. 1604.*)” Middlesex, MS 9172/37; Will Number: 27.

²⁷¹ Earls Colne, PROB11/109/12: Wm Harlakenden, 10.02.1603.

²⁷² Middlesex, MS 9172/59; Will Number: 41.

²⁷³ Middlesex, MS 9172/73; Will Number: 21.

²⁷⁴ Middlesex, MS 9172/98; Will Number: 136.

executor by my appointment shall order to preach my funerall Sermon one Guinea in Gold”.²⁷⁵

Interestingly, in 1743, Surrey widow, Elizabeth Hamton, also acknowledged her spiritual ties and affiliations. Though requesting that she was to be interred with her husband in the parish churchyard of St Mary Magdalen, Bermondsey, she also specifically bequeathed “One Guinea of Gold” (possibly for a mourning ring) to the “Reverend Mr Henry Read a dissenting minister of a Congregation at Southwark”; in addition to this, she also left to a male kinsman: “my great Bible and my Watch and Seal”.²⁷⁶

In 1725, Elizabeth Birch, a schoolmistress from Middlesex, amongst her bequests included, to her “Good friend” who was a “Minister” in Shropshire, the gift of “one Guinea for a Ring”.²⁷⁷ Similarly, Richard Stockton, a gentleman from Dunsfold, also made provision that his cousin – the “Minister of Dunsfold” – was to have twenty shillings “to preach my funeral sermon” but by which Stockton may have also implicitly implied the furnishing of a ring.²⁷⁸

Clergymen were seemingly favoured recipients for the token bequests of remembrance, such as scarfs, hatbands and gloves, and for the gift of mourning rings, increasingly distributed at early modern funerals; these favours, however, may not have been explicitly specified in the will, but, rather, obtained through the tacit assumption that the vicar/curate/parson/minister/sexton, involved in the organisation and delivery of the burial, would be furnished with the appropriate funerary accessories and mourning tokens customarily distributed amongst the other invited guests and funeral attendees.

Sixteenth- and some seventeenth-century testators might also have bequeathed a commemorative memento in lieu of services tendered at the deathbed, such as providing spiritual succour and moral comfort, or as thanks for more prosaic assistance afforded, such as the performance of scribal duties or in acting as a witness to the will. Additionally, mourning rings might also be presented to ministers and clergymen as both a signal of esteem and regard, but also as a material

²⁷⁵ Surrey, DW/PA/5/1705; Will Number: 108.

²⁷⁶ Surrey, DW/PA/5/1745; Will Number: 39.

²⁷⁷ Middlesex, AM/PW/1726/008.

²⁷⁸ Surrey, DW/PA/5/1665; Will Number: 50.

acknowledgement and appreciation of the duties performed in preaching a funeral sermon at the burial.²⁷⁹

In Earls Colne, the Honywoods and the Harlakendens – two of the leading gentry families of the parish – acted as Ralph Josselin’s patrons. The Harlakenden family, in particular, were not only “patrons of Josselin’s living”, but also “lords of the manors from which Josselin held his land”. From the evidence of his diary, Josselin seems to have considered Richard Harlakenden as a particularly close or “deare friend”, and would seem to have been on terms of relative intimacy with the family.²⁸⁰

It is unsurprising to find then, that as both neighbour and friend, and as one who seems to have shared Josselin’s religious and political outlook, not only did he leave generous monetary provision to Josselin and his wife for “mourning” (as well as token remembrances of ten shillings apiece to each of his children), but Richard Harlakenden also specifically requested: “I would have him to preach my funeral sermon”.²⁸¹ Similarly, William Brand, making his own will a few days later, also bequeathed forty shillings to Ralph Josselin, in promise that he would, “preach at my burial”.²⁸² Bridget Mathew, who had also left mourning rings in her will of 1671, likewise, also gave unto her “loving friend mr Ralph Josselin”, the sum of five pounds, “desiring him to preach at my funeral”.²⁸³ Perhaps these bequests of money not only indicated the conferral of mourning dress or stood as a down payment for the future performance of a funeral sermon, but may also have been understood as a gift which inferred imbursement for a token mourning ring.

Notably, the sum typically allocated by testators specifically for the provision of a funeral sermon (usually around ten to twenty shillings) was also around the same amount often specified for a mourning ring. In 1625, for example, William Winter, a citizen and leather seller of London, living in Bermondsey, bequeathed twenty shillings to the “preacher and curate” of the parish, as well as a twenty-two shilling

²⁷⁹ Interestingly, approximately 20% of the relatively small number of Earls Colne testators who did make bequests of jewellery or who left provision for the bestowal of mourning rings, also used their wills to request a sermon or left monetary bequests or gifts of mourning either to a minister or to the more easily identifiable clergyman, Ralph Josselin. For the testators of Middlesex and Surrey, however, who specifically bequeathed mourning rings, the proportion of those also requesting a sermon or leaving money to a minister was much lower, and completely absent from the sample after 1745.

²⁸⁰ Macfarlane, *Family Life of Ralph Josselin*, pp. 151-2.

²⁸¹ Earls Colne, D/DU256/6: Rich Harlakenden, 30.07.1660.

²⁸² Earls Colne, ERO D/ACW16/155: Wm Brand, 01.08.1660.

²⁸³ Earls Colne, ERO D/ABR9/210: Bridget Mathew, 09.10.1671.

piece of gold to his “friend”, the “parish Clarke”.²⁸⁴ In the same year, Roger Dimpleby, living in the same parish and of the same occupation as Winter, also left twenty shillings to the same “Curate & preacher”, not specifically for a ring, but bestowed gladly “as a Token of my love unto him”.²⁸⁵

Whilst the specific bequest of a mourning ring given to a clergyman is rarely to be found within the sampled wills, token sums bequeathed for a sermon or those lacking in further detail as to the exact nature of the bequest are much more common in the wills of seventeenth-century testators. Certainly, as the custom of distributing several mourning rings amongst mourners and funereal attendees became more commonplace, it would seem that at the liberal-handed funerals of the gentry and richer middling sorts, that it was sometimes an understood courtesy to include the clergyman amongst the recipients of the mourning accoutrements given out to the members of the burial party and procession.

Indeed, seemingly so ubiquitous was the obligatory mourning ring, gifted as a token sum to the cleric or parson, that by the eighteenth century it had become the subject of satire. In a tract, which discussed the various sycophants and flatterers who might cluster around the bedside of the sick or dying man, the rector came in for particularly unsympathetic treatment, cynically portrayed as a mercenary, only willing to lavish attendance upon “a Person of Quality or Distinction”:

If the sick Person be of any great Account, as a rich Householder, &c. the Rector himself will perhaps vouchsafe to give his Lungs a Breathing up a single Pair of Stairs, and read over a long neglected Office; because not only a comfortable Piece or two may chance to appear, but in case of a Funeral, a Ring and Scarf into the bargain. If the Party be only an Inmate or a Lodger, of little or no Substance, then few Curates care to visit on the second Floor, and a Garret they think nigh enough Heaven already to need their Assistance to it.²⁸⁶

In a similar vein, a mid-eighteenth-century poem which pessimistically imagined the disingenuous lamentation and mourning which greeted the un-repent death of an old miser, incorporated the obsequious and perfunctory offices dispensed by the parson, in careless exchange for the usual funerary accoutrements:

His Widow fits herself with Weeds,
Affects in tragic Tears to flow,
And greives in double Pomp of Woe...

²⁸⁴ Surrey, DW/PA/5/1625; Will Number: 269.

²⁸⁵ Surrey, DW/PA/5/1625; Will Number: 68.

²⁸⁶ Anon., *The modern Christian; or, practical sinner: exemplified, in the monstrous villanies of the age, and the great coolness and indifference of mankind towards their Creator, and the vast concern of salvation...* (London, 1738), p. 11.

The Parson for his Scarf and Ring,
His Funeral Obsequies doth sing,
And hopes in Language meekly hearted,
For his dear Brother here departed;
With tender 'Plaint, and Look profound,
Each put the sordid Lye around,
And gives the Stinkard to the Ground.²⁸⁷

This may seem somewhat of an exaggeration, but it is telling to note that the New England judge, Samuel Sewall, probably in a similar echo of the sentiments of ministers and magistrates on this side of the Atlantic, resentfully lamented the “loss” of a mourning ring – later acquiring 13 from the 29 funerals he attended in 1704 alone – when he was prevented from gracing a funeral in 1698.²⁸⁸

Acknowledging Funeral Attendees and Principal Mourners

Other participants at the funerals of the gentry, professionals and affluent middling sorts during the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, who were habitually favoured and marked out for special notice through the distribution of mourning rings or other funerary tokens were the pallbearers. The allocation of funeral accessories and the gift of mourning rings to the “principal mourners” – as opposed to the more casual attendees – “indicated the role that relations were expected to play in the funeral rituals”, particularly as the body of the deceased was transported to the grave.²⁸⁹ This procession was typically “assisted and dignified” by the communal participation of various friends, neighbours, and kin, though a more limited circle of close friends, family, and dependants might also be “differentiated” through the wearing of appropriate mourning attire and the allocation of suitable memorial accoutrements and tokens of remembrance.²⁹⁰ The principal mourners, close family, and most distinguished guests were those individuals typically gifted with the most sumptuous and generous distributions of mourning accessories and favours. The customary bestowal of gloves, hatbands, scarves, and other funeral accessories, could visibility single out – through both the quantity but most

²⁸⁷ F. Hawling, *A miscellany of original poems on various subjects. Viz. Epistles, Discourses, Odes, Satires, Tales, Elegies, Part I* (London, 1751), pp. 216-18.

²⁸⁸ S. Nehama, *In Death Lamented: The Tradition of Anglo-American Mourning Jewelry* (Massachusetts: Massachusetts Historical Society, 2012), p. 23; Bullock, S. C. and McIntyre, S., ‘The Handsome Tokens of a Funeral: Glove-Giving and the Large Funeral in Eighteenth-Century New England’, *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 69, No. 2 (April, 2012), p. 312.

²⁸⁹ Cressy, ‘Death and the Social Order’, p. 107.

²⁹⁰ Beaver, D., “‘Sown in Dishonour, Raised in Glory’: Death, Ritual and Social Organisation in Northern Gloucestershire, 1590-1690”, *Social History*, Vol. 17 (1992), p. 404.

particularly in the quality of the materials employed in furnishing these tokens – those mourners closest to the deceased and their family, acting as a respectful appreciation of social status and position, as well as material tokens which marked out those tasked with a conspicuous role to play within funeral itself.²⁹¹

Houlbrooke, for example, notes the relative importance of the material trappings at the gentry funeral of Colonel Edward Phelips of Montacute, who died in 1680. Provision of mourning dress was restricted to nine close relatives, and fourteen servants, including the coffin bearers. A number of gifts were handed out to mourners, including 26 rings, 29 hatbands, 62 scarves, 22 knots of ribbon, and 222 pairs of gloves, finely graded along a decreasing scale of extravagance, dependent upon the recipient. In particular, the eight pallbearers were the most privileged of all the guests, conventionally afforded “the largest number of these presents, all of the best quality”. Additionally, they were also exclusively treated to supper after the funeral was over, where they were each presented with “a ring and a silk escutcheon”, together with the personal thanks of the Colonel’s widow, for their attendance at the funeral.²⁹²

Ben-Amos, has also drawn attention to the role which funerary gift-giving played in underscoring bonds of obligation, cementing family attachments, and demonstrating goodwill towards kindred, close friends, and social peers. Additionally, the generous bestowal of these tokens as part of the funeral service served to publicly proclaim the generosity, honour, prestige, and commitment to hospitality on the part of the deceased and their wider household.²⁹³

The memorandum which Susanna Gregory had drawn up in 1780, comprised around eight pages of instructions and orders that she wished to be “strictly observed” after her death. This not only included the list – mentioned earlier – of the 22 friends and relations who were each to “have Guinea Rings” but there was also a separate inventory listing 18 other recipients who were to have black silk hatbands and white kid gloves, as a “small return for Their Civilitys”. Moreover, all her domestic servants were to be provided with “Handsome Mourning”, the eight tenants who carried her body to the grave were each to have “a Hatband and Gloves”, as were the clerk and

²⁹¹ Cunnington and Lucas, *Costume for Births Marriages and Deaths*, pp. 192-6.

²⁹² Houlbrooke, R., “Public” and “private” in the funerals of the later Stuart gentry: some Somerset examples’, *Mortality*, Vol. 1, 2 (1996), pp. 169-172.

²⁹³ Ben-Amos, *Culture of Giving*, pp. 153, 161, 166, 214.

sexton, whilst the “Clergyman that Burys me,” was also to receive a hatband, scarf, and a pair of gloves.²⁹⁴

Whilst the sampled wills show that testators were often keen to specify the number and names of the people they above all wished to have mourning rings, testators of more modest means might directly specify only the supply of a limited number of gloves intended for a select few, including close family members or their executors and overseers. In most cases, however, the majority of wills actually offer little detail about the provisioning and donation of mourning tokens *specifically* as part of the expected funeral observances, and in many cases such matters were entrusted to the organisation and discretion of the executor or the deceased’s family, (sometimes included as an expense in the probate account) or even detailed in lists separate from the will.

In 1705, Joshua Lister, the Middlesex victualler mentioned earlier, had taken especial care to directly specify the details surrounding the disbursement of mourning and other funerary tokens amongst those individuals attending his burial; his executors and trustees received generous favours of both mourning rings and gloves, whilst a cousin and another male acquaintance - as well as their wives and children - were all to receive gloves priced at 2s6d a pair. His household was properly attired, with the bequest of five and ten pounds to provide appropriate “mourning” for his housekeeper and former housekeeper respectively, whilst as part of his funeral display, he also instructed that his executors were to “invite thirty Housekeepers to my burying...fifteen of them may be my neighbours”, and that each would also be provided with a slightly cheaper “pair of Gloves”, priced at 1s6d.²⁹⁵

Similarly, in his will of 1704, six of William Willmott’s closest friends and relations had been granted mourning rings costing either ten or twenty shillings; the cheaper rings were bequeathed to a sister, male cousin, and his two overseers and assistants, whilst those at double the price were given to the friend and brother-in-law whom he appointed as his joint executors. Those attending his funeral would receive a cheaper and more generic gratuity, in his order that: “all persons that shall be invited to my funerall solempuity shall have and Receive a pair of ...Gloves”.²⁹⁶

²⁹⁴ Lincolnshire Archives, [Orders concerning her funeral and burial by Susanna Gregory] 2-PG/5/9/13, April, 1780.

²⁹⁵ Middlesex, DCP/K/C/06/MS 25628/46; Will Number: 37.

²⁹⁶ Surrey, DW/PA/5/1705; Will Number: 108.

Other testators in leaving several mourning rings might vary the quality and price depending upon the intended recipient, whilst others – such as Jane Cocke, mentioned earlier – chose to adopt a more egalitarian approach to their bequests, in giving the same type and quality of ring to those mourners who had been invited to the funeral.

The mourning ring shown in Figure 121, for example, was doubtless also handed out to a few choice participants at the funeral or to those who had performed specific duties – such as the pallbearers – in making up part of the more private and select company of mourners. Whilst it clearly accords with the conventional design-styles of other mourning rings produced around the same period – the oval bezel comprising a gold wire monogram ('TH') set upon a ground of woven brown hair – what is remarkable, is the inscription included around the inside of the hoop. Whilst most memorial rings typically do include some personalised biographical information – usually the name or initials and date of death – which identifies the deceased, this ring is inscribed not only with the age and date of death, but it also includes, unusually, the date of *burial*: 'obt: 4 mar: buried: 9: 1693 aged 33'.²⁹⁷ The specific inclusion of both dates suggests that the ring was most likely handed out as part of the funeral obsequies (or, perhaps, even to friends and family unable to reach the home of the deceased in the five days which elapsed between death and burial), so that it commemorated not only the death of the individual, but also the event of the burial itself. **[FIG. 121]** It is also, perhaps, significant to note that the contemporary nomenclature used in identifying these rings saw the introduction and increasing employment of "funeral" and "burial" ring as terms used during the last decades of the seventeenth and into the early decades of the eighteenth century; this was perhaps a signal of their increasingly recognised function as remembrance tokens which were expressly handed out to mourners as part of the customary funeral observances during this period.

Undoubtedly, the granting of a mourning ring was not only a mark of conspicuous funerary display, it also served as a valuable gesture of thanks and recognition. The pallbearers were among the "most honoured guests", usually chosen

²⁹⁷ British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1567. This is the only inscription on a mourning ring I have yet come across which specifically includes the date of burial.

from amongst the closest and most distinguished associates of the deceased.²⁹⁸ Holding up the pall or stately cloth that covered the coffin on its final journey to the grave was a role invested with “honour and respect”, and these privileged participants played an essentially significant and conspicuous part in the enactment of the expansive early modern funeral “*tableau vivant*”.²⁹⁹

One such player in this carefully managed performance was Ralph Verney, who, in his eminent capacity as a pallbearer, noted with approval the lavish provision of funerary trappings and memorial tokens which were distributed among the guests at the burial of Richard Pigott in 1685:

...buried very honourably,...& at a great considerable charge...Wee that bore up the pall had Rings, Scarfs, Hat-bands, Shamee Gloves of the best fashion and Sarsanet Escutcheons delivered to us; the rest of the Gentry had Rings, all the servants gloves. Wee had burnt wine & Biscuits in great plenty...& all Sir Richard's servants were in mourning.³⁰⁰

In 1715, Edmund Steere, a Surrey gentleman, seemed decidedly concerned that after his decease his memory would endure, using his will to make detailed commemorative provisions as well as leaving comprehensive instructions concerning the suitable execution of his funeral and the erecting of a tombstone. Stating that “none shall come to my funerall but such as shall be invited,” he also directed that “mourning” of either ten or five pounds was to be provided for numerous relations, including several sisters-in-law, a brother-in-law, cousin, and several of his nephews and nieces. The other of his “near Relacons” to whom he had not given mourning, but who had received bequests of land, were still he requested to attire themselves in a suitable manner, by putting “themselves into Mourning”. His exhaustive memorial bequests also included a separate list attached to his will giving small monetary legacies (twenty of half a crown and another five of 2s6d) to his male friends, “as a token of my Love”.

Additionally, Steere also named twelve individuals – including several cousins as well as his landlord – who were to have mourning rings of twenty shillings apiece, whilst another five individuals, incorporating other cousins and his landlord's son and niece, were to receive rings of ten shillings each. Mourning rings were also provided

²⁹⁸ Houlbrooke, “Public” and “private”, pp. 170, 172; Cunnington and Lucas, *Costume for Births Marriages and Deaths*, pp. 135-6.

²⁹⁹ Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death*, p. 436; Cressy, ‘Death and the Social Order’, p. 107.

³⁰⁰ M. M. Verney, *Memoirs of the Verney Family from the Restoration to the Revolution, 1660 to 1696, Vol. IV* (London: Longmans, 1899), pp. 327-8.

for his pallbearers, these six men given memorial tokens which distinctively solemnised and proclaimed the identity and social position of the unmarried Steere: “the sume of three pounds to be laid out for Gold Rings to be given to Six Batchellours that shall bear upp the pall att my funerall”.³⁰¹

At the more discreet funerals of the upper- and middling-sorts, mourning jewellery and expensive mourning garb or accessories were generally reserved for the most important funeral attendees, or were given to especially favoured friends, relations, and acquaintances. Ben-Amos, has asserted that certainly by the mid-seventeenth century, “the traditional blacks were no longer distributed to large crowds but only to a small group of mourners, especially the deceased’s household”; those distinctly dressed in mourning at the funereal, thus, “marked the most intimate set of relations and the strongest personal bonds the deceased had maintained”.³⁰²

Some testators made specific monetary provision in their wills, ensuring that favoured and appropriate individuals would be able to don suitable mourning attire after their deaths. The gift of “mourning” – repeatedly designated at around five to ten pounds – which enabled close kin, servants, and the nuclear family, to purchase black cloth or mourning gowns, was a bequest that recurrently appeared in the wills of gentry and wealthy testators even into the first half of the eighteenth century.

In 1671, for example, Thomas Bowes, esq, of Earls Colne left “mourning” to eight separate individuals, including his own father, both his mother- and father-in-law, as well as to two named servants currently in his employ. He also left a memorial ring “unto all my brothers and sisters”, two rings, priced at 12 shillings, he bequeathed to his “good friends and kinsmen”, whilst a final and more inexpensive “ring of 1 noble price”, was also given to his maidservant, for whom he had also provided mourning.³⁰³

In 1685, Mary Kemp, a widow from Southwark, in ordering that £140 “bee Expended and laid out in and about my funerall,” also made generous provision so that her family and their household should be well furnished with the appropriate mourning attire. The most expensive “mourning” of forty pounds was given to her father, whom she also nominated as the sole executor of her will; to fifteen other family members – including an uncle, 3 aunts, 2 brothers-in-law, a sister-in-law, her

³⁰¹ Surrey, DW/PA/5/1716; Will Number: 127.

³⁰² Ben-Amos, *Culture of Giving*, p. 166.

³⁰³ PROB11/366/85: Thos Bowes, 26.05.1671.

grandmother, 6 brothers and a sister – she also appointed that four pounds apiece be used “to buy them mourning”, whilst all her father’s maidservants were also to be fittingly arrayed. Mourning rings were also to be provided for family members and funeral attendees; “to everyone of them to whome mourning is hereby given” were also each to receive a ring of ten shillings, whilst slightly cheaper memorial rings at eight shillings apiece were also to be presented to “every other persons that shall Attend my funerall”.³⁰⁴

Mourning dress visibly identified those members of kin and the wider social group who were most “intimately associated with the deceased”; these individuals were the conspicuously favoured recipients of the deceased’s benevolence and esteem.³⁰⁵ Black mourning garb and the wearing of memorial accessories also acted as a discernible means of “showing solidarity with bereaved kinsfolk” whilst also demonstrating a personal respect and deference towards the memory of the dead.³⁰⁶

In some cases, particularly into the eighteenth century, as the rules and etiquette surrounding the wearing of ‘appropriate’ mourning attire became ever more complex and formalised, the bequest of a substantial monetary legacy might also be “understood to carry with it the obligation to don mourning for the testator”.³⁰⁷ Part of this seemly and adequately respectful mourning attire, implied in a testamentary bequest, might also embrace the commissioning and wearing of suitable memorial or personalised commemorative jewellery. Horace Walpole (1717-97), for example, showed “immense concern about the niceties of formal mourning wear”, when he wrote, in 1764, to the Hon. Henry Conway, who had recently received a substantial legacy of five thousand pounds.³⁰⁸

I am glad you mentioned it: I would not have had you appear without your close mourning for the Duke of Devonshire upon any account. I was once going to tell you of it, knowing your inaccuracy in such matters; but thought it still impossible you should be ignorant of how necessary it is. Lord Strafford, who has a legacy of only £200, wrote to consult Lady Suffolk. She told him, for such a sum, which only implies a ring, it was sometimes not done; but yet advised him to mourn. In your case, it is indispensable; nor can you see any of his family without it. Besides, it is much better on such an occasion to over, than under do. I answer this paragraph first, because I am so eager not to have you blamed.³⁰⁹

³⁰⁴ Surrey, DW/PA/5/1685; Will Number: 91.

³⁰⁵ Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death*, p. 440.

³⁰⁶ Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family*, p. 253.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 251.

³⁰⁸ Shortened version of this letter (No. 228) quoted in, C. Gittings, *Death, Burial and the Individual in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 210.

³⁰⁹ *The Letters of Horace Walpole, Earl of Orford: Including numerous letters now first published from the original manuscripts, Vol. 3*: <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/4773/pg4773-images.html>.

When James Steuart, a mariner living in Wapping, bequeathed the bulk of his personal possessions to his “Loving friend” Mary, the wife of a fellow mariner, he left no ambiguity in his memorial bequests as to whether the legacies he intended for her also customarily would require her to don mourning in his memory; for alongside the bequest of his various household goods and chattels, he also unequivocally bestowed upon her “Seven Guineas for Mourning & Ring”.³¹⁰

Remembrance Gone Wrong: Rescinding Bequests and Causing Offence

The very fact that the bequest and provision of mourning tended to single out certain individuals for particular notice, meant that the giving and receiving of mourning jewellery had the potential to become a veritable social minefield of offence and recrimination.

The distribution of funerary gifts such as rings and gloves often made “numerous and visible distinctions among the participants”, whether this was implicit in the very giving of the gift itself, or down to the materials and expense of certain items. It is unsurprising then, that either the failure to give a gift at all, or the apparent absence of a token which was seen to sufficiently accord with an individual’s perceived social status or was considered inappropriate to the closeness of their relationship with the deceased, meant that it was often all too easy to cause offence.³¹¹

Whilst the funeral might provide a very public setting for the bestowal of rings upon the attendant mourners, wider correspondence networks amongst the deceased’s kinship and social circles might also later bring to light instances where certain individuals had or had not received a memorial token. Moreover, the will-making and probate process itself meant that “writing a gift into a will was also a relatively public way of acknowledging the relationship that it marked”.³¹²

As Richardson has contended, the conscious decision to write a bequest of mourning jewellery into the text of the will itself made it a much more “formal” and ritualised gift, which would – as part of the legal probate process – be “broadcast within the community”.³¹³ Schen, has similarly observed that the performance of a will during the early modern period “crossed boundaries between the individual and

³¹⁰ Middlesex, MS 9172/152; Will Number: 328.

³¹¹ Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family*, p. 293.

³¹² Richardson, ““As my whole trust is in him””, pp. 186-7.

³¹³ Richardson, ““Make you a cloak of it””, p. 71.

the community”; thus, the bequeathing of jewellery in the context of a will “often occurred in a public setting,” as the ‘ritual family’ gathered to witness and observe the writing or communicating of the will and the dispensing of bequests which would single out certain individuals from amongst the testator’s own family or social group.³¹⁴

As part of the conventional will-making and probate process, bequests of memorial jewellery and other tokens of remembrance might first be articulated and declared at the deathbed, then openly reiterated and confirmed as the will was “read back to the testator in front of the witnesses,” before being signed and sealed; after the testator had died, these bequests would be broadcast more widely still, as the formal probate process began in earnest and the will was registered at the appropriate court; finally, as the appointed executors sought to fulfil the directives stipulated in the will, and the funeral was arranged, its contents and the legatees favoured with a token of mourning would become known more widely within the community and the testator’s extended family.³¹⁵

The often public nature of the bequest of mourning tokens and other acts of remembrance meant that the failure to provide a piece of mourning jewellery could provoke umbrage before a testator had even died. In his will of 1593, for example, Thomas Colshill, esquire,³¹⁶ bequeathed mourning rings to John Smith and his wife, but later rescinded the gift, adding a codicil to his will in 1595, when he learned that the intended recipient: “hath not remembered me nor my wife so much as with a mourning gown by his will”.³¹⁷

For some testators and their surviving heirs, it was a fine balancing act, what may initially have seemed like a simple and straightforward bequest of remembrance might lead some individuals into a potential quagmire of mistaken etiquette and social faux pas. There could be a slim margin between offering up what was seen by one party as an unassuming token of mourning, to those arrayed on the opposite side, feeling themselves to have been unjustly affronted and disregarded.³¹⁸

³¹⁴ Schen, *Charity and Lay Piety*, p. 14.

³¹⁵ Richardson, ““Make you a cloak of it””, p. 71.

³¹⁶ Highlighting the influence of social ties and the pull of reciprocity in the bequest of rings amongst gentry testators, Colshill’s wife was also bequeathed a death’s head ring in the earlier will of Surrey gentleman, Nycolas Crayford. Surrey, DW/PA/5/1591; Will Number: 53.

³¹⁷ F. G. Emmison, *Elizabethan Life: Wills of Essex Gentry & Merchants, Vol. 4* (Chelmsford: Essex Record Office, 1978), pp. 68-9.

³¹⁸ Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family*, p. 251.

It was with more than a hint of chagrin, for example, that Ralph Josselin recorded the death of his friend, Dame Hester Honeywood, in 1681:

The good Lady Honeywood died early. I went to see her and found she was dead, I prayed with her the 17. she was in a good frame, she was my good friend, and I hers, we lived in love about 40.y. acquaintance, I was serviceable every way to her for soul and body, and in her estate more than ordinary, she left me no legacy in her will, she said she would add a codicil to remember me and some others, but not done.³¹⁹

The ripe potential for family disharmony surrounding the bestowal of mourning jewellery continued even into the eighteenth century, and is particularly apparent in the letters exchanged between Francis Luttrell and his aunt Martha Baker in 1732. Following the death of his father, Francis writes to inform his aunt and cousin Dolly, that he is to “have Rings made on purpose for you both in memory of him, which I desire yee will please to accept”. The seemingly kind gift, however, is a rather backhanded offering, tarnished by the simmering tone of resentment, when Francis goes on to inform – or rather castigate – his aunt:

...as he was pleased to make me his Executor, Such Memorials or Presents are part of that Office. I could not imitate your Example as an Executrix, who did not think the only Nephew born into the World to your Husband, & who was my Uncle by Nature, & tho’ I was present at the Funeral, worthy of such a Token; but as the wisest man ever living hath left it behind him, that tis the Glory of a Man to pass over a Transgression...³²⁰

The bitter and rather condescending tone of Francis’ letter is clearly something of a surprise to his aunt. Nevertheless, she apologises for any offence she may unintentionally have caused, as well as kindly thanking him for the gift of the mourning ring he sent in memory of his father. However, she also takes the opportunity to remind her nephew – rather indignantly – that her late husband was not even invited to the funeral of his own sister, so clearly the bestowal – or lack thereof – of mourning rings, had stirred up old recriminations and suppressed family grievances:

I take this opportunity...to return you thanks for the ring you was pleased to send me & I hope you will excuse me that I did not do it sooner...I was sorry to find by yr letter that I so much disobliged you by not given you a ring at my husbands funeral. I did not know you did expect it having mourning left you by his will...He left rings where he thought proper but neither his children nor his own sister had any wch if they had I should not have omitted you who was so nearly related. I own I was left executrix but not to his Estate, only in trust for my children & I gave no rings to any but what was left by his will. I do assure you Sr it was not out of disrespect to you...tho my Brother did not think either of us worthy of a ring for my sister neither did he invite him who was the only Brother she had to her funeral wch

³¹⁹ Personal Records: Diary of Ralph Josselin, 19.10.1681.

³²⁰ Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies, [From Francis Luttrell at Little Chelsea; to Martha “at her house in Great James Street, near Bedford Row, London”] D-X1069/2/12, 20 July, 1732.

was a great trouble to him & I have often heard him say how unkindly he took it...I beg you will believe that I will do all that lies in my power to preserve your friendship...³²¹

Interestingly, when Matthew Dare from Guildford made his will in 1734, along with the bequest of gold rings and other items of personally-owned jewellery to his nephews and nieces, he had also intended mourning rings of ten shillings apiece for the husband and wife of two different couples; however, by the time the will went to probate several years later in 1745, the line containing the bequest of these four rings had been crossed out, the testator having either changed his mind as to the suitability of the recipients, or his circumstances having perhaps changed.³²²

Whilst it is unclear what had caused this change of heart, the reasoning behind John Bennett's rescinding of a mourning ring to a female called Sarah Reynolds, as well as that given to her husband, was made quite clear, after his daughter was called to appear as a witness on 9 March, 1786, to swear to the events that had led up to the bequest being crossed out of Bennett's will. He had originally composed his will whilst in health, on 12 April, 1779, leaving six mourning rings in total, including four given to his grandchildren, but the Middlesex physician had then later amended his will a few weeks before his death in February, 1786:

...on a day happening about three weeks before his Death having had some previous conversation with her...respecting some ill treatment received by him from a Sarah Field formerly Reynolds and at that time informed this Appearer that he had left a Legacy in his will of a Ring to the said Sarah Field formerly Reynolds but that he was determined to leave her nothing that he the said deceased thereupon immediately went to his own Room and brought the will hereunto annexed...bearing date the 12th day of April 1779 and gave it to her...and desired her to read the same over to him which she immediately did and when she came to the Name of the said Sarah Reynolds the said deceased immediately took a Pen and Ink and was going to shick out the said Name & Legacy but instead thereof gave the same Pen where this Appearer and directed her to shick the same out which she immediately did together with the Words "and her Husband" he having been dead some years and after having finished reading the same she...returned the same to the said deceased...³²³

With the potential for such friction and bitterness between family and friends, it is little wonder that some testators sensibly left the distribution of mourning rings, along with other funeral and memorial arrangements, firmly in the hands of their executors. As early as 1592, for example, Thomas Crompton, bequeathed rings, but he left it to the discretion of his wife as to which of his particular friends would actually receive a mourning ring at his death: "to every of my good frendes that my wife shall thinke meete a ringe of gould".³²⁴

³²¹ Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies, [To her nephew Francis Luttrell] D-X1069/2/11, July, 1732.

³²² Surrey, DW/PA/5/1745; Will Number: 26.

³²³ Middlesex, DL/C/429; Will Number: 20.

³²⁴ Clay (ed.), 'North Country Wills, Volume II', p. 205.

In 1693, John Lamott Honywood, whilst making testamentary provision to ensure that certain individuals and all the servants at his death were provided with “decent and necessary mourning”, also set aside three hundred pounds for his “funeral expenses”. With minimal instruction, Honywood obviously had complete faith in the abilities of his wife, whom he appointed sole executrix of his will and testament, merely asking that she might: “buy rings to be disposed to such relations and friends as [she] pleases”.³²⁵

Anne Simpson, a widow from Holborn, being “sicke & weake in body” had also, in her will of 1665, depended upon her executors to see that mourning rings would be given to the appropriate people: “I will that my Executors...shall give and bestow amongst such freinds of mine, as in their discretion they shall thinke fitt at my buriall forty rings all twenty shillings value a peece to forty severall persons”.³²⁶

As Houlbrooke, has noted, after the Restoration and on into the eighteenth century, the average length of time which typically elapsed between the making of the will and the death of the testator, was “tending to increase in the long-term”. Some testators might make their wills well in advance of their final sickness.³²⁷ Consequently, the chances of a change in family circumstances, or the likelihood of more people needing to be remembered than were perhaps individually listed in the original will, meant that pragmatic individuals, like Honywood and Simpson, were wont to rely on the discretion of their family or executors, to see that tokens of remembrance and memorial keepsakes were appropriately distributed to mourners and kin.

In a similar fashion, whilst Richard Harlakenden had seemingly made thorough and comprehensive provision for the distribution of mourning rings after his death, he also prudently requested that: “if I should have forgot any near relations and especial friends I would have my executors remember them as if I had set them down”.³²⁸

Conclusion

The giving and receiving of mourning jewellery might be guided by many strands of influence, as testators and the bereaved made decisions about the suitability (or not) of the recipients and legatees who might be gifted with a token of

³²⁵ PROB11/425: Jn Lamott Honywood of Markshall, 21.10.1693.

³²⁶ Middlesex, MS 9052/15/6; Will Number: 314.

³²⁷ Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family*, pp. 106-9.

³²⁸ Earls Colne, D/DU256/6: Rich Harlakenden, 30.07.1660.

remembrance. The motivations and concerns were wide-ranging, sometimes a mourning ring was given merely as a simple token of remembrance to acknowledge affective ties of family or friendship, but the gift of mourning jewellery could also be an act loaded with social and personal significance.

The sampled wills from testators of south-east England demonstrated the broad applicability of the mourning ring as a token which could be exchanged between family or friends, male or female. Though the terminology testators used in defining their bequests and naming their recipients could often be indistinct, what is clear is, however, is that mourning jewellery was used to mark all manner of affective, social, and kinship connections during the early modern period. Mourning rings, in particular, provided a useful means of acknowledging family relations as well as recognising and reciprocating various other communal connections and customary social obligations.

Mourning rings might be a token legacy used by fathers to acknowledge married daughters and other adult children who had already received their primary settlements and inheritances. Personally-owned jewellery, particularly expensive items or emotive pieces intimately associated with their former owners, such as wedding rings or seals and signets, were also often passed on within the immediate family, recalling the deceased and marking ongoing family associations.

Mourning rings were also given as a means of offering thanks and expressing gratitude for services performed during the lifetime of the testator or for future responsibilities which had been assigned to the intended recipients. Nurses, neighbours, landlords, friends and servants who had provided support and care were all thanked with the bequest of a mourning ring. Executors, overseers, supervisors, guardians and trustees were also routinely remembered with the token recognition of a ring as a customary sign of gratitude and appreciation.

Mourning rings also functioned as an appropriate means of adhering to conventional social practice and observing emergent funerary customs and proprieties, being distributed amongst funeral attendees and acquaintances, distinguishing principal mourners, acknowledging clergymen, and marking out other recipients for special notice.

The often public nature of the giving and receiving of mourning jewellery, however, inherently making distinctions amongst members of the deceased's family

and social group, also meant that it was a practice which might provoke umbrage as well as remembrance.

CHAPTER 5. IMPORTANCE AND POPULAR IMPACT: The Consumption and Reception of Mourning Jewellery, c. 1605-1805

'Tis a lamentable History of Life, when it can all be summed up in the few Syllables of a Funeral Ring; he lived to, or rather as it is wont to be expressed, he died such a day of the Month, such a year of his Age; for indeed he lived not at all; Life is a meer Dream...¹

Over the course of three centuries, the prevalence and popular usage of mourning jewellery underwent a process of considerable change and evolution. From an exclusive sixteenth-century custom that was, for the most part, restricted to members of the aristocracy, gentry, and affluent urban professional sorts, by the early decades of the eighteenth century, mourning jewellery had gained greater popular currency, becoming comprehensively more familiar to a wider spectrum of the population and gradually more culturally and socially pervasive than ever before.

This chapter will investigate the growing cultural prominence, popularity, and social impact of mourning and memorial jewellery over time. Not only does this involve observing how and why testators and the bereaved routinely employed mourning jewellery as an applicable funerary and commemorative strategy, but it also encompasses a wider-ranging consideration of where the custom was typically located as part of the broader themes of mourning, remembrance, and memorialisation of the deceased in early modern England.

In terms of assessing how widespread and generally popular the practice was, both in terms of the 'sorts' of people who were using mourning jewellery and the extent to which it was typically commissioned and employed, the sampled wills from Middlesex and Surrey (as discussed in Chapter 4) provide the basis for the statistical conclusions. Sampled at twenty-year intervals from 1605 to 1805, and taken from a variety of courts below the P.C.C., the wills give some insight into the chronological progression of the custom over time, particularly amongst the middling-sort testators who increasingly came to dictate and shape the custom.

The wills provide information about the gender and occupation of testators who were making bequests of mourning rings, rings more generally, as well as all other kinds of jewellery tokens. In terms of discovering how common these bequests were and how widespread amongst testators, the wills allow for an observation of change over time. Chapter 4 discussed some of the problems inherent in categorising the

¹ Anon., *Humane Life: or, a Second Part of the Enquiry After Happiness* (London, 1690).

bequests, particularly in terms of being able to definitely determine what composed an item of mourning jewellery. The particular ambiguity surrounding the gift of “a ring”, has meant that where a testator gave a monetary sum for a ring, where it was described as featuring a death’s head, or where a testator particularly stipulated the ring was intended for a remembrance – or even in some rare cases actually termed the item as a “mourning ring” – these bequests were all counted as mourning rings. Where the bequest of a ring did not fit into any of these general categories, it was counted merely as a ring, all other items of jewellery were counted in another group, and did not include the more general and prescriptive bequests (which were counted separately) often found at the end of the will in which a testator bequeathed rings and jewels as part of their remaining goods and chattels.

Of course, the statistics showing the number of testators leaving mourning rings and jewellery does not take account of those items which may have been understood in the bequest of a token legacy, which were bought independently by mourners, or those which were primarily given out as funeral tokens. Moreover, as the custom became more widespread and a standardised part of accepted mourning provision, more testators were probably inclined to assume that mourning rings would be purchased without their explicit request. Similarly, in primarily focussing on the information provided in the wills, the emphasis is principally upon the motivations and prescriptions of the testator, and whilst they do provide information about the sorts of legatees gifted with mourning jewellery, there is less information to be gleaned about the people who were actually using and wearing the jewellery itself.

In conjunction with the probate material, newspapers, letters, diaries and other contemporary writings, as well the surviving jewellery, all provide particularly effective and illustrative evidence for discovering how popular and widespread mourning jewellery became over the period.

The chronological review of mourning jewellery and the various changing forms and fashions covered in Chapters 2 and 3, certainly illustrates an increase - though not the origin - in the use of specifically commissioned and personally dedicatory mourning rings and other memorial jewels, in the decades following the execution of King Charles I in 1649. Of course, as the testamentary record also shows, the varied commemorative bequests contained within the wills from across the entire period under study, also demonstrate that personal jewellery had long been, and continued to be, called into use by testators as a functional and purposeful means of

providing various kith and kin with a personal and distinctive token of remembrance and regard.

Moreover, as has previously been shown, possibly the earliest surviving English memorial ring in existence can be dated back to at least the fifteenth century, whilst there is also – as illustrated in Chapters 2 and 3 – definite and demonstrable evidence for the bequest of *memento mori* and later dedicated mourning rings in the wills of numerous sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century testators.

Whilst the sampled will data for Middlesex and Surrey begins in 1605, Clare Schen’s analysis of 685 London wills, probated between 1500-1620, and sampled from three different courts (including, significantly, the P.C.C.), certainly does offer convincingly positive evidence for an emergent trend in the usage and popularity of mourning rings as a specific testamentary gift, and as a more private and recognised means of securing personal remembrance, in post-Reformation London.²

In separating the bequests into “pious” and “non-pious” categories, in which the latter group included the gift of mourning rings to family, friends, and neighbours, Schen witnessed an emergent trend in the recourse to such items. Schen’s analysis identified a discernible upward trend in usage, as testators invested in different forms of commemoration. Before 1601, rings made up 15.24% of all non-pious gifts bequeathed by testators and continued to grow in prominence and popularity, so that by 1620, rings made up 18.58% of these gifts as longer-term personal remembrance amongst friends and family increasingly became a pressing concern for testators.³

Certainly, the sampled testamentary evidence from Earls Colne, Middlesex, and Surrey, does suggest a discernible growth, particularly during the middle and latter decades of the seventeenth century, in the frequency and proportion of testators who might be inclined to leave a bequest of mourning rings or memorial jewellery. For Middlesex, the highest proportion of testators leaving either mourning rings or rings more generally reached a peak in 1685, at 21.1 percent and 27.2 percent respectively. For Surrey, the highest proportion of testators bequeathing mourning rings was slightly later in 1705, with 12.98 percent leaving mourning rings, and 17.6 percent bequeathing rings of any sort.

However, across the entire period under study, the overall percentages are still fairly muted, with those testators who made particular gifts of mourning rings well in

² C. S. Schen, *Charity and Lay Piety in Reformation London, 1500-1620* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002).

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 156-7.

the minority, with 14.7 percent of all Middlesex testators leaving mourning rings but even less for Surrey, with only 7.16 percent of all Surrey testators across the entire sample making a bequest of a mourning ring. The proportion of testators leaving jewellery and rings more generally is significantly higher, but even for those testators in Middlesex, not above a quarter of the total sample size overall.

ALL TESTATORS:	TOTAL NO. OF TESTATORS 1605-1805:	TOTAL NUMBER LEAVING MOURNING RINGS	TOTAL NUMBER LEAVING RINGS (any)	TOTAL NUMBER LEAVING JEWELLERY and/or RINGS
MIDDLESEX	2020	297 (14.7% of all Middlesex testators bequeathed mourning rings)	411 (20.3% of all Middlesex testators bequeathed rings)	443 (21.9% of all Middlesex testators bequeathed rings/jewellery)
SURREY	1159	83 (7.16% of all Surrey testators bequeathed mourning rings)	125 (10.8% of all Surrey testators bequeathed rings)	138 (11.9% of all Surrey testators bequeathed rings/jewellery).

However, the significant fact that mourning jewellery is conspicuously one of the largest and most recognisable categories of eighteenth-century jewellery to have survived, as well as the degree to which it seems to have been popularly understood, perhaps also suggests that as the custom became more culturally pervasive and widespread, and as it dispersed down the social ladder, testators increasingly took it as a given that their executors and legatees would, understandably, acquire for themselves a mourning ring or jewel, without the need for further explicit instruction.

Emphatically, in terms of the quality and quantity of the surviving material objects themselves, it is noticeable that in the decades after the Restoration, there certainly seems to have been a considerable growth, spreading into the eighteenth century, in the quantity of mourning rings and other forms of memorial jewellery, being produced for wear.⁴ Wealthy seventeenth-century testators and their families were evidently utilising mourning jewellery to a greater extent; mourning jewellery and memorial rings progressively came to be seen as an essential and even somewhat obligatory funerary and memorial memento, and an entirely appropriate means of

⁴ The majority of mourning rings featuring inscribed dates which are recorded on the Portable Antiquities Scheme Catalogue date from the latter decades of the seventeenth-century into the mid years of the eighteenth century.

Similarly, of the 1025 rings recorded in the Crisp Collection which date from 1653 to 1835, there are only 6 rings in the collection for the years up to 1700, whilst 928 rings make up the bulk of the collection between 1700-1800. B. Marsh (ed.), *Memorial Rings: Charles the Second to William the Fourth, in the Possession of Frederick Arthur Crisp* (Grove Park Press, 1908).

Year	Total Number of Wills Middlesex	Total Number of Wills Surrey	Total Number of Testators Leaving Mourning Rings (Middlesex)	Total Number of Testators Leaving Mourning Rings (Surrey)	Total Number of Testators Leaving Rings (any) (Middlesex)	Total Number of Testators Leaving Rings (any) (Surrey)	Total Number of Testators Leaving Rings and/or Jewellery (Middlesex)	Total Number of Testators Leaving Rings and/or Jewellery (Surrey)	Total Number of Testators Leaving Rings and/or Jewellery inc. formulaic bequests (Middlesex)	Total Number of Testators Leaving Rings and/or Jewellery inc. formulaic bequests (Surrey)
1605	29	76	0	2	2	3	3	3	3	4
1625	173	188	22	4	33	9	33	10	34	11
1645	56	55	9	4	15	6	15	6	15	6
1665	378	193	69	22	93	32	96	33	108	38
1685	228	156	48	16	62	17	62	17	72	24
1705	290	131	52	17	70	23	72	24	89	29
1725	420	122	51	8	75	14	84	15	115	24
1745	162	97	15	7	22	16	23	20	34	25
1765	90	77	8	1	10	3	14	4	18	6
1785	98	27	14	2	15	2	20	6	21	6
1805	96	37	9	0	14	0	21	0	26	1
TOTAL	2020	1159	297	83	411	125	443	138	535	174

Year	% Middlesex testators leaving mourning rings	% Surrey testators leaving mourning rings	% of Middlesex testators leaving rings of any sort	% Surrey testators leaving rings of any sort
1605	0	2.6	6.9	3.9
1625	12.7	2.1	19.1	4.8
1645	16.1	7.3	26.8	10.9
1665	18.3	11.4	24.6	16.6
1685	21.1	10.3	27.2	10.9
1705	17.9	12.98	24.1	17.6
1725	12.1	6.6	17.9	11.5
1745	9.3	7.2	13.6	16.5
1765	8.9	1.3	11.1	3.9
1785	14.3	7.4	15.3	7.4
1805	9.4	0	14.6	0

providing funeral goers, friends, and family members, with a fitting mark of notice and regard.

Additionally, after the upheavals of the Civil War years, the relative economic and political security and stability established under King Charles II provided a welcome boost to the goldsmiths' trade. Though later depressed for periods by plague and fire which affected Cheapside, materials became more readily obtainable, prices no longer so inflationary, an influx of Huguenot craftsmen brought new technical skills, and, accordingly, perhaps, people were more disposed to invest in the purchase of an attractive mourning ring or commemorative token.⁵ Indeed, according to Oman, by the end of the seventeenth century, mourning rings had become so popular and were in such high demand, that the speciality eventually became a "whole time occupation for some craftsmen".⁶

Nevertheless, for much of the seventeenth, and, indeed, even into the eighteenth century, mourning rings were still out of reach for a great majority of the English population, when faced with death and bereavement; even before the mid-seventeenth century, "only persons of some importance were commemorated with rings". Correspondingly, Oman also perceives there to have been a "marked change" regarding the nature of the distribution of mourning rings, in the years which followed the Restoration and this is perhaps also indicated in the peak in popularity of testators from Middlesex and Surrey who chose to leave rings.⁷

Formerly, in Oman's view, mourning rings and memorial mementoes had habitually only been given to a carefully selected group of close friends and kin, with the provision of an intimate and personal token of remembrance being utilised to mark out the regulated number of recipients for special notice and esteem. However, a trend for increasingly "lavish distributions" of mourning rings and other funerary accessories, at the funerals of the nobility and wealthy, and the extent to which the custom was progressively emulated by those from amongst the affluent middling sorts, meant that by the close of the seventeenth century, allocations of mourning rings were already becoming "excessive".⁸

It is interesting to note for example, that whilst the great majority of the sampled testators from Middlesex and Surrey left only a small number of mourning

⁵ E. Turner, *An Introduction to English Silver* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1985), p. 6.

⁶ C. Oman, *British Rings, 800-1914* (Totowa: Rowman and Littlefield, 1973), p. 10.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 72, 75.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 75; Oman, C., 'Mourning Rings', *Apollo*, Vol. 43 (1946), p. 73.

rings, those who did chose to leave large bequests were prominent in the years shortly after the Restoration. In Middlesex the largest bequest of 40 rings took place in a will from 1665, for Surrey a large bequest of 24 rings occurred in the same year, with another bequest of 85 rings in a will from 1672.

As the bequests for memorial rings discussed in Chapter 4 illustrated, even relatively ordinary middling sort seventeenth-century testators were sometimes taking steps to markedly ensure that their surviving kin were adequately provided with mourning rings, or a sum of money to allow for the purchase of a token remembrance. It could be a costly business, however, with one London woman tellingly complaining in 1685, that mourning lockets were “at least £6 in the making”.⁹

In his survey of wills from Elizabethan Essex, Houlbrooke observed that the number of rings typically given fluctuated from 1 to 20, although in most cases it was fewer than 10; in terms of cost, bequests ranged in price from 10 shillings up to £10, although most were budgeted at around 20 to 40 shillings.¹⁰

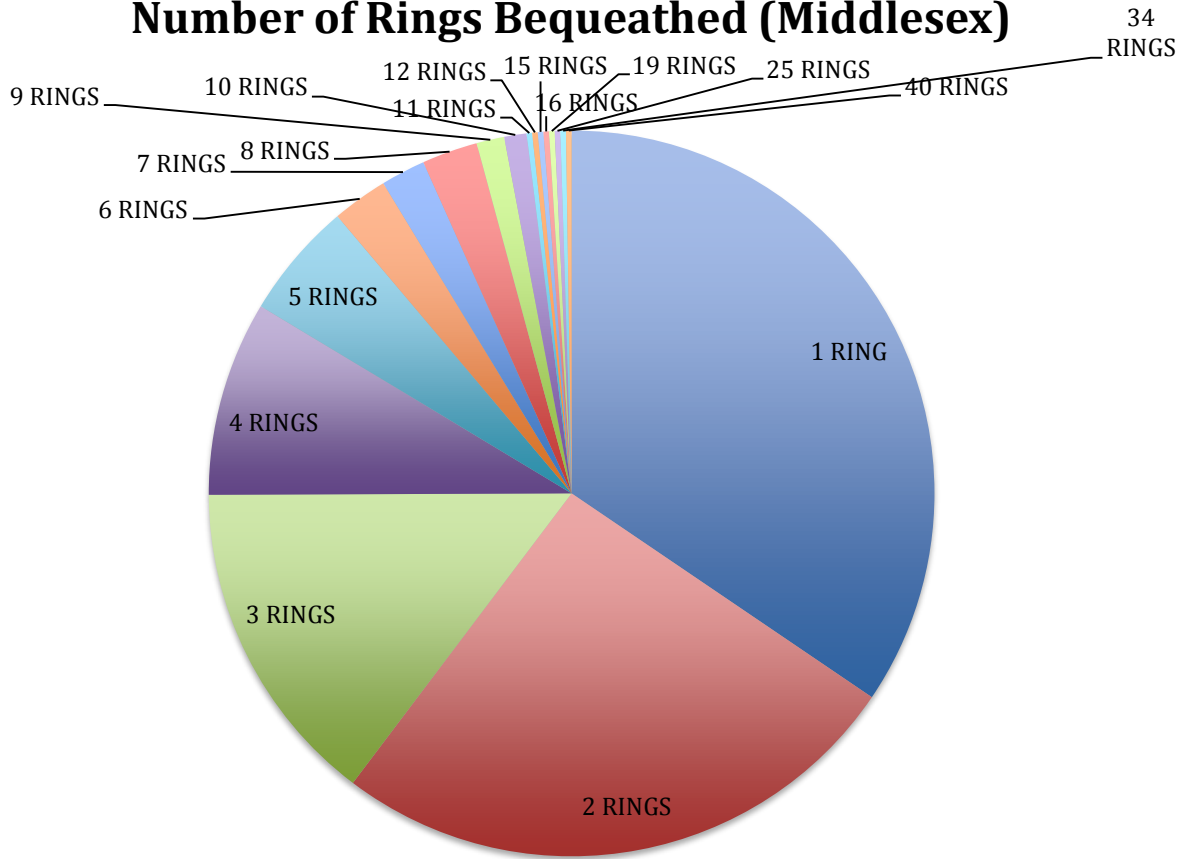
The sampled wills from across the period reflect a similar trend, with the majority of testators who did actually allocate rings, habitually leaving between one and three rings, though individual preference and personal circumstance understandably exerted a considerable influence. In Middlesex, 74.9% of testators who bequeathed rings gave between one and three, whilst the greatest proportion of testators (34.5%) left only one ring, although there was considerable variation in the bequests being made. For Surrey, the situation was much the same, with 79% of testators who bequeathed rings leaving between one and three, whilst 36% gave only one ring.

As has been seen, testators leaving several mourning rings might sometimes even grade their bequests into varying price bands dependent upon the intended recipients, and particularly lavish or ‘fashionable’ examples, set with diamonds or precious stones, could be especially expensive. However, it is also interesting to note that a seemingly customary token sum - conventionally of around 10 to 20 shillings (though sometimes specifically quantified in the form of a gift of a noble or a guinea) - for the purchase, presumably, of a ‘standard’ memorial ring, was remarkably constant over the whole period, and is reflected in the sampled wills even into the

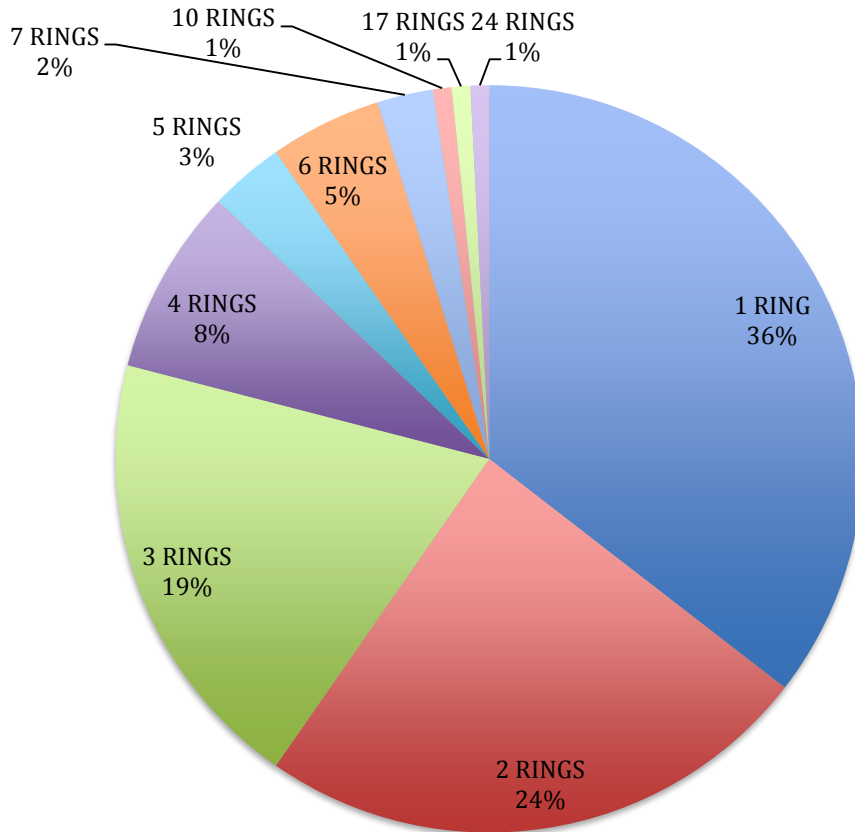
⁹ Quoted in, S. Bury, *An Introduction to Sentimental Jewellery* (London: HMSO, 1985), p. 33.

¹⁰ R. Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family in England, 1480-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 269.

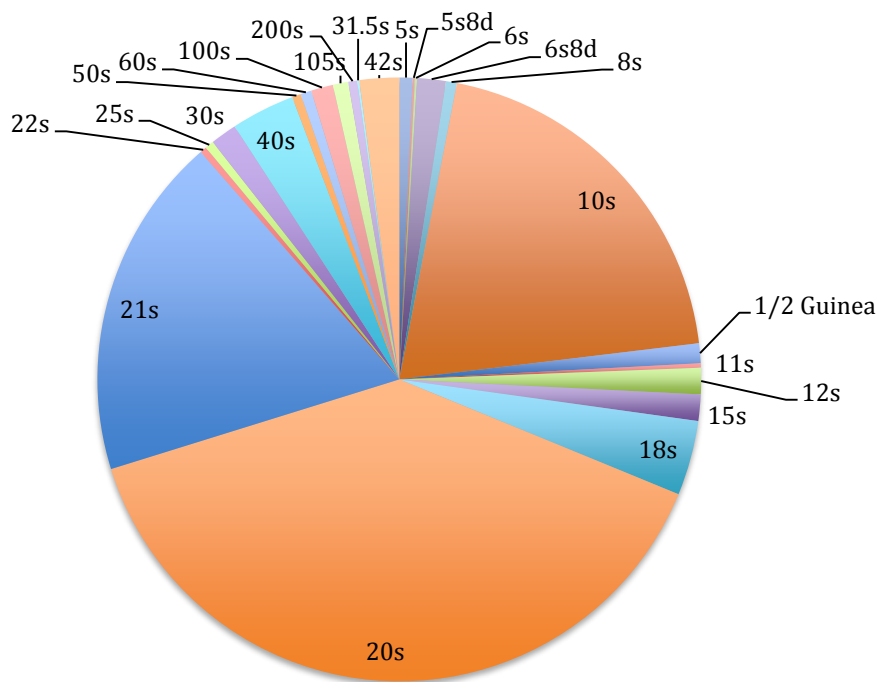
Number of Rings Bequeathed (Middlesex)



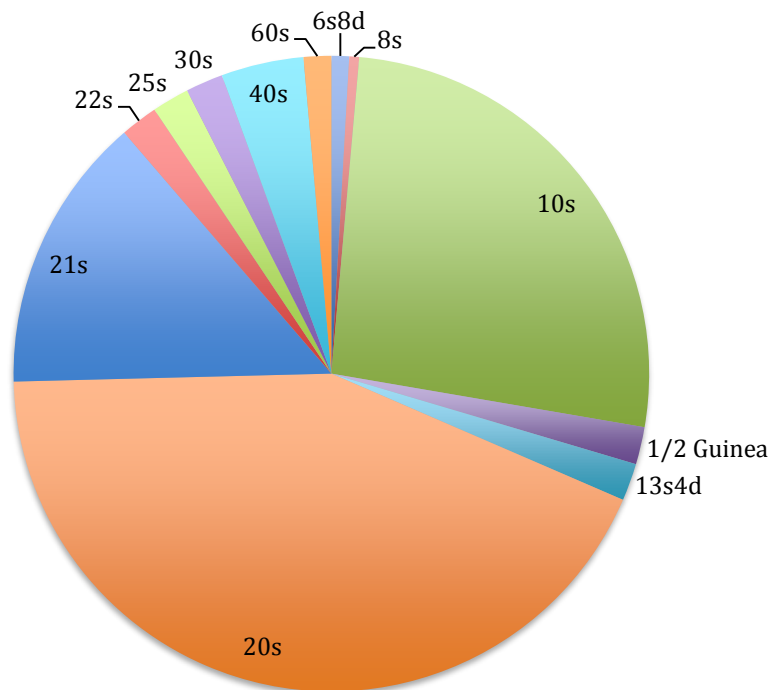
Number of Rings Bequeathed (Surrey)



Price of a Mourning Ring (Middlesex)



Price of a Mourning Ring (Surrey)



eighteenth century. Again, whilst there was a great variety in the potential price of a mourning ring, for the majority of testators from Middlesex and Surrey a ring of ten or twenty shillings sufficed.

For example, Mary Jones, a spinster from Middlesex, largely used her will for the detailed donation of over 25 mourning rings; naming each individual recipient, a ring was allocated at a cost of either 1 or 2 guineas, with nearly two-thirds of the bequests designated at “one Guinea for a Ring”. A more personal legacy, given along with a sum of forty shillings, was also allocated to her maid, who was to receive: “my large-Cypher Ring”.¹¹

Where testators fail to specifically denote or explicitly express the bequest of a mourning ring, the gift of several stock monetary sums, typically of around ten shillings or more, might also have been understood and taken by contemporaries to naturally imply the present of a ring.

In 1747, for example, one London goldsmith was advertising the availability of: “Mourning Rings of all Sizes, at 17s. each”.¹² Likewise, nearly three decades later, in publicising the sale of the “whole Stock in Trade” of a Reading-based silversmith, one newspaper advertisement, offered “Funeral Rings, the newest Fashion” at a price of “16s. each”.¹³ Similarly, in the detailed recording of robbery and burglary trials at the Old Bailey, stolen mourning rings were noticeably itemised at a price recurrently set at around 10 shillings during the late seventeenth, and even throughout the eighteenth century.

Mourning Jewellery as an Indicator of Wealth and Status

As the period progressed, and certainly towards the end of the seventeenth and into the early decades of the eighteenth centuries, mourning rings were sometimes being dispensed in considerable numbers, sometimes even stretching into the hundreds. At the funerals of the affluent gentry, wealthy urban elite, or prominent professional sorts (whose wills tended to be proved in the Prerogative Courts) - such as Samuel Pepys in 1703 (123 rings), Sir Isaac Newton in 1727 (101 rings), or

¹¹ Middlesex, AM/PW/1726/026.

¹² Classified ads, *General Advertiser* (1744), (London, England), Saturday, August 29, 1747; Issue 4008.

¹³ Advertisement and Notices, *The Reading Mercury and Oxford Gazette, etc* (Reading, England), Monday, June 10, 1776; Issue 752.

Thomas Guy in 1724 (87 rings) - the rings must have been routinely dispensed to funeral attendees almost as a matter of course.¹⁴

Tellingly, one newspaper advertisement from 1728 reported the theft of “about 20 Funeral Rings” from a “Gentleman’s House”, the rings had, in all probability, been acquired at the various interments of associated local dignitaries, with “several of them being Inscriptions of Aldermen of London, deceased”.¹⁵ The fact that a copious quantity of personalised mourning rings might be required to be given out to mourners at the burial of certain prominent individuals is also recorded in the newspaper reports detailing the lavish funeral preparations and associated material trappings – even as late as the 1780s and 1790s – of some of the members of London’s civic and professional public bodies.

In 1781, for example, one news story reported that: “The Remains of the late Alderman Hayley are to be interred in a new Vault, now erecting in the Church-Yard of St. Mary, Whitechapel”; significantly, the report also noted that: “Upwards of one Hundred Mourning Rings have been ordered on the Occasion”.¹⁶ Likewise, over fifteen years later, and very much proclaiming the corporate public spirit and communal munificence of “The late Mr. Bushnan, the much-respected Comptroller of the Chamber of London”, the *Whitehall Evening Post* of 1797, detailed the bequest and generous distribution of mourning rings to various acquaintances and esteemed fellow colleagues of Bushnan:

...by his will [he] left a striking mark of his gratitude to his patrons, the Lord Mayor, Aldermen, and Commons of the City. He has desired each of the Gentlemen to accept of a mourning ring; which, with those bequeathed to all his brother officers, will make the number near three hundred.

With a proclaimed fortune of “between forty and fifty thousand pounds”, the late Bushnan and his surviving widow, could obviously afford to expend a large amount of money in making a great show of his obviously very public funeral obsequies.¹⁷ Thus, mourning rings could be distributed as a distinct symbol of remembrance and as a personalised memorial marker to the memory of Bushnan’s prior place and importance within the civic elite and municipal life of London.

¹⁴ Fennetaux, A., ‘Fashioning Death/Gendering Sentiment: Mourning Jewelry in Britain in the Eighteenth Century’, in *Women and the Material Culture of Death*, ed. M. D. Goggin and B. F. Tobin (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 29, 47; Pirohakul, T., ‘The Funeral in England in the Long Eighteenth Century’, PhD thesis, The London School of Economics and Political Science (2015), p. 116.

¹⁵ Classified ads, *Daily Journal* (London, England), Wednesday, July 31, 1728; Issue 2359.

¹⁶ News, *St. James’s Chronicle or the British Evening Post* (London, England), September 1, 1781 – September 4, 1781; Issue 3201.

¹⁷ News, *Whitehall Evening Post* (London, England), January 31, 1797 – February 2, 1797; Issue 7138.

Indeed, provision of a plentiful supply of memorial rings, coupled with the distribution of an appropriate number of suitable mourning accessories, was soon regarded by many as an essential and seemingly indispensable component of a ‘decent’ and respectably polite funeral. Harding, for example, has also noted the conspicuous “element of competitive consumption and display”, surrounding the burial rituals which flourished within the “urban milieu” of post-Reformation London, and the diverse ways in which contemporaries demonstrated an acute appreciation of the various “socially accepted forms of spending”, perceptively perceiving funerary display as a distinct indicator of wealth and status.¹⁸

Consequently, in observing the broad changes that took place as to how and why mourning rings were typically conferred, Oman has also suggested that these lavish and unrestrained displays, occurring particularly in the decades after the Restoration, “rapidly became a means of pegging a claim to gentility”.

What had once served as an intimate and personalised means of commemoration and affection, was subverted, to become, in Oman’s opinion, a mere “status symbol”, and a conspicuous opportunity for the relatives of the deceased to visibly and even ostentatiously proclaim their prosperity and social standing.

For the childless and widowed Samuel Pepys, who had emerged from relatively humble beginnings to prominent professional standing, the bestowal of a large number of mourning rings amongst the chosen members of his wide-ranging social circle was also a significant material marker and an evident proclamation of his own social distinction and status, both amongst his own associates and the wider world. Indicative, also, of a more socially mobile society, this lavish mourning performance was, perhaps, an indicator of Pepys’ social aspirations from beyond the grave, a judicious enterprise enacted to preserve his reputation and secure a respectable remembrance post-mortem.

Oman, has similarly questioned the real motivation which lay behind the distribution of a large number of mourning rings, presented to a dubiously wide circle of friends at the funeral of John Evelyn’s nineteen-year-old daughter, following her death from smallpox in 1685.¹⁹ At the funeral, which took place only two days after his daughter’s death, (and so must have occasioned the extremely swift procurement

¹⁸ Harding, V., ‘Choices and Changes: Death, Burial and the English Reformation’, in *The Archaeology of Reformation, 1480-1580*, ed. D. Gaimster and R. Gilchrist (Leeds: Maney, 2003), pp. 387, 390.

¹⁹ Oman, *British Rings*, pp. 72-3.

of a substantial number of suitably fashioned memorial rings), Evelyn – not without some degree of gratification – recorded the various noble personages who had deigned to attend the burial and the “decencies” fittingly occasioned by the event:

...my deare Daughter interr'd in the south east end of the Church at Deptford...There were divers noble persons who honor'd her Obsequies, and funeral, some in person, others in sending their Coaches, of which there were 6 or 7 of six horses viz. Countesse of Sunderland, Earle of Clarendon, Lord Godolphin Sir St. Fox; Sir William Godolphin, Viscount Falkland and [following the hearse of 6 horses] there were (besides other decencies) distributed among her friends about 60 rings: Thus lived, died, and was buried the joy of my life and ornament both of her sex and my poore family.²⁰

Whilst the grief caused by the death of his daughter was undoubtedly genuine, Evelyn's diary entry also suggests that the funeral proceedings were clearly seen as a reflection on him as well as a more obvious means of commemorating and fittingly observing the loss of his daughter. He obviously regarded it as a pleasing mark of respect towards both himself and his family that a number of noble attendees had appeared at the funeral; consequently, with his honour and reputation under such rarefied scrutiny, it is no wonder then that Evelyn was moved to ensure that a proper degree of funeral ceremony and ostentation was noticeably on display.

Thus, the giving of around sixty mourning rings was not just a reflection of the direct and personal ties of friendship and regard, solely limited to the friends of Evelyn's daughter, but, was, no doubt, also keenly employed as a shrewd means of impressing upon members of the attendant burial party, the social standing and consequence of Evelyn himself.

Likewise, when Elizabeth Freke's husband, Percy, died in 1706, and notwithstanding the fact that the marriage had been undeniably strained, she nevertheless set about organising – to her mind – a “gentlemans burial”, which was complemented by the various funerary trappings she obviously considered most appropriate in the continued maintenance and overt display of their gentility and pre-eminent social position within the wider community.²¹ The total financial outlay, “in the sickness, death, and buriall” of Percy Freke, came to well over one thousand pounds, an absolutely enormous sum, some of which was disbursed in the provision of mourning rings and jewellery, either given to various participants on the day of the funeral, or later provided for friends and relations in London.

²⁰ E. S. de Beer (ed.), *The Diary of John Evelyn, Vol. 4* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), p. 430.

²¹ R. A. Anselment (ed.), *The Remembrances of Elizabeth Freke, 1671-1714* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 86, 296-303.

Elizabeth spent over fifteen pounds alone, on “twenty gold rings”, which were distributed to the “bearers and ministers and gentry”; a further “fowre gold locketts and ten gould flowered rings”, costing over fourteen pounds in total, were also provided for her “sisters and friends in London”. The flowered pattern Freke chose for her husband’s mourning rings was obviously one that was also highly fashionable, reproduced in a number of variations, as illustrated in Chapter 3. **[FIG. 125]** Other mourning accessories which were handed out to the funeral attendees included scarves, hatbands, and gloves, costing well in excess of twenty-five pounds, altogether.²²

Oman has suggested that this lavish outlay and carefully considered public display surrounding the funeral actually had little to do with honouring and preserving the memory of Percy Freke; rather, his wife used it as a more indirect means of “establishing her own social standing”.²³ Certainly, it was not without some satisfaction that she remarked of the funeral: “...a vast appearance of company – gentry, tennants, and neighbours...I had all the gentry in the country of my neighbours with all my other neighbours and tenants, a vast appearance”.²⁴

In a similar fashion, when Mary Teagge, a widow from Middlesex, made her will in 1725, whilst bequeathing to her granddaughter her expensive diamond rings, as well as a mourning ring of one guinea to the wives of her executors, she also made provision that her death would be well marked within the local community, leaving the generous provision of mourning rings to be distributed amongst her tenants: “Unto each and every of my Tenants that shall be my Ten.ts at the time of my decease and to their wives the sume of Twenty shillings a peice to buy them Rings”.²⁵

Whilst Elizabeth Freke seems to have carefully considered which mourners in particular should receive individual gifts of mourning jewellery, for other funeral organisers the procurement of a sizeable batch of ready-to-wear mourning rings, probably acquired and engraved at relatively short notice, might also suffice. Such lavish distributions of numerous rings allowed for extensive allocations, and doubtless were often given away at some funerals without much thought or care as to the individual claims of the various recipients, or their relationship to the deceased.²⁶

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 296-99, 303.

²³ Oman, *British Rings*, p. 72.

²⁴ Anselment (ed.), *Elizabeth Freke*, p. 296.

²⁵ Middlesex, MS 9172/124/3; Will Number: 194.

²⁶ Oman, *British Rings*, p. 72.

Samuel Pepys, himself the donor of a large number of memorial rings distributed upon his death in 1703, was also a recurrent beneficiary of such tokens, even acquiring them, it seems, under sometimes rather fortuitous circumstances. In 1669, for example, recording an intended visit to an acquaintance, he was surprised instead, to find himself surrounded by the participants of burial party:

I come to Captain Cocke's, where the house full of company at the burial of James Temple, who, it seems, hath been dead these five days here I had a very good ring, which I did give my wife as soon as I come home.²⁷

The careless ease with which Pepys acquired this mourning ring rather confirms Oman's suggestion that by the second half of the seventeenth century mourning rings – for some sections of society at least – were increasingly less likely to be a “token of special friendship”, and rather more a “fee” which acquaintances and funeral attendees could expect to receive.²⁸ Similarly, when Pepys attended the funeral of Robert Blake in 1661, having received a funeral ticket, although he received the gratitude of a ring, he goes on to record that after the burial rather than going to church as would perhaps be expected of an invited mourner he instead returned home with three fellow friends who had also each received rings.²⁹ These customary distributions of memorial tokens to mourners are perhaps indicative of wider religious and societal changes taking place within early modern England, in which funeral and mourning customs marked a transition from the sacred to the secular and from public largesse to private personal remembrance.

The consideration and application of mourning jewellery as a visible and ostentatious indicator of wealth and social position only served to further fan the flames of popular enthusiasm; concurrently, there was also a growing tide of secularisation sweeping down over the English death ritual. Understandably, as the religious aspects of the English funeral increasingly began to “dwindle”, the secular and social aspects of the ritual swelled to fill this space, and began to assume a greater prominence and significance.³⁰

In a similar vein – though stressing that there was often, essentially, a good deal of continuity in the approach and performance of burial practices both before and

²⁷ H. B. Wheatley (ed.), *The Diary of Samuel Pepys* (London: George Bell, 1893).

²⁸ C. Oman, *Victoria and Albert Museum: Catalogue of Rings, 1930* (Ipswich: Anglia Publishing, 1993), p. 39.

²⁹ Wheatley (ed.), *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*.

³⁰ C. Gittings, *Death, Burial and the Individual in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 1984), p. 57.

after the Reformation – Harding has also noted that other customary elements of the early modern English death ritual, “expanded in importance to fill the ritual vacuum left by specific disappearances”. Perhaps the notable appearance of mourning jewellery in the wills of testators in the decades that followed the Reformation represents just one (material) element of an adaptable and prudently secular funerary and commemorative mourning practice, which was perceptibly expanded and embraced to fill this apparent ‘gap’ in the ceremony and collective social convention of the early modern English response to death.³¹

Privacy, Protocol, and Performance

Into the second half of the seventeenth century, as the rites and rituals surrounding death and mourning became ever more personalised and private, the means of remembering and commemorating the dead followed in similar fashion. Before the Reformation, it had been customary to include poor parishioners in the funeral procession, whilst the largesse of wakes and doles often promoted and encouraged the attendance of a large number of participants, who might typically be expected to pray for the soul of the deceased.

Funerals of the wealthy, however, increasingly became more private and restricted; for the most part, they were no longer the large communal or public parish affairs they might once have been in the previous century. Moreover, the appearance of the nocturnal burial in the seventeenth century, and a growing recourse to funeral tickets and invitations, was also a sign of a trend towards greater exclusivity, and a mark of the increasing desire, amongst the upper- and middling-ranks, to “regulate or discourage casual attendance” at their funerals.³² As Houlbrooke perceptively noted, as the period progressed, “new notions of respectability and decorum”, would, in the long term, dictate and determine how resources were expended in providing for the various aspects required of the funeral.³³

In 1674, for example, Richard Smyth recorded the death of Anne Badger, but noted: “my daughter Hacker (only of our family invited) had a ring at her burial”. Smyth also records that his daughter was again specifically favoured, receiving

³¹ Harding, ‘Choices and Changes’, p. 395.

³² Houlbrooke, R., ‘The Age of Decency: 1660-1760’, in *Death in England: An Illustrated History*, ed. P. C. Jupp and C. Gittings (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), pp. 191-2.

³³ Houlbrooke (ed.), *Death, Ritual and Bereavement*, p. 41.

another mourning ring in return for her attendance at the private funeral of Dionysia Jones in 1674: “my daughter Hacker and sister Edney had tickets and gold rings”.³⁴

Similarly, in April, 1661, Samuel Pepys noted that he had received: “a tickett to invite me to Captain Robert Blake’s buriall, for whose death I am very sorry”; attending the funeral with two acquaintances the following day, he recorded: “there had each of us a ring”.³⁵

In limiting the attendees of the funeral, executors and family of the deceased could also plan for and provide rings and other mourning gifts to a more limited and specially selected group of friends and family. Even as an especially prominent member of the parish of Earls Colne, for example, Ralph Josselin still requested, in his will of 1683, that he might be buried: “with as much privacy as may be”.³⁶

Indeed, Gittings’ contention that “older practices and attitudes were gradually being eroded” by funerary rituals that increasingly stressed the importance and primacy of the “immediate family, rather than the wider social group”, can find reflection in the specifications set out in the 1741 will of Essex draper, Thomas Heckford;³⁷ as well as bequeathing mourning to his wife and three appointed executors, he also particularly requested that he should be: “privately interred and that none but relations may be invited to my funeral and that supporters of my pall may be appointed out of them”.³⁸ Ben-Amos has also noted this growing trend for exclusivity at early modern funerals, which increasingly involved “kin and a select group of friends from among peers and social equals” rather than the crowds of social inferiors and poor members of the parish as had been formerly.³⁹

Indeed, by the mid-eighteenth century, it seems that receiving a ticket to the funeral may also have been understood to naturally imply the automatic provision of a mourning ring as well. For example, when Thomas Gray wrote to Horace Walpole in 1752, after receiving a letter enclosing the engraved illustration for his *Elegy Written in a Country Church Yard*, which depicted a village funeral scene, he recounted the

³⁴ Ellis, Henry (ed.), ‘The Obituary of Richard Smyth, Secondary of the Poultry Compter, London: Being a catalogue of all such persons as he knew in their life: extending from A.D. 1627 to A.D. 1674’, *Camden Society*, 44 (1859), pp. 103-4.

³⁵ Wheatley (ed.), *Diary of Samuel Pepys*.

³⁶ Earls Colne, ERO D/ACW20/79 D/ACR10/144: Ralph Josselin, 01.06.1683.

³⁷ Gittings, *Death, Burial and the Individual*, pp. 97-102, 120-1.

³⁸ Earls Colne, ERO D/ABR22/404-406: Thos Heckford of Braintree, 08.07.1741.

³⁹ I. K. Ben-Amos, *The Culture of Giving: Informal Support and Gift-Exchange in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 161.

mistake of his aunts, who upon catching a glimpse of the contents, had took it “to be a Burying-Ticket enclosed, & ask, whether any body has left me a Ring”.⁴⁰

It is also telling to read in a newspaper report from 1736, that when a coach “returning from a Funeral at Hammersmith” was stopped by a group footpads, all four of the occupants were each relieved of the mourning ring they had obviously just acquired earlier that day.⁴¹

The mourning accoutrements and material trappings of the lavish and well-provisioned funeral, increasingly operated not just as symbols of mourning and remembrance, but also as indicators of a family’s “wealth, taste, personal circumstances, and rank”.⁴² Indeed, as Houlbrooke perceptively observed, a family’s readiness to perform a funeral appropriate to the standing of the deceased, also effectively reinforced their own position within society.⁴³ Thus, a ‘decent’ funeral was increasingly exemplified by its liberal-handed largesse – fittingly ample hospitality and, progressively, the supply of a sufficient quantity of mourning rings, gloves, ribbon-knots, silk scarves and hatbands, to the principal mourners and other attendees; the material provisions of the funeral provided an appreciable and conspicuous shorthand for those who wished to adjudge the success and mien of a funeral.

As Harding has also equally noted, early modern “funerals were becoming a secular, social ritual of consumption” and, increasingly, there were “strong social pressures to spend appropriately”. The “elaboration of the funeral into a social event” - rather than a primarily religious ceremonial rite - during the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, meant that the various elements which made up the “funeral performance” were increasingly seen as “commodities with a price as well as a value”. Funeral goods and mourning mementoes were just one particular element of this ritual, influenced by a growing tide of commercialisation and the changing priorities of funeral consumption.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Thomas Gray, "Thomas Gray to Horace Walpole, 4th earl of Orford: Wednesday, 19 July 1752," In, *Electronic Enlightenment Correspondence*, edited by Robert McNamee et al. University of Oxford. < <http://dx.doi.org/10.13051/ee:doc/graythOU0010362b1c> >.

⁴¹ News, *Old Whig or The Consistent Protestant* (London, England), Thursday, November 25, 1736; Issue 90.

⁴² Houlbrooke, 'The Age of Decency', p. 90.

⁴³ Houlbrooke, R., "'Public" and "private" in the funerals of the later Stuart gentry: some Somerset examples', *Mortality*, Vol. 1, 2 (1996), p. 164.

⁴⁴ V. Harding, *The Dead and the Living in Paris and London, 1500-1670* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 208-33.

Indeed, by the early decades of the eighteenth century, the quantities of mourning tokens and some funerary gifts being given out, were reaching rather absurd proportions, with some members of the polite and gentle classes seemingly more interested in impressing each other, than in allegedly honouring the memory of the deceased.⁴⁵ A principal illustration of this development, can be seen in the lavish distributions which accompanied the funeral, in 1728, of Sir William Blackett III - a baronet and member of Parliament – in which over £1000 was spent in providing 157 rings, 238 scarves, and 1,886 pairs of gloves.⁴⁶

The fashionable practice of dispensing large numbers of funeral accessories and gifts, was, understandably, often an expensive business; at the funeral of Colonel Edward Phelips, mentioned in Chapter 4, the “cumulatively costly” provision of gifts – gloves, rings, and scarves – given to selected mourners, made up more than half the total expenditure at the funeral in 1680.⁴⁷ Indeed, in some cases, these abundant disbursements might even be the cause for discord and dispute, such as the case which came to court in 1718, when Dame Anne More brought an indictment against the executrix of her father’s will, alleging that the payment, charge and expenses, which accompanied the funeral, were not in accordance with the directions which she had given for the disposal of 100 gold rings, costing 100 l. 7s. 6d.⁴⁸

When Hannah Bennett made her will in 1730, bequeathing “good Gold Rings” of twenty shillings apiece to the twenty-three individuals she had specified, the £24 3s expended on the rings, was recorded in the attached probate account as having cost more than the total amount of £19 4s paid to the undertaker for his bill covering the rest of the funeral.⁴⁹

With the potential for such extravagant and lucrative commissions, it is no wonder that jewellery-sellers and goldsmiths were increasingly seeking to advertise their services. In 1749, for example, Chesson, a London-based jeweller and goldsmith, was offering for sale: “Motto Rings, and other Funeral Rings made at the most reasonable Rates”.⁵⁰ Similarly, Ralph Ayscough, a specialised “Ring-maker and

⁴⁵ D. Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 450.

⁴⁶ Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family*, p. 283.

⁴⁷ Houlbrooke, “Public” and “private”, pp. 171-2.

⁴⁸ National Archives, [Sir Cleave More, Bart., and his wife Dame Anne v. Elizth Greenhill, spinster executrix...] E 134/4Geo1/Hil8, 1718.

⁴⁹ Surrey, DW/PA/5/1731; Will Number: 10.

⁵⁰ Classified ads, *General Advertiser (1744)*, (London, England), Thursday, January 26, 1749; Issue 4442.

Goldsmith”, advertised in 1753, that he could make: “all sorts of Funeral Rings in the neatest Manner, at the lowest Prices, and with the greatest Expedition; plain Rings...Motto Rings, Deaths, Flowers, &c. Graved and Enamelled as usual”.⁵¹

Indeed, the required demand in some quarters for large quantities of mourning rings, supplied at relatively short notice, was a demand that some unscrupulous goldsmiths were apparently willing to exploit, seeking to defraud the customer for significant financial gain. Accordingly, suspicions surrounding the adulteration in the standard of gold for sale, and concerns that consumers were liable to be cheated, saw the publication of a treatise, written in 1678, warning that:

There hath been, and is, a Great Abuse to the People of this Kingdom in the Gold and Silver that is wrought in to the several sorts of Wares in use amongst us...if there were inspection made into the...Gold that is wrought into Rings of all sorts...a great part thereof would be found to want very much of the value it ought to be of, in respect both of the Standard, and the Price it was sold at, whereby the wearing buyer is abused and defrauded, and the Laws infringed for the private benefit of deceitful and ill-minded men.⁵²

Another treatise, published in the same year, effectively illustrated the potential extent to which a buyer of a large number of mourning rings might be defrauded:

The Adulterating of Gold and Silver, brings in so great Gain to the Practicers of that Deceit...Now the greatness of which Adulterating Cheat, I shall shew you in one Example of a Ring, about the usual or most common coursness: I find a Burial Ring by the Assay worse than Standard two Carracts, one Grain and three Quarters, which is in one Ounce 8 s. 11 d. 1 q. and it may be two-hundred of these Rings have been bought (or may hereafter be) by one party; which two hundred Rings may weigh twenty five Ounces, and the Buyer payeth 4 l. an Ounce (besides the making or fashion) which is the price of Standard: now reckon for the 25 Ounces (which is the supposed weight of the two hundred Rings) so many times 8.s. 11d. 1q. which the one Ring is worse than Standard; and it amounteth to 11 l. 3 s. 5.d. 1 q. so that if one party in one parcel of Burial Rings, be cheated so great a sum; what is the whole Nation cheated in Adulterated Wares?⁵³

It is revealing that the author – who identified himself as a goldsmith – should have chosen the mourning ring, in particular, as the item with which to illustrate the potential for such frauds. Though the purchase of two hundred mourning rings may seem a number exaggerated purely for the purposes of illustration, as the substantial distributions which accompanied the funerals of men such as Blackett and Pepys have shown, though fairly exceptional it was certainly not implausible for such a number of rings to be required. Certainly, in the decades following the Restoration, there was an increasingly “high social value” placed on securing an appropriate level of funeral ostentation and display. A family’s “dignity, honour, and reputation” were potentially

⁵¹ Classified ads, *Public Advertiser*, (London, England), Saturday, November 3, 1753; Issue 5934.

⁵² W. B., *A Touch-Stone for Gold and Silver Wares...*(London, 2nd ed., 1678), pp. 1-2.

⁵³ W. Tovey, *News from the Goldsmiths or a Tryal of Gold and Silver...*(London, 1678), pp. 3, 7.

on the line, likely under close scrutiny from “experienced funeral-goers who expected ritual provision appropriate to the deceased’s social position”.⁵⁴

In 1674, for example, Dame Hester Honywood, of Earls Colne, had stipulated that the charges of her funeral were not to exceed £200; she had also bequeathed various items of jewellery, and over £140 in mourning, to several members of her nuclear and extended kin.⁵⁵ In his diary entry, which recorded her funeral in 1681, however, Ralph Josselin rather curtly observed:

The good old Lady Honywood buried. not a glove, ribband, scutcheon, wine, beer, biscuit given at her burial but a little mourning to servants...six persons with scarves and gloves bear up the pall.⁵⁶

Clearly, Josselin obviously felt that the extent and scope of the funerary provision was far too meagre, and that it did not sufficiently accord with the wealth and standing of the deceased. Similarly, there was, perhaps, also a disapproving tone to the entry in which Richard Smyth recorded the death of the bookseller, Cornelius Bee, in 1672: “buried Jan. 4 at Great St. Bartholomew’s, without a sermon, without wine or wafers, only gloves and rosemary”.⁵⁷

Probate Accounts and Funeral Disbursements

Of course, it is still worth remembering that, for the majority of testators and their surviving heirs, particularly those “without pretensions towards gentility”, mourning jewellery - even into the later eighteenth century - habitually played little or no part in their remembrance strategies or customary funeral rituals.⁵⁸ For example, Houlbrooke’s sampling of surviving London and suburban probate accounts exhibited between the 1660s and 1740s, suggested that for the lower fringes of the middling sorts, “rings and scarves were provided only at the more expensive funerals”.⁵⁹

Comparably, Ian Mortimer has also noted in his study of Berkshire probate accounts, 1583-1712, that those accounts which did provide an itemised breakdown of funeral costs afforded “relatively few instances where specific reference was made to

⁵⁴ Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death*, pp. 447-51.

⁵⁵ Earls Colne, PROB11/368: Dame Hester Honywood of Markshall, 05.05.1674.

⁵⁶ Personal Records: Diary of Ralph Josselin, 26.10.1681.

⁵⁷ Ellis, ‘The Obituary of Richard Smyth’, p. 93.

⁵⁸ Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family*, p. 274.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 285-6.

the purchase of mourning clothes, [or, indeed, to memorial rings or other lavish mourning accessories, with]...the cost beyond the means of most individuals”.⁶⁰

The mix of testators leaving rings (any kind) in the Earls Colne sample was fairly traditional, dominated by widows (24%) whilst the gentry and affluent members of the parish made up the vast majority of the proportion of other testators leaving rings, with gentlemen (16%) and Esquires (11%). For the testators of Middlesex and Surrey, there was actually a fairly wide spread in the types of middling-sort testators who were able to bequeath a ring, even if it was just one personally-owned ring to a favoured legatee. For the Middlesex sample, whilst widows were by far the largest category of donors (39%), followed by spinsters, the largest occupational group for men, was made up of victuallers and innholders (6%), followed by gentlemen, and yeomen. The smaller Surrey sample produced less of a mix of occupational types, although widows were again the largest category of donors of rings (47.2%), this was followed by yeomen and, again, victuallers as the most common professions amongst male testators leaving rings.

It is also important to stress that personal preferences, wealth, social position, and locale, understandably, also exerted a relatively strong influence upon the extent of the changes taking place, affecting both the approach to and view of the ‘appropriate’ level of outlay on an individual funeral and the resultant nature and makeup of the obligatory elements deemed most necessary.⁶¹

Furthermore, the various components which made up the funeral are, inevitably, more easily recoverable for those funerals of the prosperous and well-to-do; the most comprehensive probate accounts – which provide specified enumeration of the various funeral costs - tend to belong to the most affluent individuals, where expensive jewellery and mourning accessories naturally featured more heavily.

However, “the correlation between wealth and funeral expenses is by no means always direct”; arrangements were governed not only by established custom and tradition, but, of course, also by “social position and one’s ability to pay”.⁶²

Yet, as Houlbrooke has noted, the “scale and speed” of these changes concerning the various fundamentals which made up the early modern English funeral, “must not be exaggerated”; what was fashionable amongst genteel sorts in the

⁶⁰ Mortimer, I. (ed.), *Berkshire Probate Accounts, 1583-1712* (Reading: Berkshire Record Society, 1999), pp. xvi-xx.

⁶¹ Gittings, *Death, Burial and the Individual*, p. 15.

⁶² Mortimer, (ed.), *Berkshire Probate Accounts*, pp. xvi-xvii.

metropolis only gradually percolated socially downwards and geographically outwards, to have a growing influence elsewhere.⁶³ Certainly, where London led, others tended to follow, but “only gradually did London funeral fashions spread to the provinces” and eventually to remoter countryside towns and villages. Illustrative of this, Houlbrooke’s overview of the more informative executors’ and administrators’ accounts from later-Stuart Berkshire, led him to conclude that not only was far less spent on funerals than was the case in London, but that payments for hatbands, scarves, rings, and mourning, “seem seldom to have been mentioned in accounts relating to the funerals of members of *rural* society below the level of the gentry”.⁶⁴

Mortimer’s comparable conclusions also maintained that in Berkshire, at least, adequate hospitality and refreshment, as part of the typical funerary provision and disbursement, remained a central feature of nearly all the funerals he looked at, with “drinking mentioned in nearly every document”, and in many accounts “was the largest single expense incurred”. The persistent and fundamental importance of food and drink as part of the wider funeral festivities is illustrated, according to Mortimer, by the very fact that “food or drink was offered at even the funerals of plague victims and the poorest individuals”.⁶⁵

Similarly, Paul Fritz’s study of the early development of the undertaking trade in England also maintained that particularly in “smaller towns, villages, and rural areas”, where “control of funerals was still largely a family affair”, the “older, more traditional ways for the disposal of the dead remained in use”; this broadly meant a “minimal use of mourning dress”, and a ritual performance in which a large proportion of funerary spending continued to be focussed on the feast.⁶⁶

Changes, however, in the function and performance of traditional funerary and mourning customs did not occur overnight, and what was considered important to people or deemed socially necessary, in terms of the material, charitable, and hospitable elements of the funeral, only gradually expanded and evolved over time.

Nonetheless, Gittings, in particular, has suggested that from the later seventeenth century onwards, members of the middling sorts increasingly diverted their resources away from the convivial and sociable aspects of the funeral, namely

⁶³ Houlbrooke (ed.), *Death, Ritual and Bereavement*, pp. 35-6.

⁶⁴ Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family*, p. 287.

⁶⁵ Mortimer, (ed.), *Berkshire Probate Accounts*, p. xx.

⁶⁶ Fritz, P. S., ‘The Undertaking Trade in England: Its Origins and Early Development, 1660-1830’, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (Winter, 1994-5), p. 249.

eating and drinking, channelling them, instead, towards the procurement of funeral accoutrements and mourning accessories. In the longer term, spending was drained away from charitable doles, food, and drink, with a greater emphasis progressively focussed upon the material qualities and trimmings of the funeral and burial rite.⁶⁷

As Cressy has similarly noted, as the seventeenth century drew to a close, testators were much “more inclined to provide their kin with gloves and rings, than to throw a party”; the growing importance and popularity of mourning jewellery and other material funerary paraphernalia - in opposition to feasting and entertainment - ultimately meant that there was a “turning away from festival”, as money and resources were diverted elsewhere.⁶⁸

Making his will in 1748, for example, James Dendy, a Surrey yeoman, left detailed bequests for the distribution of various mourning accoutrements amongst the friends and family who would attend his funeral. He listed seven women who would receive “a sasnet hood, and A Gould Ring and Gloves”, and another seven men who were to have “A Gould Ring and Gloves and A faver”; all his brothers and sisters as well as their children were each to have “A Gold Ring and Glovse” and finally, all his “furst and second Cousens that Coms to my Buring Gloves”.⁶⁹

Mourning jewellery, however, remained a somewhat luxurious funerary expenditure, and the ability to distribute numerous gifts of rings and costly memorial favours to mourners at the funeral, lay well beyond the means of many individuals. For example, in studying the practice of glove-giving at funerals in eighteenth-century New England, Bullock and McIntyre concluded that whereas gloves were “widely available and relatively inexpensive”, other funeral gifts were much less affordable. They note, for example, that when Samuel Sewall, of Massachusetts supervised the funeral of a relative in 1723, “each ring cost as much as four pairs of gloves”.⁷⁰ The situation in England was comparable, whereas gloves could be obtained locally, executors and relatives of the deceased usually had to apply directly to goldsmiths (often in London), where there were greater costs attached for the making and engraving of rings.

⁶⁷ Houlbrooke (ed.), *Death, Ritual and Bereavement*, pp. 12, 35.

⁶⁸ Cressy, D., ‘Kinship and Kin Interaction in Early Modern England’, in *Past & Present*, No. 113 (Nov., 1986), p. 62.

⁶⁹ Surrey, DW/PA/5/1748; Will Number: 26.

⁷⁰ Bullock, S. C. and McIntyre, S., ‘The Handsome Tokens of a Funeral: Glove-Giving and the Large Funeral in Eighteenth-Century New England’, *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 69, No. 2 (April, 2012), p. 319.

In looking at the bequests of the testators from Middlesex and Surrey, gloves which could range in price, though often given at around 2s6d were a fraction of the price of the standard mourning ring. Indeed, when William Wrinch, a yeoman from Surrey, made his will in 1644, he was able to leave a very affordable mark of thanks and remembrance to the two men he appointed as his overseers, granting: “twelve pence a peece each of them for gloves”.⁷¹

Consequently, provincial English testators, and those of more modest means, might aspire to leave a monetary bequest allowing for the purchase of a smaller, more affordable personal token of remembrance and affection, such as a knot of ribbon or a pair of gloves, to be given to a, typically, more limited circle of acquaintance. Houlbrooke, for example, could conclude from his review of probate accounts that “gloves were very often given, especially to bearers and relatives, even at quite cheap London funerals”.⁷²

In 1677, for example, Robert Potter, an Essex “yeoman”, left a bequest of half a crown apiece to each of his children and their respective spouses, with which to buy them gloves to wear in remembrance, and as a material gesture of familial affection and continued regard:

I do give an bequeath to each and ever of my own sons and their several wives to each and every of my sons in law and to my daughters their wives to each and every of them half a crown to buy every of them a pair of gloves to wear and keep in remembrance of their father and although it be but a small token yet I am moved to give it them as a testimony of my love to them and as a testimony I leave of their great kindness and love to me while I was living and I desire them to accept it accordingly earnestly entreating them all to live together as brethren and sisters in all mutual love and kindness assisting one another with their mutual counsels and best advice.⁷³

Similarly, in 1705, John Maxton, a Surrey yeoman, though not leaving rings, made sure that he likewise bequeathed the same sum of 2s6d., to both of his overseers, so that they might each buy themselves gloves.⁷⁴

Samuell Prince, a Middlesex carpenter, in making his will in 1748, inserted a bequest into his will to ensure that his children by his first wife would each receive a suitable token of remembrance:

As for all my children by Frances Prince deceased my first wife, as I have settled them in the World according to my ability, and as I cannot afford them any shares of my temporal Estate, I desire...my wife to give them at my Decease to Every one of them...a Pair of black Gloves, and Crapes for Mourning.⁷⁵

⁷¹ Surrey, DW/PA/5/1645; Will Number: 61.

⁷² Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family*, p. 285.

⁷³ Earls Colne, ERO D/ACW20/116: Robt Potter sen of Colne Engaine, 17.03.1677.

⁷⁴ Surrey, DW/PA/5/1705; Will Number: 58.

⁷⁵ Middlesex, MS 9172/166; Will Number: 12.

Patently, there was an ever-greater “emphasis on material goods” over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, particularly as the undertaking trade steadily began to “dictate the form of the ritual”. Money was progressively redirected, spent instead on mourning and funeral paraphernalia, rather than on convivial communal feasting, as ideas of decorum, privacy, and notions regarding the determinants of a ‘respectable’ funeral gradually evolved and took hold.⁷⁶

Decline of the Heraldic Funeral and the Emergence of the Undertaking Trade

Moreover, the steady decline of the heraldic funeral, over the course of the seventeenth century – in which officers of the College of Arms had precisely dictated the form and management of the funeral ceremonial for England’s elite – meant that families of the nobility and gentry were no longer so “constrained by heraldic rules and precedents, particularly with regard to mourning”. Houlbrooke has suggested that with the waning of heraldic ceremony, the nature of funeral expenditure for the upper-classes was no longer so narrowly ordained according to some set degree appropriate to one’s rank and social position, but was, instead, “determined above all by individual and family preferences, circumstances, and spending power”.⁷⁷

Accordingly, gifts handed out to mourners “grew more varied and numerous”, as expensive ‘blacks’ and cloth for mourning garb - which had previously formed such an “essential element of the heraldic funeral” - were surpassed by tokens of mourning and personal remembrance, such as gloves and rings. The gift of these small tokens of mourning and commemoration performed a similar function to the provision of funeral-wear, in that they helped to acknowledge the ties of obligation and regard, marking out mourners for particular notice, but in a more “flexible”, personal, nuanced, and “economic” fashion than expensive ‘blacks’ had ever provided.⁷⁸

These developments occurred in conjunction with the swift rise of the (at first, metropolitan) professional ‘undertaker’, during the last quarter of the seventeenth century. As Earle noted, “funerals were just another institution which illustrated the

⁷⁶ Gittings, *Death, Burial and the Individual*, p. 97.

⁷⁷ Fritz, ‘The Undertaking Trade’, pp. 241-5; Houlbrooke, “Public” and “private”, p. 174.

⁷⁸ Houlbrooke, “Public” and “private”, p. 174.

increasing penetration of the profit motive into the fabric of society”.⁷⁹ In this social and economic environment, London’s expanding middling-sorts – characterised by their “new affluence, consumer-oriented mentality, and drive to imitate elite society” – fuelled a demand for the services of the undertaker, who was conveniently able to supply the necessary paraphernalia and manage the essential form of the funeral from beginning to end.⁸⁰ Indeed, Houlbrooke has suggested that his sampled London probate accounts would indicate that even as early as the 1730s, “most funerals were wholly or partially entrusted to them”.⁸¹

Distinctions of rank, as expressed through the visual display and material accoutrements of the funeral, were thus “steadily eroded”, and became ever more confused and socially ambiguous. Certainly by the eighteenth century, money, rather than the deceased’s perceived position within the social hierarchy of early modern English society might equally determine exactly what kind of a funeral might be effectively realised and performed.

As Fritz shrewdly observed, “burial had become a viable commodity”, and by the eighteenth century, funerals were increasingly “an indicator not of rank but of wealth”.⁸² Furthermore, the very fact that the undertaker and funeral furnisher was able to offer a number of necessary articles (such as the pall, cloaks, mourning drapery, even hatbands and scarves) for hire, rather than outright purchase, perhaps also allowed, or encouraged at least, mourners to divert funds towards the procurement of a more permanent token of mourning and remembrance, such as a memorial ring or other personalised item of commemorative jewellery.⁸³

Peter Earle, for example, noted the 1731 funeral of a Westminster tobacconist, which came to a total cost of £47, “about average for the poorer members of the middle station”; nevertheless the funeral still included the provision of appropriate mourning accoutrements, with £16 spent on gloves, cloaks, hatbands and rings for the mourners.⁸⁴

⁷⁹ P. Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class: Business, Society, and Family Life in London, 1660-1730* (London: Methuen, 1989), p. 79.

⁸⁰ Fritz, ‘The Undertaking Trade’, pp. 246-8.

⁸¹ Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family*, p. 286.

⁸² Fritz, ‘The Undertaking Trade’, pp. 246-7.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 243, 246-8; Litten, J., ‘The Funeral Trade in Hanoverian England, 1714-1760’, in *The Changing Face of Death: Historical Accounts of Death and Disposal*, ed. P. C. Jupp and G. Howarth (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), p. 55; Litten, J., ‘The English Funeral, 1700-1850’, in *Grave Concerns: Death and Burial in England, 1700-1850*, ed. M. Cox (York: Council for British Archaeology, 1998), pp. 4, 8.

⁸⁴ Earle, *Making of the English Middle Class*, p. 313.

Though it was more usually executors and family members who tended to commission and procure rings for mourning purposes, it would appear that London undertakers could even supply this particular element of the funeral by the mid-eighteenth century (by which time the undertaking trade was firmly established). In 1767, for example, John Townshead, a London goldsmith and jeweller, was offering: “mourning rings made in the genteelest taste, at the shortest notice, with proper allowance to undertakers”.⁸⁵

Disapproval and Censure: The Reception of Mourning Jewellery

These developments in the management and organisation of the funeral meant that there was - certainly by the early eighteenth century - “a greater continuum between the funerals of the aristocracy, the gentry, and the middling ranks of society”.⁸⁶

Tellingly, by the mid-1750s, one disgruntled commentator could lamentingly bewail the disconcerting pretensions and indecorous affectations inherent in the lavish funeral displays associated with some members of the middling sorts:

I was stopped by a grand procession of a hearse and three mourning-coaches drawn by six horses, accompanied with a great number of flambeaus and attendants in black. I naturally concluded, that all this parade was employed to pay the last honours to some eminent person, whose consequence in life required that his ashes should receive all the respect which his friends and relations could pay to them: but I could not help smiling, when upon enquiry I was told, that the corpse (on whom all this expence had been lavished) was no other than the cheesemonger...This illustrious personage was, I believe, the first of his family, that ever thought of riding in a coach, living or dead...his widow however, for the honour of *her* family, was resolved at all events to *bury him handsomely*.

...that ridiculous affectation among the middling sort of people, which induces them to make a great figure beyond their circumstances...I have frequently known a greater sum expended at the funereal of a tradesman, than would have kept his whole family for a twelvemonth;

This absurd notion of being handsomely buried...As funerals are at present conducted, all distinction is lost among us: and there is no more difference between the duke and the dancing-master in the manner of their burial, than is to be found between their dust in the grave...

The spirit of affecting the manners of the great has from hence made others vie (as far as they can) with people of quality in the pomp of their burials...⁸⁷

Of course, accusations of vain excess, or a Puritan-tinged disapproval of ‘pomp’, were certainly not confined solely to the funerals of the eighteenth century, despite the seeming pre-eminence of the material accoutrements and trimmings in

⁸⁵ Classified ads, *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, (London, England), Tuesday, December 15, 1767; Issue 12 100.

⁸⁶ Houlbrooke, “Public” and “private”, p. 174.

⁸⁷ ‘To Mr. TOWN’, *The Connoisseur*, Number 39, 24 October, 1754; *British Periodicals*, pp. 229-231.

furnishing the standard early modern funeral.⁸⁸ Whilst apparent parsimony could clearly provoke censure and comment – as was seen in the disapproving observations made by Ralph Josselin in response to the seemingly paltry provisions of Dame Honywood’s funeral – the increasingly elaborate or ostensibly excessive displays associated with some funerals also attracted criticism.

Indeed, even before the Reformation, Sir Thomas More, candidly decried what he saw as the “superfluouse charge vsed for boste and ostetacyon”, vividly envisaging souls trapped in Purgatory and mourning their “gay & goodly funerallys”, which had bestowed very little in the way of spiritual benefit.⁸⁹

Mych haue many of vs bestowyd vppo ryng me[n] in **gold ryngs** and blak gownys: mych in many tapers & torchys: mych in worldly pomp and hygh solempne ceremonyes about our funerallys, wherof the brotle glory standeth vs here god wot in very litle stede, but hath on the tother syde done vs great dyspleasure.⁹⁰

It seems to have been the excessive expense associated with the provision of memorial rings and other mourning jewellery, however, which largely provoked any form of criticism. Whilst, for the most part, the mourning ring, as a dedicatory token of remembrance and commemoration, seems to have been enthusiastically embraced and straightforwardly incorporated into the fluctuating religious landscape of Protestant England, there were, nevertheless, some voices of dissent.

Indeed, it is rather surprising that in a period which witnessed the outbreak of periodic bouts of iconoclastic fervour, that jewellery which quite reasonably might have been thought to encourage prayers for the dead, and which often also incorporated hair into its designs (rather in the manner of a quasi-Catholic reliquary), that there should not have been *more* forthright disapproval.

Puritan condemnation of the mourning ring, did, however, emanate from some of the more severely conservative quarters, particularly as the custom grew in prevalence and popularity during the seventeenth century.

Nehemiah Wallington, for example, who, in 1621 had initially so enthusiastically embraced the fashion for *memento mori*, buying himself “pickters of

⁸⁸ Harding, *Dead and the Living in Paris and London*, pp. 219-233.

⁸⁹ See, Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family*, p. 264, for further comment on More’s text.

⁹⁰ T. More, *The Supplycation of Soulyes...* (London, 1529), p. xli.

Death...and a little black coffin”, was soon castigating himself for engaging in such superstitious and delusory practices:⁹¹

After this an honest man knowing of it did tell me it was superstition, shewing me it was a sine. And then I was not in quiet till I had made it away. Thus I could doe nothing but sine, sine in whatever I did and yet had not that understanding to looke unto Jesus Christ from whence all helpe commeth.⁹²

John Donne was more pragmatic in his approach to the whole concept of *memento mori* imagery, which was pervasive across much of the mourning jewellery of the period, even into the eighteenth century. Though he acknowledged that whilst others might question the need for such aids to pious contemplation, he also meditated upon the utility of such visual prompts as an aid to self-examination and religious reflection:

But, O my God, my God, doe I, that haue this feauer, need other remembrances of my Mortalitie? Need I looke vpon a Deaths-head in a Ring, that haue one in my face? Or goe for death to my Neighbours house, that haue him in my bosome? We cannot, wee cannot, O my God, take in too many helps for religious duties; I know I cannot haue any better Image of thee, than thy Sonne, nor any better Image of him, than his Gospell: yet must not I, with thanks confesse to thee, that some...pictures...haue sometimes put mee vpon better Meditatuons than otherwise I should haue fallen vpon?⁹³

The material trappings of the funeral and, specifically, the offering of mourning rings, certainly attracted the outright disapproval of some non-conformists, who saw in such practices nothing but hollow excess and vanity, which conferred no spiritual benefit upon the individuals who resorted to such rituals. It was pious simplicity and an adherence to the word of God which the Quaker, George Fox (1624-91) advocated, castigating those who found fault in the simplicity and restraint of Quaker burial practices:

...our Lord and Saviour the Son of God, the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, who hath all Power in Heaven and Earth given unto him, he was not carried to his Sepulchre with a Gilded coffin, with a great white and black cloth over it, with Arms or Scutcheons upon it, and many Priests and People following in black cloths, and black scarfs on their hats, pretending mourning, **and have Golden Rings given to them**, and twigs of Rosemary in their hands, and ringing of Bells, which is more like going to a Wedding than to a Burying, in the Pomp and Glory of the World...

And all you that say, that we bury like Dogs, because that we have not superfluous and needless things upon our Coffin, and a white and black Cloth with Scutcheons, and do not go in Black, and hang Scarfs upon our Hats, and white Scarfs over our Shoulders, and **give gold Rings**, and have sprigs of Rosemary in our hands, and Ring the Bells. How dare you say that we Bury our People like Dogs

⁹¹ See Chapter 2 for further discussion of Wallington’s attitude towards death, and the buying of various *memento mori*-related paraphernalia.

⁹² D. Booy (ed.), *The Notebooks of Nehemiah Wallington, 1618-1654: A Selection* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 271-2.

⁹³ J. Donne, *Devotions vpon Emergent Occasions, and seuerall steps in my Sickness...* (London, 1624), pp. 403-4.

because we cannot Bury them after the vain Pumps and Glory of the world? Whereas ye do not read that Christ the Prince of Life, our Lord and Saviour had any of these things, neither when he came into the world, nor when he went out of the world; and refused the Pomp and Glory of the world, when the Devil tempted him with it.⁹⁴

Certainly, the *wedding* ring *had* attracted Puritan hostility in England, with some reformers attacking the use of rings as part of the marriage service; indeed, extreme Puritan reformers, particularly during the Commonwealth, were in favour of its total abolition as part of the wedding ceremony.⁹⁵ For example, one seventeenth-century non-conformist minister was “moved to denounce the use of rings as “prettie juggling trash”, “a Popish and idolatrous practice”, which reduced the solemnity of marriage to a mere “maygaime” rather than a “holy institution of God”.⁹⁶

Surprisingly, however, mourning rings do not seem to have attracted any where near the same level of criticism from Puritan reformers, though this may have been due, in part, to the fact that their use was by no means as widespread as that of the wedding ring; additionally, criticism may also have been more muted due to the simple fact that memorial rings tended to be exchanged after burial had taken place, and thus were unlikely to impinge upon the religious rites of the funeral.

Non-conformist views on the conduct of burials certainly advocated sobriety and simplicity, and counselled against imitating the mourning habits prevalent in wider society. John Canne, for example, who had condemned the use of rings as part of the Church’s celebration of matrimony, similarly condemned the “superstitious abuses” associated with Anglican burial practice.⁹⁷

Similarly, Gwynne Stock’s study of Quaker funerary and burial procedures, also highlighted a prescription from 1717, which advised that: “no Friends imitate the World in any Distinction of Habit or otherwise, as Marks, or tokens of Mourning for the Dead”. Further advice followed in 1724, which also provided: “A Caution against imitating the vein Custom of wearing, or giving Mourning, & all extravagant Expenses, about the Interment of the Deceased”.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ G. Fox, *An Encouragement For All To Trust in the Lord...* (London, 1682), pp. 12-13.

⁹⁵ D. O’Hara, *Courtship and Constraint: Rethinking the Making of Marriage in Tudor England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 62; Oman, *British Rings*, p. 36; D. Scarisbrick, *Rings: Jewelry of Power, Love and Loyalty* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2007), p. 82; C. Phillips, *Jewelry: From Antiquity to the Present* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996), p. 101.

⁹⁶ J. Canne, *A Necessitie of Separation from the Church of England, proved by the Nonconformists Principles...* (Amsterdam, 1634), pp. 101-2.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 102-3.

⁹⁸ Stock, G., ‘Quaker Burial: Doctrine and Practice’, in, Cox (ed.), *Grave Concerns*, pp. 131-33.

Nevertheless, not all Quakers obviously adhered to such austere strictures; when the religious writer and Quaker activist, Mary Forster died in 1686, for example, she bequeathed posy rings (“with this Motto, *wee live to love forever*”) to both of her daughters, as well as a similar mourning ring of ten shillings to her Quaker kinswoman, Hester Fleetwood.⁹⁹ Moreover, the following chapter also considers how the daughter of non-conformist minister, William Jenkyn, had distributed mourning rings, effectively using them in order to specifically highlight and commemorate the sufferings of her father, who had died in 1685 during his imprisonment in Newgate gaol, following his refusal to sign the Oxford oath in support of the Anglican Church of England.¹⁰⁰

When Mary Whitley, a widow from Middlesex made her will in 1684, she made the generous bequest of fifty pounds “unto and among such nonconformist ministers or their widdowes”, as well as an additional fifty pounds to be distributed by the “Pastor and Elders” of the “Congregation of which I am a member”; despite Whitley’s seeming religious persuasions, this did not prevent her from also bequeathing an additional twenty shillings apiece to four individuals with which to buy them “a Ring to weare in Remebrance of me”.¹⁰¹ Similarly, when Elizabeth Beck made her will in 1704, as well as leaving money to the “Poor Quakers”, she specifically bequeathed two mourning rings of a guinea apiece, one of which went to her friend and sole executor, who was also identified as a Quaker.¹⁰²

Similarly, by the end of the period, mourning jewellery still evidently held an appeal for those mourners from denominations outside of the established Anglican Church. This engraved gold memorial pendant, for example, displays a ceramic cameo which depicts the founder of Methodism, John Wesley (1703-91); the dignified profile of Wesley rests atop the rather wistful motto: ‘HE RESTS FROM HIS LABOURS’, whilst the back is engraved with his name, age, and date of death.¹⁰³ **[FIG. 126]** Interestingly, this was unlikely to have been an item of memorial jewellery specially gifted to a mourner at Wesley’s own funeral, as he particularly

⁹⁹ L. Taylor, *Mourning Dress: A Costume and Social History* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1983), p. 96; C. Gill, ‘Forster, Mary (c.1619–1686)’, *ODNB*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008; For will see: The National Archives; Kew, England; *Prerogative Court of Canterbury and Related Probate Jurisdictions: Will Registers*; Class: *PROB 11*; Piece: 386.

¹⁰⁰ E. C. Vernon, ‘Jenkyn, William (bap. 1613, d. 1685)’, *ODNB*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008.

¹⁰¹ Middlesex, MS 9172/73; Will Number: 13.

¹⁰² Middlesex, MS 9052/34; Will Number: 7.

¹⁰³ V&A, Museum Number: M.126-1962.

requested by his will that at his burial: “there may be no hearse no Coach no Escutcheon no pomp except the tears of them that loved me and are following me to Abrahams bosom”.¹⁰⁴

Clearly, however, very many people, even those of strong Christian humility and belief or of a non-conformist faith (including ministers themselves) did not deem the mourning ring to be a superfluous funerary token, or even a mark of sinful excess.¹⁰⁵

Some individuals – particularly during the second half of the seventeenth century – might, however, in a move towards greater economy and restraint, specifically request the exclusion or limiting, of certain customary elements of the funeral, such as the provision of mourning rings. Harding, for example, noted the “deliberately low-key and inexpensive” night burial of Walter Smyth in 1676, who had purposefully desired a funeral, “without any sermon, wine, sweetmeats, gloves, rings, or any of the usual funeral gifts except ‘only a branch of rosemary’”.¹⁰⁶

Conversely, however, even those testators whose wills explicitly requested that they were to be decently buried “without pomp”, might still include bequests of jewellery to various friends and relatives in their wills; clearly, the use of such striking terminology did not necessarily preclude the gift of memorial rings and mourning jewellery. In 1671, for example, Thomas Bowes, whilst making detailed and generous bequests for the provision of mourning and memorial rings after his decease, also stipulated that he was to be buried: “decently without pomp or vanity by torchlight...the charge not exceeding 50li”.¹⁰⁷ When Margaret Goose, a widow from Middlesex made her will in 1678, although she bequeathed three mourning rings of twenty shillings apiece, she also expressly stated that “nothing be given att my funerall but Rosemary and thyme”.¹⁰⁸

The ostentation and extravagance of some of the grander funerals, which might be accompanied by lavish distributions of a large number of mourning rings and

¹⁰⁴ The Reverend John Wesley, 08.11.1791: The National Archives, Kew, England; *Prerogative Court of Canterbury and Related Probate Jurisdictions: Will Registers*; Class: *PROB 11*; Piece: *1203*; Henry D. Rack, ‘Wesley, John (1703–1791)’, *ODNB*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2012.

¹⁰⁵ Schen, for example, records several instances of mourning rings bequeathed to ministers and even decidedly Puritan preachers and lecturers; particularly in the sixteenth century, mourning jewellery seems to have been utilised and bequeathed by testators regardless of religious differences. Schen, *Charity and Lay Piety*, pp. 157-162.

¹⁰⁶ Harding, *Dead and the Living in Paris and London*, p. 228.

¹⁰⁷ Earls Colne, PROB11/366/85: Thos Bowes, 26.05.1671.

¹⁰⁸ Surrey, DW/PA/5/1685; Will Number: 53.

accoutrements, unsurprisingly attracted the censure and disapprobation of some late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century commentators, who saw in such spectacles only vain excess, and recognised that the distribution of such gifts was less about commemorating the bonds of affection and regard, and more about demonstrating prosperity and social standing.¹⁰⁹

In 1674, for example, a didactic treatise was published which not only advised people of the need to prepare for death and contemplate their own mortality, but it also reflected this growing unease which some observers evidently felt regarding the increasing recourse to mourning tokens and expensive funeral disbursements and displays during this period. The third edition, published in 1674, added an addendum to the front cover, noting that the work was: “recommended as proper for Funerals”. A further note to the reader, included as a prologue and which had not appeared in the earlier 1673 edition, actively recommended the work as a much more fitting and seemly present to attendees at a funeral, than the rings and superficial mourning tokens which had increasingly become the norm:

...some pious persons have thought fit (considering the suitableness of the subject) to bestow many of these at Buryals, instead of Rings, Gloves, Biskets, Wine, &c, (Reading and Meditation much more beautifying such Solemnities than eating and drinking, &c.) and have already found this way very much instrumental to make people serious on such Sad occasions:¹¹⁰

In fact, so popular was this work that it went through several editions, and was certainly even given out at funerals, with an example of the twentieth edition, published in 1699, containing a title page dedication to the seven-year-old daughter of a Mr Edward Leeds, of London. The address to the reader had also been slightly amended, and emphasised perhaps to an even greater degree, the seeming superficiality and futility of funeral accoutrements and festivities:

¹⁰⁹ Critics across the Atlantic shared similar concerns, particularly in Massachusetts, where a number of laws were passed to try and curb the expense and excess of funerary displays emerging in New England. An act was passed in 1721, which prohibited the giving of scarves at funerals, whilst further controls were imposed in 1742, forbidding the distribution of funeral scarves, rings, and large quantities of gloves.

These statutes were not just provoked by a Puritan distaste for funerary extravagance, but were also influenced by the particular economic and political conditions and tensions existent in the region; many felt that the burden of excessive funerary consumption proved a detriment to the growth and prosperity of the American colonies, and further encouraged a dependence on imported British goods. Bullock and McIntyre, ‘Handsome Tokens of a Funeral’, pp. 319, 334-5, 338-9.

¹¹⁰ E. Pearse, *The Great Concern, or a Serious Warning to a Timely and Thorough Preparation for Death with Helps and Directions in order thereunto...The Third Edition, recommended as proper for Funerals* (London, 1674).

And how Sad is it to behold the unsuitable carriage of the generality of Christians at Funerals!...A Proposition, &c. viz that Books of this nature may be given at Burials, instead of Rings, Gloves, Biskets, Wine, &c. Reading and Meditation would be much more decent at such sad Solemnities, than Eating and Drinking, and putting on of Ornaments. Books of this Subject would make People mind the present instance of Mortality...¹¹¹

This debate, concerning the most proper or appropriate offering to attendees at a typical funeral of the middling sorts, gained the greatest currency and import thanks to the work and publications of John Dunton and the associated periodical of the Athenian Society. In 1682, Dunton had published ‘The House of Weeping’, and following in a similar vein to writers such as Pearse, he considered the idea of a book or practical devotional text, as a much more beneficial and appropriate gift to be given out to mourners.¹¹² Indeed, the subject had even been irreverently discussed and endorsed in the pages of the *Athenian Mercury*, in 1691:

Quest. 1. I have heard that several good Men have order'd Books to be given away after their decease, – Query, Whether Books are not more proper to be given at Funerals, than Bisquits, Gloves, Rings, &c.

Ans. We vehemently suspect this Query is sent in by some Bookseller or other, who has either a great many Books fit for such a business, or is about to Print one that is design'd to that End. And the mischief is, we can't oblige the Bookseller, but we must at the same time draw upon us the Displeasure of the Confectioners, Glovers, and Goldsmiths, by intrenching on their Profits. –But to silence them, we assure 'em before-hand, the Project is ne'ere like to take, as long as Persons value their Hands and Palats, more than their Brains; which the generality of mankind are likely to do as long as Bisquits are eaten, or Rings are worn. –Now we have done with them, let's to the Bookseller; whose Question we Answer in the Affirmative.¹¹³

The rather deliberate tenor of the discussion (Dunton, of course, *was* a bookseller, and likely also acting as editor for this piece) was founded, no doubt, upon the knowledge of Dunton's impending publication the following year, of a book he had himself authored, entitled – rather meaningfully – ‘A Mourning Ring, In Memory of your Departed Friend’.¹¹⁴ This elaborate work – including a frontispiece with images depicting a tableau of scenes as the corpse progressed from the house to the place of burial – was “Recommended as proper to be given at Funerals”, and even

¹¹¹ E. Pearse, *The Great Concern, or a Serious Warning to a Timely and Thorough Preparation for Death with Helps and Directions in order thereunto...Recommended as proper to be given at Funerals, Twentieth Edition* (London, 1699).

¹¹² J. Dunton, *The House of Weeping, or, Mans last Progress to his Long Home: Fully Represented in several Funeral Discourses, With many Pertinent Ejaculations under each Head, to remind us of our Mortality and Fading State* (London, 1682).

¹¹³ *Athenian Mercury*, Vol. IV, No. XV, Tuesday, November 17, 1691, quoted in, Moore, C. A., ‘John Dunton: Pietist and Impostor’, *Studies in Philology*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (October, 1925), p. 484.

¹¹⁴ J. Dunton, *A Mourning-Ring, in Memory of your Departed Friend, ...the Second Edition, Recommended as proper to be given at Funerals* (London, 1692). Sections from his earlier 1682 work were also incorporated into this edition.

included a blank space to the left of the title page, so that people might insert the name of the deceased, place of burial, or include their own dedicatory verse.

In addressing the readers of his expansive treatise on death, mortality and the conduct of funerals, Dunton actually made explicit reference to the discussion which he himself had doubtless introduced to his fellow members of the Athenian Society, regarding the issue of whether a book was not a more appropriate gift to be given to mourners and funeral attendees:

I Remember a while ago, there was a Question proposed to the Athenian Society; Whether Books are not more proper to be given at Funerals, than Bisquets, Gloves, Rings, &c. The Answer they returned was: That undoubtedly a Book would be a far more convenient, more durable, and more valuable Present, than what are generally given, as much exceeding them, as the Soul does the Body; and besides, will much better, and more profitably preserve the Memory of a Deceased Friend; if good, teaching him how to follow him; if bad, to avoid his Example...and the Truths contained therein, we should think, would make a more lasting Impression, even than a Sermon it self, much more than a Dull Deaths=head; for having always before our Eyes, the Idea of those for whom 'twas given; they'll still (as it were) Preach from the Dead unto us.

Dunton was obviously trying to send out a clear message in the titling of this work; it was books such as these, which encouraged contemplation and examination, which were the most fitting gifts to be given out to mourners at a funeral. The gold and enamelled trinket of the ring was but a fleeting adornment, whereas Dunton's 'Mourning Ring' was of a much more practical and significant value; unlike the refreshments and mourning favours offered at the typical early modern funeral, this printed 'Mourning Ring' offered spiritual refreshment and moral succour, it was an embellishment which memorialised and honoured the memory of the deceased, and benefitted the recipient.

Nevertheless, in seeking to promote the efficacy and versatility of his work, Dunton also ingeniously suggested that this metaphorical 'Mourning Ring', or pertinent passages from it, might also be bound up with the real thing, to be given away at the funeral:

And certainly nothing can more conduce to our eternal Well-fare, and to put us in mind of Mortality, than Books of this kind; and to the end they may be more Profitable and Useful to Christians, it were to be wished that this Mourning=Ring, which is so Entitled, that it might be given at Funerals, instead of Gloves, Bisquets, Wine. And those that think it proper, may Print in a Sheet of Paper, the most Material Passages, in the Life of their Dead Friend, and bind it up with those Mourning-Rings, they give away at his Funeral; and for the more effectually perpetuating the Memory of the Party Deceased. There is room left in the Title of this Book, for inserting his Name and Place of Burial...and if Bound in Black, with a Cypher of Mortality, (as this Mourning=Ring, should be when given at Funerals) will be very decent and proper for such a Solemn Occasion...And doubtless, Reading and Meditations would be much more decent at such Solemnities, than Eating and Drinking, and putting on Gay Attire. Books of this Subject would make the People mind the present instance of Mortality, and affect them with devout Meditations thereon...it can be no small Advantage to have

always before us, this Mourning Ring,...and be still constantly putting us in Mind of our Departed Friend.¹¹⁵

Thus, this was a mourning ring in the truest sense, acting both as a *memento mori*, and as a personalised means by which to remember and commemorate the deceased.¹¹⁶

Conversely, there was a rather hypocritical contrast to the didactic advice offered by Dunton compared to the actual provisions he made in his will of 1711, in which he left exceptionally detailed instructions for the creation and distribution of a great number of variously inscribed mourning rings, the majority priced at ten shillings, to his wife, various friends, even his undertaker, and perhaps most ironically (considering his publications on the topic) one to his “Athenian Brother”.¹¹⁷

The Spreading Consumption of Mourning Jewellery

Individual preference conceivably exerted a greater influence upon the English death ritual than ever before, and, accordingly, the use of personalised memorial jewellery and the gift of other mourning accoutrements, “soon caught on in the ranks of society below the gentry”.¹¹⁸ As Houlbrooke has asserted in his evaluation of these developments, funerals were increasingly a reflection of “wealth and personal choice”, rather than an observable or direct indication of the deceased’s “precise position in the social hierarchy”.¹¹⁹

Gittings, particularly, has also stressed that these manifest “changes in the pattern of funeral expenditure”, particularly among the less wealthy, were undoubtedly influenced and promoted by the rise of the professional undertaker, who principally began to “dictate the form of the ritual”, particularly concerning the quantity of material trappings required. Gittings clearly sees in the encroachment of

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ Other works, published around the same time, obviously took a lead from the ideas suggested by writers such as Dunton and Pearse, including Richard Stafford’s treatise, published in 1700, which was also purposefully “Recommended as more proper and Beneficial to be given at Funerals than Gloves or Rings”.

R. Stafford, *The Great, Useful and Blessed Duty of a Contentment, Willingness and Desire to Die: Set forth upon true and assured Grounds, in several Discourses on these following Scriptures...* (London, 1700).

¹¹⁷ PRO PROB 11/657, p. 82.

For more information concerning the context and contents of Dunton’s will, see: Berry, H., ‘Crimes of Conscience: The Last Will and Testament of John Dunton’, in R. Myers, M. Harris and G. Mandelbrote (eds.) *Against the Law: Crime, Sharp Practice, and the Control of Print* (London: Oak Knoll Press, 2004).

¹¹⁸ Houlbrooke, ““Public” and “private””, p. 174.

¹¹⁹ Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family*, p. 293.

the undertaker into the rites of burial, a corresponding alteration in contemporary attitudes surrounding the crucial determinants of a ‘decent’ and ‘respectable’ funeral.¹²⁰

In a similar vein, Houlbrooke has further suggested that the rise of the undertaker actively encouraged and allowed the middling sorts to ape and emulate the funeral and mourning rituals of their social superiors. Consequently, “the pattern of the genteel funeral spread outwards from the greater towns and down the social scale”.¹²¹ As one prickly commentator was moved to remark in 1754: “Many a worthy tradesman of *plebeian* extraction has been made a gentleman after his decease by the courtesy of his undertaker”.¹²²

Evidence for this growing tide of commercialisation and the increasing focus on conspicuous consumption as a suitable determinant of a decent and fitting funeral, can also be seen in the activities of Thomas Turner, a shopkeeper based in the Sussex village of East Hoathly. The entries from his diary, illustrate how this mid-eighteenth-century mercer, had expanded his services to include the role of undertaker. Within his small community, he was routinely tasked with supplying and distributing various mourning gifts and favours, including gloves, hatbands, and ribbons, often on a fairly considerable scale.¹²³ In 1755, for example, he records that at the funeral of Mrs Piper, he “Distributed at the funeral and afterwards 20 pairs men’s and women’s 2d. shamy gloves, 3 pairs youth’s and maid’s and 8 hatbands”. Similarly, in an entry from 1757, Turner records that in serving the funeral of Mr John Cornwell, he “gave away...106 pairs of gloves and 8 hatbands”.¹²⁴

Acting as undertaker, Turner provides revealing information regarding the supplying and distribution of these funerary favours and tokens, though, interestingly, there actually seems to be, within the edited diary entries, very few direct references to the supply of mourning rings at all. Nevertheless, it would appear that by the mid-eighteenth century, London goldsmiths, in particular, were also actively seeking to accommodate and promote the supply of mourning rings and jewellery to mourners, executors, undertakers, and shopkeepers, who lived beyond the Capital.

¹²⁰ Gittings, *Death, Burial and the Individual*, pp. 96-7.

¹²¹ Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family*, p. 293.

¹²² ‘To Mr. TOWN’, *The Connoisseur*, Number 39, 24 October, 1754; *British Periodicals*, p. 230.

¹²³ D. Vaisey (ed.), *The Diary of Thomas Turner, 1754-1765* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 7, 95.

In 1758, for example, a Mr. Brooke of Fleet-Street was advertising: “Mourning Rings made, engraved and enamelled with the greatest Expedition”. He was obviously also seeking to attract custom and business from all over, not just from those who came to his shop directly: “Ladies and Gentlemen waited on, Letters answered and Country Orders punctually executed”.¹²⁵ Around a decade later, More, a “Working-Jeweller and Fancy Hair-worker”, based in London’s Covent Garden, as well as offering “Mourning Rings on the shortest notice”, was also advertising his stock and trade to provincial shopkeepers outside of London, who did not manufacture such specialised goods, yet were obviously seeking to accommodate the growing demand for such wares: “Town and country shopkeepers accommodated with gold, pearl, and hair cyphers, or any hair-work”.¹²⁶

Indeed, by the second half of the seventeenth century and on into the early eighteenth, it is possible to see in the occupations of some of the testators and the recipients of memorial rings that the custom of mourning jewellery had obviously extended well below the level of the gentry, professions, and affluent orders in Middlesex and Surrey, to include members not only of the yeomanry, but also to the lower fringes of the middling sorts, incorporating various tradesmen and individuals belonging to more intermediate occupational and social groups.¹²⁷ For example, amongst those individuals from Middlesex in 1705 who were bequeathing mourning rings, were professions as diverse as a victualler, baker, mason, coachman, waterman, gardener, and bodice-maker.

In thinking also about the various types of people who were wearing and utilising mourning jewellery, not just those testators who bequeathed it, the popularity of mourning jewellery amongst the middling sorts can also be vividly be seen in some of the employments listed in the newspaper advisements and criminal trial proceedings - dating from around the 1730s to the end of the period - concerning the individual owners of lost and stolen items of mourning jewellery. The varied range of

¹²⁵ Classified ads, *Public Advertiser*, (London, England), Saturday, February 4, 1758; Issue 7258.

¹²⁶ News, *Morning Herald* (London, England), Saturday, November 7, 1789; Issue 2824.

¹²⁷ In analysing the occupations and status in probate inventories, and the resultant relationships between social and consumer behaviour, Weatherill classed her sampled inventories as potentially falling into ten separate categories, ranging from gentry down to labourers. It is, of course, much more difficult to determine the precise social status of women and widows, who were, significantly, much more likely to leave a bequest of mourning rings or jewellery. L. Weatherill, *Consumer Behaviour and Material Culture in Britain, 1660-1760* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 208.

professions, included (to name a selection): a “Buckram Stiffner”,¹²⁸ “Leather-Breeches-Maker”,¹²⁹ “Grocer”,¹³⁰ “Gardener and Nursery-man”,¹³¹ “Sadler”,¹³² “Haberdasher”,¹³³ “Cellar-man”,¹³⁴ “Apothecary”,¹³⁵ proprietor of a “publick House”,¹³⁶ “Clerk”,¹³⁷ “waterman and lighterman”,¹³⁸ “vintner”,¹³⁹ “carpenter”,¹⁴⁰ “confectioner”,¹⁴¹ even a “Patient in St. George’s Hospital”.¹⁴²

The associated items of jewellery and plate that were sometimes either lost or stolen concurrently with the items of mourning jewellery would suggest that some of these individuals were actually relatively prosperous, but the range and diversity of occupations also seems to indicate that mourning rings, in particular, were owned and worn by a fairly comprehensive array of persons, which encompassed a relatively broad swathe of the social and occupational groups across eighteenth-century England.

The wide-ranging mix of occupations and the broad socio-economic spectrum presented by this sample, however, is just as apparent amongst those testators who also specifically left bequests of mourning rings in the sampled wills from around the same general time period. For example, of those testators who left mourning rings amongst the Middlesex sample of 1725, the occupations represented as well as incorporating several gentlemen and yeomen, also included victuallers, weavers, coachmen, a brewer, a butcher, a bricklayer, and a grocer to name but a selection. The Surrey sample for the same year also included a range of solidly middling sort testators who were clearly utilising mourning rings as part of their commemorative strategies and bequests, including a waterman, a leather-seller, and an apothecary.

¹²⁸ Classified ads, *Daily Post* (London, England), Tuesday, May 30, 1721; Issue 519.

¹²⁹ News, *Daily Courant* (London, England), Monday, January 4, 1731; Issue 9124.

¹³⁰ News, *British Journal or The Traveller* (London, England), Saturday, March 6, 1731; Issue 166.

¹³¹ News, *Daily Advertiser* (London, England), Thursday, September 2, 1731; Issue 182.

¹³² News, *Daily Advertiser* (London, England), Tuesday, October 26, 1731; Issue 228.

¹³³ News, *Daily Courant* (London, England), Monday, August 20, 1733; Issue 5419.

¹³⁴ Old Bailey Proceedings Online, September 1735, Trial of Eleanor Byrom, John Freeman (t17350911-6).

¹³⁵ Classified ads, *London Evening Post* (London, England), February 1, 1733 – February 3, 1733; Issue 808.

¹³⁶ Old Bailey Proceedings Online, December 1737, Trial of John otherwise Samuel Bugden (t17371207-3).

¹³⁷ Old Bailey Proceedings Online, January 1740, Trial of Thomas Motte, alias Moote (t17400116-12).

¹³⁸ Old Bailey Proceedings Online, February 1771, Trial of Isabella Lakin (t17710220-29).

¹³⁹ Old Bailey Proceedings Online, January 1782, Trial of Jane Moffatt (t17820109-14).

¹⁴⁰ Old Bailey Proceedings Online, February 1789, Trial of James Sutter, Elizabeth Williams, otherwise Cornwall (t17890225-38).

¹⁴¹ Old Bailey Proceedings Online, December 1794, Trial of James Barker (t17941208-41).

¹⁴² News, *Public Advertiser* (London, England), Monday, December 4, 1752; Issue 5647.

Utilising a range of sources reveals both the *recipients* and *consumers* – rather than just the testamentary *donors* of mourning jewellery – effectively presenting a more demonstrative and widely representative picture of how the custom essentially operated in practice during the course of the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The seemingly broad appeal, familiar popular usage,¹⁴³ and potentially extensive reach of mourning jewellery, indicates that it was no longer the prohibitive or extravagant preserve of a wealthy or professional elite. Indeed, Christiane Holm has similarly suggested, that whereas the mourning jewellery of the seventeenth century was predominantly created for an “exclusive, elite clientele” (although the testamentary evidence of the second half of the century would question the extent of this domination) into the following century, it became “widely popular”, and “more and more commercialized”. Holm asserts that this “new mourning jewel of sentimental culture” - which principally emerged during the last quarter of the eighteenth century - was “no longer defined by its economic but rather by its intimate and emotional value”.¹⁴⁴

In a similar vein, Scarisbrick and Henig have also observed that the jewellery of this period - typically characterised by miniature mourning compositions, or the inclusion of hair-work arrangements, enclosed in outsized marquise bezels, or featured in large mourning lockets, pendants, pins, and clasps - was now characteristically worn to “demonstrate sentiment rather than wealth”.¹⁴⁵

Indeed, with the changing styles, iconography, size, and composition of mourning jewellery into the later eighteenth century (as discussed in Chapter 3), pieces were not so obviously the formerly accepted and explicit indicators of wealth and social status – as utilised hitherto by individuals such as Pepys and Freke – but, instead, exhibited a greater degree of mourning sensibility and suggested owners

¹⁴³ Indeed, apparently so familiar and culturally pervasive was mourning jewellery, that it was even being referred to in a mid-eighteenth-century educational tract for children, as an illustrative example used to teach the rudiments of logic, grammar and ontology:

“Signs are *antecedent*, as the gathering of Clouds is of approaching Rain; or *concomitant*, as Shivering is of an Ague; or *consequent*, as a Funeral is of Death;... *memorial*, as a Funeral Ring is of a Friend deceased; and *commemorative*, as a Tomb is of a Person buried there”.

Anon., *Logic Made familiar and easy to Young Gentlemen and Ladies. To which is added, a Compendious System of Metaphysics, or Ontology. Being the Fifth Volume of the Circle of the Sciences, &c.* (London, 1748), p. 256.

¹⁴⁴ Holm, C., ‘Sentimental Cuts: Eighteenth-Century Mourning Jewelry with Hair’, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (Autumn, 2004), pp. 139.

¹⁴⁵ D. Scarisbrick and M. Henig (eds.), *Finger Rings* (Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 2003), p. 74.

presenting an air of solid respectability and decorum. As Arianne Fennetaux similarly suggested, the previous conventional role of mourning jewellery as a discriminating indicator of taste and social refinement, was no longer so strongly attached to mourning jewellery, “whose meanings and related practices became much more intimate and merged with those of sentiment”.¹⁴⁶ Whilst the objects themselves certainly attest to this interpretation, it should be noted, however, that the sampled testamentary data also shows that the testators of Middlesex and Surrey were, even before this time often inclined to be rather discerning and discriminating in their limited bequests of mourning rings.

As the eighteenth century progressed, mourning jewellery became a more attainable and seemingly desirable mourning accoutrement for the increasingly influential consumer of the middling sorts;¹⁴⁷ indeed, Sarah Nehama has even gone so far as to suggest that one of the reasons driving the move towards larger and more visible memorial accessories was partly down to the influence of this particular type of customer: keen to make a fashionable statement, exhibit their inherent social status, and clearly “make its financial wherewithal visible”.¹⁴⁸

This is not to say, of course, that members of the aristocracy, gentry, and wealthy urban elite stopped using mourning jewellery, and, indeed, there are inscribed examples – doubtless, bespoke commissions, usually distinguished by refined design and superior workmanship, the inclusion of rich enamel work, precious stones and lavish material components, elaborate hair-work compositions, and which have been engraved and personalised – which attest to its continued use amongst these groups.¹⁴⁹

However, the progressive erosion of the exclusive association between the giving of copious quantities of rings and the place of mourning jewellery within fashionable and genteel mourning practice, meant that the ability to bequeath, distribute, or acquire a piece of mourning jewellery was opening up to a wider range and number of peoples than had previously been the case. The middling sorts or,

¹⁴⁶ Fennetaux, ‘Fashioning Death/Gendering Sentiment’, p. 29.

¹⁴⁷ Remarkably, however, the percentage of testators in both Middlesex and Surrey leaving mourning rings actually decreased somewhat as the eighteenth century progressed; the smaller sample sizes may have influenced the data, but the increasing prominence of the mourner in driving the custom may also have influenced how the jewellery was consumed.

¹⁴⁸ S. Nehama, *In Death Lamented: The Tradition of Anglo-American Mourning Jewelry* (Massachusetts: Massachusetts Historical Society, 2012), p. 44.

¹⁴⁹ See, for example: V&A, Museum Number: 849-1888; M.7-1958; 929-1888; Ashmolean, Finger Ring Collection, Accession Number: LI1045.20; Museum of London, ID Number: NN6771; British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1471; National Trust Collections, National Trust Inventory Number: NT 1140662; NT 437314.

indeed, any individual with the financial means, could acquire what had once been a mark of some distinction; furthermore, the growing demand and market for these goods also heralded the creation of a number of standardised and relatively affordable versions being produced, in order to accommodate the demands of an increasingly expanding popular market.¹⁵⁰

Maxine Berg has particularly pointed to these new consumer practices and the growing consumption, into the eighteenth century, for these kinds of “semi-luxuries and ornamental goods” catering to and adopted with increasing enthusiasm by England’s expanding middle classes.¹⁵¹ Berg has also spoken about the way in which some of these commodities - such as mourning rings - used as markers of rites of passage, might be “transformed from the anonymity of the market place to signifiers of family and memory”, as well as the way in which the demand and acquisition of these goods was bound up with notions of “fashion, individuality and personal identity”.¹⁵²

In thinking about the context of later seventeenth and eighteenth-century consumerism and the changing priorities of funeral and mourning consumption, it is interesting to view mourning jewellery then as a consumer durable – albeit a rather particular one – seen in the context of the ‘consumer revolution’. In considering the function and place of mourning jewellery within wider social practice, Pointon has particularly drawn attention to the thorny issue of deciding exactly *who* may be regarded as the consumer? Was it the deceased who left instructions and provided funds for the creation of mourning jewellery? Was it the executors charged with ordering and paying for the pieces themselves? Or was it the mourners who would actually wear and use these items?¹⁵³

Some goldsmiths and jewellery-sellers adapting to demand, were obviously offering mourning jewellery suited to, and fittingly catering for, a wider range and variety of budgets and tastes. Whereas the scrolled, enamelled, delicately painted, or finely executed hair-work compositions might be relatively costly and labour-

¹⁵⁰ Nehama, *In Death Lamented*, p. 44.

¹⁵¹ Berg, M., ‘New commodities, luxuries and their consumers in eighteenth-century England’, in M. Berg and H. Clifford (eds.), *Consumers and Luxury: Consumer Culture in Europe, 1650-1850* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999).

¹⁵² Berg, M., *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 154, 242.

¹⁵³ Pointon, M., ‘Jewellery in Eighteenth-Century England’, in *Consumers and Luxury: Consumer Culture in Europe, 1650-1850*, ed. M. Berg and H. Clifford (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), p. 128.

intensive, with jewellers and goldsmiths often engaging specialist outworkers and craftsmen to complete these more exclusive and bespoke commissions, there is also evidence, even as early as the 1730s, of cheaper alternatives or more affordable pieces, being manufactured and worn.

Though few modest pieces seem to have actually survived in the museum collections, examples can be found listed amongst some of the stolen items in the criminal indictments processed at the Old Bailey; here there are articles such as, “a Brass Mourning Ring”,¹⁵⁴ “a Brace” or “Bathmetal Mourning-Ring”,¹⁵⁵ and, similarly, “a Bath hair ring”, which was valued at a relatively inexpensive “six pence”.¹⁵⁶ These were obviously mourning trinkets produced to cater primarily for those at the lower end of the market, consumers who wished to obtain a memorial token, yet who required more inexpensive varieties, featuring cheaper and more crudely executed hair-work, or items made from a base metal – rather than gold – including ‘Bath-metal’, which was an alloy composed from zinc and copper.

It is perhaps telling, for example, that in 1751, when William Shepherd was accosted and robbed by highwaymen, who attempted to take the “little ring” from his finger, he meaningfully proffered the plea that: “it was not worth taking, for it was only a burial ring”.¹⁵⁷ Relatedly, perhaps it was the relatively minor monetary worth of the mourning rings, rather than an attack of conscience, which prompted the actions of the highwaymen who robbed Thomas Smith in 1754:

...as Mr. Thomas Smith, Rider to Mr. Thomas Maltby and Son, was coming to Town, he was robbed by three Highwaymen, who took from him his Watch, about three Pound in Money, and two Mourning Rings; but they very generously returned him the two Rings...and then rode off.¹⁵⁸

Thus, the fact that mourning jewellery had become much more ubiquitous and was gaining greater popular currency, particularly amongst the middling sorts, meant that, according to Fennetaux, its “more traditional role of social distinction”, in light of such developments, was increasingly perceived as “old fashioned and meaningless”. It is telling for example, that when Horace Walpole (1717–1797) wrote to a friend concerning the mourning rings made following Lady Orford’s death in 1781, he rather condescendingly remarked: “Mourning rings are so much out of

¹⁵⁴ Old Bailey Proceedings Online, 16 February 1730, Ordinary’s Account (OA17301116).

¹⁵⁵ Old Bailey Proceedings Online, June 1733, Trial of Mary Burness, otherwise Curtis (t17330628-7).

¹⁵⁶ Old Bailey Proceedings Online, July 1775, Trial of Joseph Muggleton, William Jackling, James Lewis (t17750712-49).

¹⁵⁷ Old Bailey Proceedings Online, September 1751, Trial of John Jobbins (t17510911-16).

¹⁵⁸ News, *London Evening Post* (London, England), March 19, 1754 – March 21, 1754; Issue 4112.

fashion amongst people of rank as plum porridge”.¹⁵⁹ Clearly, the fact that the custom was now being enthusiastically adopted by a wider range of consumer, meant that it inevitably lost some of its fashionable gloss and former allure, in this case rather affectedly dismissed as outmoded and passé by a “self-conscious sophisticate” of the political and social establishment.¹⁶⁰ Despite the expression of such fashionable displeasure, when Robert Careless, a Middlesex gentleman made his will in 1804, he still utilised mourning rings as an appropriate and respectable means not only of thanking his executors and trustees who were each to have a ring of thirty shillings, but he also requested that a mourning ring was to be given “to each of the persons who at the desire of my Executors shall attend my Funeral”.¹⁶¹

Indeed, even by the end of the period, the fact that mourning rings and memorial jewellery had become so prevalent meant that some goldsmiths and jewellers were obviously becoming particularly well-renowned and recognised as established suppliers of mourning accoutrements and memorial rings.

Rather, interestingly, when Elizabeth Philpott, a widow from Middlesex, made her will in 1706, among the five mourning rings she bequeathed, one of the recipients, she instructed, was also to be the maker of the intended rings.¹⁶²

Additionally, when Samuel Reynardson, Esq., of Holywell in Lincolnshire died in 1797, his executors obtained over 19 mourning rings from Robert Makepeace, goldsmith and jeweller, based in Serle Street, Lincoln’s Inn Fields, London.¹⁶³ Significantly, the elaborate funeral disbursements which followed the death of Alice Ingham, of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, a few years before in 1794, not only included the purchase of mourning rings from a Newcastle-based jeweller, but her son had, likewise, also obtained mourning jewellery from Robert Makepeace of Serle Street.¹⁶⁴ Rather astonishingly, following the death of George Amler, in 1754, his executors

¹⁵⁹ Letter to Horace Mann, 11 February 1781, Horace Walpole, quoted in, Fennetaux, ‘Fashioning Death/Gendering Sentiment’, p. 29.

¹⁶⁰ Pointon, ‘Jewellery in Eighteenth-Century England’, p. 128.

¹⁶¹ Middlesex, MS 9172/189; Will Number: 238.

¹⁶² Middlesex, AM/PW/1708/070.

¹⁶³ Lincolnshire Archives, [Letter from Robert Makepeace junior to the executors of the late Samuel Reynardson Esq] Holywell 110/5, December, 1797.

The trade card of Robert & Thomas Makepeace, can also be found amongst the Heal Collection of trade cards: British Museum, Museum Number: Heal.67.270.

¹⁶⁴ Northumberland Archives, [Alice Ingham’s Funeral] ZBK/C/1/A/3, 1794. See particularly, ZBK/C/1/A/3/18; ZBK/C/1/A/3/20; ZBK/C/1/A/3/22.

It should be noted, that there is also some indication that the Makepeace family was originally from Newcastle, which may have contributed to the decision of the Ingham family to engage this particular firm of goldsmiths and jewellers.

spent over £45 obtaining various mourning rings from five separate jewellers and goldsmiths.¹⁶⁵

Many jewellers and goldsmiths, as has been seen, were also actively seeking to promote and advertise the particular kinds of goods they could supply to the discerning eighteenth-century consumer and mourning customer; furthermore, it is unusual not to typically find some reference made to the availability or expeditious supply of mourning rings or sentimental articles within these newspaper advertisements and announcements. In 1775, for example, one advert was offering London shoppers: “Painting on vellum curiously executed. Hair formed to fancy. Mourning rings, &c., made on the shortest notice”.¹⁶⁶ Another, presented: “MINIATURE PAINTING perform’d in a neat and easy Manner, to any Size, Bracelets, Rings &c., &c, at one Guinea each”.¹⁶⁷ Towards the end of the period, Thomas Woolley, a London-based “Jeweller, Goldsmith, and Hardwareman”, was likewise advertising: “Mourning Rings, both Fancy and Motto, executed on the shortest Notice. All Articles in the Jewellery Line completed in the newest and most fashionable Taste, and on the most reasonable Terms”.¹⁶⁸

Moreover, numerous eighteenth-century retail jewellers and goldsmiths, in a further sign of the popularity and appeal of mourning jewellery during this period, specifically chose to make explicit and named reference, within the relatively limited space of their trade cards, to the availability and supply of memorial rings and jewellery. Dating from around the 1750s, the trade card of Mary Threlkeld, a London goldsmith, purposely reminded customers that she could supply: “Rings for Funerals with the Greatest Expedition”.¹⁶⁹

Around the same time, the trade card of the Whitechapel-based goldsmith and jeweller, Henry Barlow, emphasised the making and selling of: “all Sorts of Rings for Burings, [i.e. burial or memorial rings] at the Lowest Prices”.¹⁷⁰ The prevalence and prominence of such pointed references to the supply of mourning rings, in particular, is evident still on trade cards issued towards the very end of the period, such as that of

¹⁶⁵ Shropshire Archives, [10 bills for mourning rings] 49/545-554, 1754.

¹⁶⁶ Classified ads, *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, (London, England), Saturday, July 22, 1775; Issue 14480.

¹⁶⁷ Classified ads, *Public Advertiser*, (London, England), Tuesday, March 18, 1760; Issue 7914.

¹⁶⁸ Classified ads, *Times*, (London, England), Thursday, September 22, 1796; Issue 3695.

¹⁶⁹ British Museum, Museum Number: Heal,67.399.

¹⁷⁰ British Museum, Museum Number: Heal,67.20.

John Brown, based in London's Fleet Street, whose card informed readers that he: "Makes Diamond & Plain Mourning Rings".¹⁷¹

In discussing the role of graphic display in the selling of consumer goods during the eighteenth century, Maxine Berg and Helen Clifford have also highlighted the fact that the trade cards themselves were also the "transmitters of fashionable forms", effectively presenting a "visual language of publicity".¹⁷² It is unsurprising to find then, that it is not only the text, but also the images and illustrated goods depicted upon several of the trade cards produced over the course of the second half of the eighteenth century which distinctively portray and prominently allude to the supply of mourning jewellery.

Indeed, some of the designs unmistakably echo surviving items of mourning jewellery produced and worn during this period, from the skulls and crossbones which adorned the earlier enamelled gold mourning bands, to the urns, weeping willows, and miniature mourning scenes, so redolent of the typical Neo-classical-inspired pieces.¹⁷³

[FIG. 127]

Such portrayals and pictorial allusions of course, not only acted as a visual signpost to consumers that such specialist items could be obtained from these jewellers and goldsmiths, but they also give some idea as to extent to which contemporaries were familiar with and recognised the archetypal symbols, iconography, and imagery, which appeared on the mourning jewellery produced during this period.

The trade cards not only serve to illustrate the growth of the practice in terms of its expanding popular appeal, but they also highlight the extent to which the demand for mourning jewellery was increasingly spreading outwards from the Capital, with items now being produced for sale in various towns and cities across England.

The expansive metalworking, jewellery, and goldsmiths trade was also buoyed by the establishment of Assay Offices outside of London during the course of the eighteenth century – much to the chagrin of members of these trades who worked out of the Metropolis – in locations which included Newcastle, Exeter, Chester,

¹⁷¹ British Museum, Museum Number: Heal,67.55.

¹⁷² Berg, M. and Clifford, H., 'Commerce and the Commodity: Graphic Display and Selling New Consumer Goods in Eighteenth-Century England', in, M. North and D. Ormrod (eds.), *Art Markets in Europe, 1400-1800* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), pp. 193-99.

¹⁷³ See, for example: British Museum, Museum Number: Heal,67.393; D,2.1703; D,2.1704; D,2.1722; D,2.1752; D,2.1791; Heal,67.141.

Birmingham, and Sheffield.¹⁷⁴ Consequently, the developing popular market and the expanding geographical scope of the custom was such that by the closing decade of the eighteenth century, the trade cards and advertisements of provincial and urban retailers expressly promoting the supply of mourning rings, are to be found based in locations ranging right across England, including: Peterborough,¹⁷⁵ Norwich,¹⁷⁶ Liverpool,¹⁷⁷ Exeter,¹⁷⁸ Chester,¹⁷⁹ York,¹⁸⁰ and Derby.¹⁸¹

This growing enthusiasm and the thriving demand for mourning jewellery continued right into the nineteenth century, during which time mass-production methods, the introduction of new forms, and the use of alternative, often cheaper material components, further pushed down prices, so that by the Victorian period, the custom had been “democratized”, with standardised pieces being produced to cater for even the humble working-class mourner.¹⁸² Moreover, the lowering of the gold standard in 1854 – introducing 15, 12 and 9 carats – would have also allowed for the production of more affordable pieces of mourning jewellery, available to a larger proportion of the population.¹⁸³

This distinct development is revealed most clearly in a journalistic report, written in 1897, which detailed the industrialised production of cheap and imitation jewellery still flowing out of the Birmingham workshops at the end of the nineteenth century:

An old man was making mourning rings with “In Memoriam” and “In loving Remembrances” worked in brass on a background. One would think that when a mourning ring was worn it would at least be real. But, no; hundreds of thousands of imitation rings are sold.

“But they won’t last long, will they?” I questioned the workman.

¹⁷⁴ Anon., *Extracts from Acts of Parliament for Preventing Frauds in Gold and Silver Wares, and Preserving the Standards appointed for Wrought Plate; and also From the Charters granted to the Company of Goldsmiths of the city of London: With some Notes and Observations thereon* (London, 1773); Anon., *Case of the Goldsmiths, Silversmiths, and Plate-workers of the City of London, and Places adjacent* (London, 1773).

¹⁷⁵ British Museum, Museum Number: D,2.216.

¹⁷⁶ Advertisements and Notices, *The Norfolk Chronicle: or, the Norwich Gazette* (Norwich, England), Saturday, August 2, 1794; pg. 1; Issue 1277.

¹⁷⁷ British Museum, Museum Number: D,2.1775.

¹⁷⁸ British Museum, Museum Number: D,2.1806.

¹⁷⁹ British Museum, Museum Number: D,2.1694.

¹⁸⁰ British Museum, Museum Number: Heal,67.15.

¹⁸¹ Advertisements and Notices, *The Derby Mercury* (Derby, England), Thursday, January 30, 1800; Issue 3542.

¹⁸² Scarisbrick, *Jewelry of Power, Love and Loyalty*, p. 184.

¹⁸³ D. Cooper and N. Batershill, *Victorian Sentimental Jewellery* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1972), p. 36.

“No, sir, they won’t,” he replied; “but they look all right at first, though they very soon begin to lose their colour. You know you can’t expect much gold on a ring which has to be sold for twopence...”¹⁸⁴

Thus, the inclination and demand for affordable and accessible mourning jewellery – a trend which had which had principally emerged with the consumer of the middling sorts over two hundred years before – had reached its crowning heights by the closing years of the reign of Queen Victoria.

Conclusion

From the mid-seventeenth century mourning jewellery grew in prevalence and popularity. Whilst it had been in use in the century before, it was the decades after the Restoration and into the early eighteenth century which witnessed a marked increase in the use of mourning jewellery amongst the testators of Middlesex and Surrey.

Whilst, across the entire sample, for the majority of testators, mourning rings and jewellery might be the exception rather than the rule, the growing prevalence and increasing recourse to these accoutrements amongst middling sort testators in particular was certainly a noteworthy addition to customary funerary practice and traditional mourning ritual.

As the secular and personalised aspects of the early modern funeral grew in prominence, there was a concurrent focus on the material trappings and the bestowal of sufficient quantities of mourning accoutrements which were thought necessary to achieve the correct level of decorum and display. The changing priorities of funerary consumption, coupled with notions of gentility and status determining and shaping contemporary concepts of a ‘decent’ or meet funeral, saw a growing demand for all sorts of material goods as part of accepted mourning etiquette and custom. The rise and influence of the undertaker, as well as jewellers and goldsmiths seeking to meet as well as drive popular demand for such goods, only added to the prevalence and pervasiveness of mourning jewellery into the eighteenth century.

In some quarters, this increasing focus on the material trappings within popular funerary and mourning custom, led to disapproval and censure, as social commentators and religious critics highlighted the vain excesses and disingenuous sentiment which lay behind such immoderate or indecorous displays. Whilst for some testators at least the bestowal of a large number of mourning rings might be thought

¹⁸⁴ Fraser, J. F., ‘Birmingham and its Jewellery’, in *The Windsor Magazine: an illustrated monthly for men and women*, 6 (June, 1897), British Periodicals, p. 468.

necessary and proper for their social standing, for the majority of the testators from Middlesex and Surrey, the careful bestowal of perhaps one or two mourning rings or items of jewellery was seemingly considered more fitting and appropriate.

For those testators and mourners of more limited means, the bestowal of a few pairs of gloves might be considered a more achievable outlay than the giving of several mourning rings. However, towards the end of the period, particularly as jewellery became more closely aligned with sentiment and personal remembrance, rather than an exhibition of status and position, and as suppliers increasingly looked to manufacture cheaper articles for sale, mourning jewellery became an ever more accessible and achievable method of remembrance for mourners across the social spectrum.

CHAPTER 6. USING MOURNING JEWELLERY

*Taught, silent monitor, by thee,
I learn what I must shortly be;
My flesh to lifeless clay return,
Like the dear friend's for whom I mourn;*¹

This chapter focuses the spotlight more firmly onto the bereaved and those individuals who were actually consuming, displaying, and utilising mourning jewellery, whether as part of the wider customary mortuary practices of the day, as an active commemorative strategy, or simply as a mourning accoutrement to be employed within their daily lives.

Though the wills might offer a range of evidence concerning the motivations and processes, which could inform the giving and receiving of mourning jewellery, there is less obvious material to be gleaned regarding what essentially happened to the memorial tokens thereafter. Attempting to discover what became of mourning jewellery once it was bequeathed in a will, distributed at a funeral, obtained from a goldsmiths', or received as a commemorative gift, presents the historian with a particularly challenging task.

Whilst earlier chapters have considered the form, consumption and customary processes of exchange, this chapter looks also to consider the meanings ascribed to mourning jewellery, and how it might have been used both by those facing death as well as by the bereaved for whom it was intended. In this context, Hallam and Hockey have also pointed to the ways in which material culture mediates our relationship with death and the dead, and the subsequent social practices that mobilise these objects, which then acquire meanings and resonances through their usage.²

In considering this relationship between objects and people, and specifically in this instance between mourning jewellery and its wearers, this chapter will consider the ways in which people turned to mourning jewellery as a token of remembrance, their relationships with these objects, and the fluctuating meanings embodied within them. In attempting to recover something of the contemporary experience and the emotions and attitudes which were expressed through and towards these kinds of objects, other historians, such as Lena Orlin and Catherine Richardson, have similarly

¹ Turner, D., 'On Being Presented with a Mourning Ring', in, D. Turner, *Poems Devotional and Moral, in Two Parts* (Henley, 1794), p. 148.

² E. Hallam and J. Hockey, *Death, Memory and Material Culture* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), pp. 1-2.

explored the role of material culture in post-mortem remembrance and identity. Whilst their focus, in relying solely upon wills and inventories, gave a pre-eminence to the testators who bequeathed mourning jewellery, this chapter aims to adopt a more 'object-driven' approach in trying to reconnect these objects of mourning to their historical contexts throughout the process of their usage. Accordingly, this chapter utilises a range of source materials, including the jewellery itself, as well as the sampled wills, and a range of other supplementary evidence including portraiture, newspapers, letters and diaries.

The approach is to try and reveal the ways in which mourning jewellery was functionally employed and the means by which mourners engaged with the practice, uncovering the progression of the custom in action, from the death of an individual, through to acquisition, use, and beyond, in the life and duration of memorial rings and jewellery.

Other broad themes are also incorporated, and this chapter considers the role of jewellery within the nuclear family, particularly in terms of using it to remember and memorialise the deaths of children. Issues of gender specificity are also considered, as jewellery was increasingly given but also utilised and produced for the early modern female. There is also some consideration as to how jewellery was particularly used by both the dying and the bereaved, as a means of achieving a 'good death', mitigating tragic losses, as well as directly manipulating and shaping post-mortem remembrance.

Uncovering some of the conventional 'life-cycles' of mourning jewellery will involve looking at the ways in which contemporaries routinely encountered and responded to the custom at various key stages in the process. Some of the main questions to be asked centre around the habits and behaviours of the people who acquired and used mourning jewellery, and the ways in which it was employed and put to use in the hands of the bereaved. This involves looking at matters surrounding the length of time mourning jewellery might be worn for, the perceived relevance, significance, and attachment to the items owned, what became of these mementoes, and the extent to which jewellery was appreciated and preserved as a valued possession or wearable token of mourning, regard, and remembrance.

This, of course, also encompasses thornier issues relating to emotion and affect, such as whether mourning jewellery was seen to provide a useful and positive means of memorialising and mourning the dead, the scope and import it might provide in terms of offering an emotional outlet for the proper expression of grief and loss, and

whether it was welcomed as a method for bestowing upon the bereaved a sincere token of comfort and consolation.

Again, in thinking about the ‘material turn’ and the relationships between objects and people and the expression of emotion in the past, John Styles, in his study of the London Foundling Hospital tokens, has particularly stressed the importance of context in trying to capture and recognise the emotional charge of an object to its contemporary users. Nevertheless, whilst the particular meaning of a mourning ring may have been lost to the historian or the “emotional power” of an object now diminished or vanished to history, using objects as a source still provides a valuable means of uncovering the ways in which early modern consumers utilised mourning jewellery as a signal and conveyor of real emotion and sentiment.³

Jewellery as a Token of Mourning

Of course, in thinking about some of these issues, it is important to remember – as the previous chapters have illustrated – that there were many different types and styles of memorial accessory, which evolved and developed over the course of the period, though which can still essentially be classed and understood as ‘mourning jewellery’. Undoubtedly, the individual piece in question, and the manner in which it was obtained, was a fundamental factor in determining and influencing the potential level of emotional response and the individual degree of attachment on the part of the recipient or owner.

Clearly, there might be a significant disparity between the sentimental connection felt in acquiring a generic mourning ring for a social acquaintance, which had been perfunctorily distributed to mourners at the funeral, compared to that of inheriting a particular piece of personally-owned jewellery, directly bequeathed or bestowed at the deathbed of a close family member.

Jewellery which had once belonged to the dead, portrait miniatures which depicted them, or even new mourning tokens especially fashioned so as to incorporate their hair or which included special dedicatory posies or inscriptions of remembrance, were mourning items often with an import and meaning well beyond their outward material substance or inherent economic worth. As Hallam and Hockey have contended, these personalised and intimate tokens of regard and attachment were not just perfunctory or rudimentary mourning accessories, but rather “memory objects”,

³ Styles, J., ‘Objects of Emotion: The London Foundling Hospital Tokens, 1741-60’, in A. Gerritsen and G. Riello (eds.), *Writing Material Culture History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p.165.

with the potential to provide the deceased with a “powerful presence within the here and now”.

An item of mourning jewellery – whether newly commissioned or converted from an existing piece – was effectively a material sign that the previous relationship between the individual remembered and the individual who commemorated them, was now at end. However, these poignant material mementoes and keepsakes, often loaded with meaning and imbued with “emotive powers” of remembrance, recollection, and recall, meant that it was possible to “retain aspects of the dead within the social lives of the bereaved”.⁴

This is a contention which has similarly been proposed by Nigel Llewellyn, as part of his ‘multiple bodies’ theory; he suggested, for example, that the fragmentation and disruption following the death of the ‘natural body’, consequently led to efforts to try and maintain and sustain a sense of continuity and cohesion, by preserving the ‘social body’ of the deceased. In this context, the social body after death is sustained in living and collective memory by a rich culture of visual artefacts, including mourning jewellery; thus, on a relatively small scale, mourning jewellery was used to maintain or at least mark and commemorate an individual’s place and continued ‘presence’ within society and the everyday lives of the bereaved.⁵

Particularly in terms of jewellery which the deceased had once personally owned or used, or items which were intimately connected and “associated with the person, body, and identity of their [former] owners”, meant that the bereaved - in inheriting such pieces - were afforded a wearable and visible “token of physical proximity to a loved one”, even after death.⁶

The use of such treasured and personally meaningful keepsakes, used to evoke and memorialise the memory of a loved one, was clearly in evidence in the portrait of Thomas Killigrew (1612-83), which was painted in 1638, following the recent death of his young wife, Cecilia Crofts. Fixing the viewer with a melancholy gaze, Killigrew is depicted wearing his wife’s wedding ring threaded onto a black silk band, which is tied around his left wrist; a silver and gold cross, inscribed with his wife’s

⁴ Hallam and Hockey, *Death, Memory and Material Culture*, pp. 5, 164.

⁵ N. Llewellyn, *The Art of Death: Visual Culture in the English Death Ritual, 1500-1800* (London: Reaktion, 1991), pp. 7-9, 47-49, 101-4.

⁶ Hallam and Hockey, *Death, Memory and Material Culture*, p. 165.

initials, is shown prominently pinned to his tunic, whilst one of the rings he sports on his little finger may also have had further mourning connotations.⁷ [FIG. 128]

Whilst, this jewellery might offer some form of comfort and consolation for the bereaved, it would also appear that testators, particularly in gifting practical and highly personal items of their own jewellery – such as a watch, signet, seal, or wedding ring – clearly recognised and exploited the opportunity it provided as a means of inserting a material prompt with which to encourage and foster their own remembrance, into the daily lives of their legatees.

Gendered Bequests: Women Using Mourning Jewellery

Whilst women are undeniably an underrepresented group in terms of their contribution towards the testamentary record, several historians have highlighted the place of women and the significance of gender in the mortuary customs of Tudor and post-Reformation England.⁸

In looking at how women specifically utilised the will-making process, Susan E. James, has drawn attention to the noticeable way in which women of Tudor England emotionally invested in and marshalled their material culture – particularly clothing and jewellery – as powerful markers of post-mortem personal identity and remembrance. For James, the process (compared to their male counterparts) was much more “horizontal” as women looked to distribute their personal memorabilia more widely among members of their “female networks”, acknowledging family, friends, neighbours, goodwives and gossips; in this context, the gift of rings and jewellery became “reiterations of friendship and affection”, “endorsers of personal

⁷ Dyck, Sir Anthony van, ‘Thomas Killigrew and William, Lord Crofts (?)’, (1638). Royal Collection Trust, Accession Number: RCIN 407426.

A portrait of Thomas’ brother, Sir William Killigrew (c.1606-1695), was also painted by van Dyck in the same year, in which he is depicted wearing a ring tied with a ribbon which is fastened onto the front of his black tunic; perhaps this was a memorial ring, received as a personal mourning token and worn to commemorate the death of his brother’s wife.

See: Dyck, Sir Anthony van, ‘Portrait of Sir William Killigrew’, (1638). Tate Britain, Reference Number: T07896.

⁸ Martha C. Howell’s study of gift-giving amongst testators in the medieval city of Douai, has highlighted the long-standing gender differences often apparent in the distinctive ways in which women ascribed meaning to their personal goods, as well as the ways in which they particularly sought to bequeath their gifts individually amongst other members of their female social network. Howell, M. C., ‘Fixing Movables: Gifts by Testament in Late Medieval Douai’, *Past and Present*, No. 150 (February, 1996), pp. 3-45.

memory”, whilst also engaging the recipients of these mnemonic bequests as “personally designated rememberers”.⁹

In his study of the will-making and testamentary gift-giving of women in Elizabethan England, J. S.W. Helt, for example, has similarly suggested that women assumed a particularly inimitable role both as “rememberers and as remembered”. He argues that female testators *actively* mobilised their wills as a deliberate means of sustaining and promoting post-mortem remembrance; that they utilised testamentary gifts and structured the content of their wills, as a means of recognising the emotional ties that bound them to their communities, which, in turn, aided and supported a sense of “continuity” and “cohesiveness” amongst the members of their wider social group.

Helt contends that women’s wills performed a distinct “custodial role as sources of post-mortem memory” and identity, and that individual gift giving – such as the bequest of a mourning ring or a personally-owned item of jewellery – to assorted family, friends, and neighbours, also helped to “sustain” and “maintain” a sense of “spiritual and material affinity between the dead and the living community”.¹⁰

In a similar vein, Lucinda Becker has also highlighted the apparently remarkable way in which early modern English women, when faced with death, utilised their wills and bequeathed tokens of remembrance, as a means of confirming and consolidating the ties of friendship and kinship that bound them to their communities and social networks.¹¹

Women’s wills, of course – unlike the majority of their male counterparts, who were naturally more concerned with the lineal bestowal and inheritance of land and property – often contained carefully detailed and precise descriptions of the token goods and personal possessions they intended to bequeath. Becker has contended that women, in particular, were much more concerned with leaving personal and affectionate tokens or “keepsakes”, as well as the more unremarkable objects that formed the “minutiae” of everyday life.¹²

Women’s wills were frequently occupied with “many minor bequests”, with the breadth of their personal gift-giving being marshalled to promote post-mortem

⁹ Susan E. James, *Women’s Voices in Tudor Wills, 1485-1603: Authority, Influence and Material Culture* (Routledge, 2015) [Bookshelf Online].

¹⁰ Helt, J. S.W., ‘Women, Memory and Will-Making in Elizabethan England’, in, B. Gordon and P. Marshall (eds.), *The Place of the Dead: Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 188-205.

¹¹ L. M. Becker, *Death and the Early Modern Englishwoman* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).

¹² Becker, *Death and the Early Modern Englishwoman*, pp. 141-2.

remembrance, and to acknowledge and confirm family relationships and personal attachments.¹³ As Susan Amussen has further pointed out, that when widows (or, women, more generally) made wills, they typically “had very different considerations” in mind from their male counterparts, which influenced both the type of legacy given and the intended recipients of such bequests.¹⁴ Erickson has also made reference to these differences, noting that women’s wills tend to reflect a greater degree of “personalism”, in that they were much freer to express personal preference in the nature of their bequests and in the recognition of legatees.¹⁵

In thinking about the significance and role of moveable goods and personal possessions at the final stage of a woman’s life-cycle, Helen Berry has also pointed to the way in which the bequests of female testators “reveal the meaning of goods with respect to a woman’s affective ties and loyalties”. Bequeathing their personally-owned jewellery or in bestowing mourning rings upon favoured recipients, showed the ways in which women might use material culture as a means of creating a sense of their own identity, conveying personal affect, and endeavouring to be remembered by family, friends, and fellow members of their female social network.

The often complex ways in which women distributed and bequeathed their belongings suggested to Berry that these women “regarded their possessions more as a means of constructing relationships between family members and within the wider community,” whilst the post-mortem bestowal of mourning rings and other elements of funeral consumption might also serve to further “express something of the identity of the deceased,” acknowledging relationships and attachments between the dead and the surviving members of their social group.¹⁶

Amanda Vickery’s exploration of female consumption and material culture through the study of the values and practices expressed in the diary and correspondence of Lancashire gentlewoman, Elizabeth Shackleton (1726-81), looked to uncover women’s attitudes towards material things, the meanings they ascribed to personal goods, and the role or social function which these goods acquired. When it came to gender differences in attitudes towards commodities, Vickery maintains that

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 110, 154, 156.

¹⁴ Amussen, quoted in: Goose, N. and Evans, N., ‘Wills as an Historical Source’, in, T. Arkell, N. Evans, and N. Goose (eds.), *When Death Do Us Part: Understanding and Interpreting the Probate Records of Early Modern England* (Hertfordshire: Local Population Studies, 2004), p. 69.

¹⁵ A. L. Erickson, *Women and Property in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 212-222.

¹⁶ Berry, H., ‘Women, Consumption and Taste’, in, H. Barker and E. Chalus (eds.), *Women’s History: Britain 1700-1850 An Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 204-5.

women's records (including wills) consistently reveal "a more self-conscious and emotional investment" in apparel, domestic goods and personal effects.

For Elizabeth Shackleton, in particular, whose goods were "rich with memory" and often infused with sentimental meaning, Vickery proposed the concept or existence of a kind of "sentimental materialism". Vickery's analysis suggested that Shackleton deliberately marshalled her material world, with items of jewellery, for example, consciously ascribed with "extra-material meaning", called to "bear witness to and reinforce her social and familial relationships". Pointing to Shackleton's subsequent bestowal of a mourning ring featuring the hair of her deceased mother, as well as the commissioning of a bracelet composed from the hair of her three sons, Vickery highlights the way in which different systems of meaning could also co-exist within a single object according to its use and context. The hair jewellery commissioned and subsequently passed on by Shackleton, for example, could fulfil several diverse functions: a family heirloom, an emotive token of personal remembrance, but also an object which exhibited a clear engagement with the contemporary and à la mode fashions of the day.¹⁷

In thinking about the acquisition, giving and receiving of jewellery, in particular, Pointon has also highlighted the importance of these possessions in marking "important moments of transition in an individual's life", where value and meaning was also acquired through use, so that these particular objects held an "affective as well as an economic value". For Pointon, the bequest of jewellery held a special significance in the "conduct of social relations between women", it was a "declaration of sentimental attachment," and a gift – particularly in the case of personally-owned jewellery passed on to female kin – which might also be bound up with the affective and familial significance of previous exchanges and transactions.¹⁸

James has particularly stressed the efficacy of wills in revealing something of the "emotional context" surrounding the bequests of women's personal belongings and the bestowal of mourning jewellery. Within the will, people and possessions are singled out for special notice, as the testator, in bequeathing tokens of remembrance and memorial keepsakes, decided who was to "carry her memory into the future". In a

¹⁷ Vickery, A., 'Women and the World of Goods: A Lancashire Woman and her Possessions, 1751-81', in J. Brewer and R. Porter (eds.), *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 274-94.

¹⁸ M. Pointon, *Strategies for Showing: Women, Possession, and Representation in English Visual Culture, 1665-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 32-44.

similar vein to Vickery's notion of "sentimental materialism", James suggested that women's wills can also offer a new understanding of material culture, revealing, through the description and bequest of belongings, a woman's "emotional and material priorities" and the memories, meanings and uses attached to and invested in these objects. In relation to the bequest of jewellery, specifically, James has also contended that such a precious commodity not only evidently had an intrinsic value, but that such objects implicitly linked together other aspects of "heritage, identity, status, wealth, and legacy" connecting testator and recipient.¹⁹

Furthermore, in considering the types of bequest being made, it is worth bearing in mind that affluent and aged widows often tended to have accumulated the best family trinkets and heirlooms, over the course of their lifetimes, and those female wills which typically include profuse testamentary and material provision, tend also to reflect the "enhanced possibility of both independence and prosperity that widowhood could bring".²⁰ Consequently, the wills of wealthy widows are routinely filled with personal and considered bequests, which distributed and dispensed family jewels to favoured kin or close friends. In her will of 1674, for example, Dame Honywood made careful gifts of the jewels she had inherited and now sought to pass on to members of her nuclear family and close female kin:

I give to the said sir Francis a sapphire seal ring with the inscription Jacob with his staff which was my husband Manning's...I give to my son Jn Lamott Honywood the jewel that sir Thos Honywood gave me that came from the family of the Brownes and is in the great cabinet in the chamber over the great parlour and the rest of the varieties in the said cabinet I give to be equally divided between my daughter Honywood and my granddaughter Eliz Cotton.²¹

In 1630, Joan Hunt, a widow from Kingston, as well as leaving ten pounds apiece to her daughter and son-in-law (also her executor), with which to "buy each of them a ringe to weare in remembrance of mee", she was also able to bequeath a varied assortment of personal rings – including "my ringe wth a Toadstone in it", "my ringe wth a deaths head on it", "my wedding ringe" and "my ringe wth a pearle in it" – amongst her four grandchildren.²²

Similarly, in composing her will in 1660, the widowed Sarah Wilkins of Bermondsey, amongst various items of family silver, clothing and furniture, also specifically granted a ring to each of her four children, which included: a "Stone

¹⁹ James, *Women's Voices* [Chapter 6].

²⁰ Erickson, *Women and Property*, p. 46.

²¹ Earls Colne, PROB11/368: Dame Hester Honywood of Markshall, 05.05.1674.

²² Surrey, DW/PA/5/1630; Will Number: 57.

Ring”, “one hoope Ring”, “one Ring with a trewlovers knot”, and to her son and sole executor, “one Seald Ring”.²³

Relatedly, Pointon has also asserted that jewellery, at least since the seventeenth century, has recognisably been the “particular property of women”, with family jewels typically passed down along the female line.²⁴ This may be due in some part to the custom of ‘widow’s paraphernalia’ or *bona paraphernalia*, which typically consisted of the personal clothes, jewels and ornaments, bed linen, and plate, specifically belonging to a widow, and which a woman could claim from the estate, upon the death of her husband.²⁵ Jewellery was a key part of this provision, incorporating the valuables she had brought with her at the time of her marriage, as well as the jewels she had subsequently acquired.²⁶

Additionally, many husbands in composing their bequests, routinely tended to incorporate a formulaic and rather generalised prescription (typically towards the end of the will) that their wife should inherit and retain all the remainder and residue of the “ready money, household goods, plate and jewels”, which had not already been specifically referred to in the list of their testamentary bequests and disposal of their personal estate.

The widow Dorothy Joynes, for example, had clearly inherited a veritable lifetime’s worth of plate and jewels, and was thus able to lavish bequests and tokens of remembrance upon her family, including gifts of silver and rings to at least five different grandchildren. Included amongst these jewels were such diverse items as:

One Large Gold Seale Ring the impression whereof is an Anchor...A small seale Gold Ring the Impression whereof is a ship, and one other small Gold Ring...Silver Chains about a yard long...an Enamelled Gold Ring...two pair of Small Gold Buttons and a Gold Ring, with a large Stone set in the same.²⁷

Joynes had, perhaps, inherited these items in the face of other deaths, but in drawing up her own will, she used her large collection of personal jewellery and plate to provide her relatives with a suitable and carefully considered token of remembrance.

²³ Surrey, DW/PC/5/1665; Will Number: 116.

²⁴ Pointon, M., ‘Valuing the Visual and Visualising the Valuable: Jewellery and its Ambiguities’, *Cultural Values*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (1999), p. 10.

²⁵ Erickson, *Women and Property*, pp. 26, 184.

²⁶ Hodges, M., ‘Widows of the “Middling Sort” and their Assets in Two Seventeenth-Century Towns’, in, Arkell, Evans, and Goose (eds.), *When Death Do Us Part*, p. 312.

²⁷ Surrey, DW/PC/5/1705; Will Number: 13.

In 1683, Elizabeth Pickeringe, a widow from Middlesex, whilst ensuring that her executor should have “one mourning Gold Ring”, also filled her will with detailed and individually itemised bequests of her silver plate and, particularly, her own jewellery. Leaving over eight different rings to her godson and four other female acquaintances (including the wife and daughters of her executor), her bequests show the lavish and extensive collection of jewellery she must have acquired over the course of her marriage and widowhood. Though “being sicke and weake of body”, the testatrix could still, obviously describe in fulsome detail the various items which she carefully sought to pass on to her intended legatees, the collection encompassing: “one Diamond Ringe wth three Stones one Ruby Ringe wth A Diamond on each side...one Diamond Ring wth fower Stones one Ruby Ring wth A Diamond on each side...one Amithst Ring...one Diamond Ringe wth nine small Stones...two Gold Rings”.²⁸

In a similar, though less extravagant fashion, when the widowed Elizabeth Howard made her will in 1765, it was, likewise, filled with detailed bequests of clothing, silver, and personally-owned items of jewellery, including the particular gift of a mourning ring:

I give and bequeath unto Sarah Shepherd a Stone Ring set in Gold, a Mourning Ring, a large Silver Table Spoon, a Pint Silver Mug...I give and bequeath unto Elizabeth George...a Green Silk Gown...a Gold Necklace and Locket, a large Silver Table Spoon...and a Silver pepper-box...²⁹

This exchange of jewellery, particularly between the female members of a social network group, helped to “affirm friendships” and kin relationships, whilst also acting to consolidate and “reinforce” their ties to one another.³⁰ Remembering was a “collective activity” and the gift of mourning jewellery might be used to help convey a sense of “communal identity”. Testamentary gift-giving and the wearing of mourning jewellery could also help to foster a process of “reciprocal remembering” – as was evident between the elite testators from Earls Colne – in which members of the social group routinely recognised one another in their wills, often through the symbolic bequest of a ring or money given for a token remembrance.³¹

Distinctly, however, Becker has suggested that there is a significant gulf between the ritual of female testamentary gift-giving – predominantly built upon the

²⁸ Middlesex, AM/PW/1685/058.

²⁹ Middlesex, DL/C/424; Will Number: 175.

³⁰ Becker, *Death and the Early Modern Englishwoman*, p. 155.

³¹ Helt, ‘Women, Memory and Will-Making’, pp. 199-200.

intimate and individualised bequest of personal and sentimental keepsakes – in comparison to the gift of a mourning ring or memorial jewel. In her opinion, mourning rings failed entirely as a remembrance strategy that could adequately hope to acknowledge or even exemplify the complex emotional ties that bound together and reinforced the connections of kinship and attachment. Household stuffs, clothing, and small personal keepsakes – the things referred to by Erickson as “Objects of Affection” – were the testamentary gifts that had the ability to articulate affection and promote remembrance after death.³²

Mourning rings, in her view, had little to recommend in terms of providing a remembrance that expressed genuine sentiment or affection; they were merely a straightforward “formal gift”, a “relatively expensive” funerary token given primarily as a means of “solemnising and commemorating the occasion”.³³

In a similar vein, Lena Orlin has also suggested that mourning rings offered very little scope for genuine sentimental attachment or emotional engagement, on the part of either the donor or the recipient. Though they, perhaps, had a “symbolic value” as a token of remembrance, and they certainly had an appreciable “financial value”, Orlin maintains, however, that they were essentially items with “no recoverable sentimental value”.³⁴ Unlike Pointon, however, Orlin makes little distinction between the different possible types of mourning ring that might be intended in the bequest of a will, suggesting that the monetary value was often the first consideration; in her view these token remembrances were little more than that, and the fact that these legacies necessitated the commissioning of a ring – and thus were goods not in even in existence at the time of their bequest – has led Orlin to the conclusion that they could not, therefore, “have had any special meaning to the testators” (or their recipients).³⁵

For Orlin, the sentiment expressed and exposed in early modern wills was “directed almost exclusively towards people, not goods”, but as this study would contend – and as the giving and receiving of mourning jewellery in Chapter 4 has hopefully shown – that particularly for those testators passing on family heirlooms,

³² Erickson, A. L., ‘Possession – and the other one-tenth of the law: assessing women’s ownership and economic roles in early modern England’, *Women’s History Review*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (July, 2007), p. 373.

³³ Becker, *Death and the Early Modern Englishwoman*, p. 161.

³⁴ Orlin, L. C., ‘Empty Vessels’, in T. Hamling and C. Richardson (eds.), *Everyday Objects: Medieval and Early Modern Material Culture and its Meanings* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 301-303.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 301.

bequeathing items of jewellery with strong personal associations, or in giving tokens of remembrance in which the testator provided a brief biography of acquisition and ownership, there was frequently strong indications of attachment and affect bound up with these goods.

Furthermore, testators might, in making their bequests of mourning rings, clearly designate them as a “token of my love” or expressly refer to the bequest as a mark of “love and affection”, some also left rings and other pieces of jewellery which they “much valued”, whilst other testators might even leave a particularly emotive bequest in the giving of an item which they announced was currently worn about their person. Whilst some bequests of rings, were, undoubtedly, generic commemorative tokens rather than a significant sentimental gift, for the testators of Middlesex and Surrey, perhaps in nominating only one or two individuals for the receipt of a ring, and even in a few instances passing on these token remembrances again in turn, they were certainly not the “disinterested commodities” which Orlin suggested they were.³⁶

Conversely, in Becker’s view, and in line with Orlin’s conclusions, the gift of a mourning ring was simply a token bequest, “not generally left with the intention that they would oblige the recipient to perform any action beyond honouring the memory of the deceased”. Moreover, Becker has also implied that the bequest of a mourning ring was a predominantly male-dominated remembrance strategy, suggesting that rings were “more commonly seen in the wills of men”, whilst those women who did leave them, were generally spinsters, “whose wills tend in general to follow more closely those of men than those of married women or widows”.³⁷

Undoubtedly, spinsters certainly did leave bequests of mourning rings, and for female testators of rather more limited means, no doubt the giving of general household stuffs or the bequest of personal wearing apparel, provided an important, indeed, perhaps the only means, of articulating attachments and securing some form of post-mortem remembrance within their social group.

The testamentary evidence, however, does little to support Becker’s hypothesis that mourning rings were a token remembrance typically restricted to, or primarily utilised by men. Certainly, many of the female testators represented across the entire period under study concerned themselves with the careful disposal of their everyday

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 306-7.

³⁷ Becker, *Death and the Early Modern Englishwoman*, p. 161.

household goods; concurrently, however, many women – widows in particular – also used their wills specifically to provide members of their family, friends, and wider social group, with affective gifts of memorial rings and mourning jewellery.

In Earls Colne, for example, of all the testators who bequeathed mourning rings, 37.5 percent were women, despite making up just one-fifth of the total number of testators overall. Focusing more narrowly on the period 1640-75, when the custom of personalised memorial jewellery was particularly beginning to expand, women represent well over half of the testators in the wills which made mention of mourning rings.

For the testators of Middlesex and Surrey who were bequeathing mourning rings, rings in general (of any sort), and for those leaving bequests of either jewellery and/or rings, women – particularly widows – were the prime drivers of the custom, particularly from the mid-seventeenth century on; they were much more likely to leave bequests of this kind, often making up nearly half or more of the total percentage of testators overall.

FEMALE TESTATORS:	TOTAL NO. OF FEMALE TESTATORS 1605-1805:	TOTAL NUMBER LEAVING MOURNING RINGS	TOTAL NUMBER LEAVING RINGS (any)	TOTAL NUMBER LEAVING JEWELLERY and/or RINGS
MIDDLESEX	620 (30.7% of all testators)	130 (20.97% of all female testators bequeathed mourning rings; Women made up 43.8% of all Middlesex testators who left mourning rings)	196 (31.6% of all female testators bequeathed rings; Women made up 47.69% of all Middlesex testators who left rings)	209 (33.7% of all female testators bequeathed rings/jewellery; Women made up 47.2% of all Middlesex testators who left rings/jewellery)
SURREY	262 (22.6% of all testators)	38 (14.5% of all female testators bequeathed mourning rings; Women made up 45.8% of all Surrey testators who left mourning rings)	66 (25.19% of all female testators bequeathed rings; Women made up 52.8% of all Surrey testators who left rings)	73 (27.86% of all female testators bequeathed rings/jewellery; Women made up 52.9% of all Surrey testators who left rings/jewellery).

MALE TESTATORS:	TOTAL NO. OF MALE TESTATORS 1605-1805:	TOTAL NUMBER LEAVING MOURNING RINGS	TOTAL NUMBER LEAVING RINGS (any)	TOTAL NUMBER LEAVING JEWELLERY and/or RINGS
MIDDLESEX	1400 (69.3% of all testators)	167 (11.9% of all male testators bequeathed mourning rings; Men made up 56.2% of all Middlesex testators who left mourning rings)	215 (15.36% of all male testators bequeathed rings; Men made up 52.31% of all Middlesex testators who left rings)	234 (16.7% of all male testators bequeathed rings/jewellery; Men made up 52.8% of all Middlesex testators who left rings/jewellery)
SURREY	897 (77.4% of all testators)	45 (5% of all male testators bequeathed mourning rings; Men made up 54.2% of all Surrey testators who left mourning rings)	59 (6.6% of all male testators bequeathed rings; Men made up 47.2% of all Surrey testators who left rings)	65 (7.2% of all male testators bequeathed rings/jewellery; Men made up 47.1% of all Surrey testators who left rings/jewellery).

Moreover, a larger percentage proportion of female testators consistently also chose to leave either mourning rings or jewellery, and this was often in stark contrast to their male counterparts. Taking the Middlesex sample as an illustration, in 1685, for example, whilst 40 percent of all female testators left rings, only 21.5 percent of all male testators chose to do so. By 1725, the contrast was just as stark – 10.2 percent of all male testators leaving rings in contrast to 34.07 percent of all female testators. In addition, as the period went on, men were seemingly even less likely to mention the bequest of rings or mourning rings in their wills, whilst female testators formed an increasing proportion of those testators who did.³⁸

YEAR	% of MIDDLESEX testators leaving mourning rings who were FEMALE	% of MIDDLESEX testators leaving rings (any) who were FEMALE	% of SURREY testators leaving mourning rings who were FEMALE	% of SURREY testators leaving rings (any) who were FEMALE
1605	-	50	50	33.3
1625	18.2	24.2	0	33.3
1645	33.3	40	25	33.3
1665	31.9	35.5	36.4	37.5
1685	45.8	54.8	62.5	58.9
1705	51.9	54.3	47.1	56.5
1725	54.9	61.3	62.5	62.5
1745	33.3	45.5	42.9	68.75
1765	87.5	90	100	66.7
1785	50	53.3	50	50
1805	55.6	64.3	-	-

³⁸ Moreover, these figures accord with the themes discussed in Chapter 3, in which in thinking about the various ‘types’ of mourning jewellery, the eighteenth century saw a distinct gendering of mourning jewellery, not just in terms of those who were increasingly wearing it and dictating the predominant design-styles, but also with the predominance of the female mourner depicted within many of the typical Neoclassical compositions.

Thus, the gender difference in the statistics of testators bequeathing and using mourning rings or rings in general is fairly striking. In the sampled Surrey wills for the early eighteenth century, in taking the year 1705 as a representative point at which mourning jewellery had become established as an identifiable mourning custom and a recognised post-mortem remembrance strategy amongst testators, it is remarkable to note that of all the testators for that year who left explicit bequests or monetary provision for the supply of mourning rings, nearly half were women (despite forming just over a quarter of the total number of testators overall), and all were identified as widows.

In thinking about ways in which women, especially widows, purposely looked to utilise mourning jewellery, not only were female testators much more likely than their male counterparts to bequeath jewellery and rings of all sorts in their wills, but the way in which they might marshal their bequests could also be significantly different. Considering issues of “gender-specificity” in wills and to the material world more broadly, Erickson suggested that women not only bequeathed different things to men, but the way in which those things were described was often more detailed, and the recipients of those goods were often favoured from amongst a testatrix’s female legatees.³⁹

Catherine Richardson’s study of jewellery bequests found in the wills of testators from early modern Kent, also highlighted “marked differences in gendered giving”. Like the testators from Middlesex, Surrey and Earls Colne, the female testators of Kent were also “more likely to leave jewellery than men”; though only 20 percent of the testators in Richardson’s sample of 1,350 wills were women, they still made up 40 percent of the overall number of bequests. In terms of the chosen recipients of these jewellery bequests, Richardson also noted that “in contrast to male practice, women gave their rings to more distant relatives”, and though both male and female testators gave their rings to every category of relationship, 22 percent of men’s rings were passed on to sons, and another 18 percent to more distant kin.⁴⁰

Even into the eighteenth century, Maxine Berg’s study of the types of goods left in the wills of metalworkers and women in Birmingham and Sheffield, 1700-1800,

³⁹ Erickson, ‘Possession’, pp.372-74.

⁴⁰ Richardson, C., “‘As my whole trust is in him’: Jewelry and the Quality of Early Modern Relationships”, in B. Mirabella (ed.), *Ornamentalism: The Art of Renaissance Accessories* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), pp. 187-88, 199.

showed marked gender differences in the kinds of commodities which male and female testators chose to single out in their bequests. Significantly, “the women of Sheffield and Birmingham left substantially more bequests containing jewellery” than did men: 4.74% of male testators from Birmingham left jewellery, in contrast to 16.67% of women; in Sheffield, just 1.76% of male testators left jewellery, but 9.62% of women did so.⁴¹ The fact that female testators patently chose to include jewellery in their bequests, singling out and passing on these particular tokens of remembrance, sheds a light not only on the “consumption of urban middling women in Britain’s expanding industrial towns,” but also on the ways in which women chose to endow these goods with some “emotional, familial or material value”. For Berg, the detailed and descriptive bequests of jewellery, along with other “personal and expressive goods” demonstrates women’s “sensitivity to commodities”; female testators specifically chose to utilise jewellery as part of the will-making process, “conveying identity, personality and fashion,” as it was passed on and used to single out individuals within their “web of familial and community relationships”.⁴²

Thus, to simply dismiss the notion that mourning jewellery or the giving of memorial rings might have formed a significant facet of women’s remembrance strategies or testamentary gift-giving during the early modern period, appears somewhat disingenuous.

Furthermore, in contradiction to Becker and Orlin’s arguments, many of these bequests were highly personal, and conscientiously composed, in order that friends and relations might obtain an intimate token of remembrance and affection. The jewellery itself, with individualised and often poignant inscriptions, also counters allegations that mourning rings offered little scope for the expression of genuine sentiment or feeling. It is not difficult, for example, to believe that sincere grief and intense sorrow lay behind the commissioning of one seventeenth-century mourning ring, which is inscribed around the inside of the hoop, with the stark lamentation: ‘Oh my sister, my sister, R.H. Jan 22. 1670’.⁴³

⁴¹ M. Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 237-8.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 237-8; Berg, M., ‘Women’s Consumption and the Industrial Classes of Eighteenth-Century England’, *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (Winter, 1996), pp. 415-434.

⁴³ Museum of London, Museum Number: 62.120/89.

Portrait Miniatures

Other highly personal and emotive items of jewellery which might be converted upon the death of an individual, in order to assume a new function as an article of mourning, included the rather luxurious and exclusive portrait miniature.⁴⁴ They were valuable and precious objects, featuring intricately realised portraits, richly framed or enclosed inside locket, which were often ornately decorated with jewels or lavish enamel work. As Marcia Pointon has asserted, the portrait miniature was a highly invested artefact, fusing both economic and sentimental value, though one which before the last few decades of the eighteenth century, at least, was essentially the preserve of the gentry and aristocracy.⁴⁵

Though probably originally exchanged as intimate and highly private tokens of love and affection, upon the death of the individual depicted, portrait miniatures might be adapted to perform a more solemn task, either through publicly conveying grief connected to the loss of that individual, or utilised as a more private and portable means of personal remembrance and commemoration.

In some cases, this conversion might be a physical one, in which the portrait miniature itself was materially altered and re-set within a casing - usually black or with a befittingly dulled finish - more suited to mourning wear.⁴⁶ Such examples can be seen in the mid-seventeenth-century portraits of both the widowed Lettice Digby (c.1580-1658), who had been in mourning for nearly forty years, and the portrait of another, rather younger widow, who is depicted wearing a black bejewelled miniature locket pinned to her dress.⁴⁷ [FIG. 129] Similarly, Scarisbrick has also noted the additional verses which John Hervey, 1st Earl of Bristol (1665-1751), wanted specifically added to the reverse of his late wife's portrait miniature, so that the piece

⁴⁴ For a general overview of the chronological development of the miniature portrait in England, see: R. Walker, *Miniatures: Three-Hundred Years of the English Miniature Illustrated From the Collections of the National Portrait Gallery* (London: NPG, 1998).

⁴⁵ Pointon, M., "'Surrounded with Brilliants": Miniature Portraits in Eighteenth-Century England', *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 83, No. 1 (Mar., 2001), pp. 48-68.

⁴⁶ Scarisbrick has also highlighted a mid-seventeenth-century bracelet slide, thought to be set with the portrait miniature of Lady Brilliana Harley; the back is enameled with *memento mori* symbols, including a skull and crossbones, which may have been a later addition, subsequent to her death in 1643.

D. Scarisbrick, *Portrait Jewels: Opulence & Intimacy from the Medici to the Romanovs* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2011), pp. 122-3.

⁴⁷ Unknown Artist, 'Lettice, Baroness of Offaly', (c.1650-58). The Bowes Museum, Acquisition Number: O.81; Unknown Artist, 'Reputed Portrait of Jane Bromley, as a Young Widow', (c.1640-50). National Trust, Lacock Abbey, Accession Number: NT 996380.

should recall: “the various graces God and nature had adorned her with, to remain in our family as an incentive for future daughters of it to emulate”.⁴⁸

Thus, the portrait miniature, as well as offering an immediate and direct manner through which to recall and retain a likeness of the deceased, also helped to secure and preserve an idealised and lasting image of the dead individual’s ‘social body’. Correspondingly, Llewellyn has also pointed to the particular utility and function of pictures in early modern England, as a unique and matchless means of visually sustaining and upholding the memory of specific individuals.⁴⁹

It was certainly a function which was discernibly employed by Frances, Duchess of Lennox and Richmond (1578-1639), following the sudden death, in 1624, of her third husband, Ludovick Stuart, 2nd Duke of Lennox and Duke of Richmond (1574–1624).⁵⁰ In more than one portrait, such that shown in Figure 130, which was painted around a decade after his death, the Duchess is portrayed prominently displaying a heart-shaped portrait miniature of her husband; this exclusive mourning article was originally created around 1605, painted by one of the pre-eminent miniature portrait artists of the day, Isaac Oliver.⁵¹ **[FIG. 130]**

Indeed, the Duchess remained in (fashionable) mourning for the rest of her life, and the portraits she commissioned not only advertise her wealth and social status, but in a similar manner to other seventeenth-century aristocratic widows - such as Lettice Digby and even Katherine, Duchess of Buckingham – she also astutely projects and presents herself as an “idealised image of widowhood”. In dutifully honouring and preserving her husband’s memory – through the wearing of mourning dress and the continued display of his portrait miniature – Frances has assumed a socially prescribed role, as both a faithful wife, and what Stephen Collins has described as “a sort of animated gravestone”.⁵²

⁴⁸ D. Scarisbrick, *Jewellery in Britain 1066-1837: A Documentary, Social, Literary and Artistic Survey* (Norwich: Michael Russell, 1994), pp. 214-15.

⁴⁹ Llewellyn, *Art of Death*, p. 96.

⁵⁰ For example, a portrait painted around the same year as her husband’s death depicts the Duchess wearing a small round black miniature case, closed and affixed to her left breast, whilst it also appears that she is sporting a black enameled mourning ring, worn on her left hand. Unknown Artist, ‘Lady Frances Howard, Duchess of Lennox and Richmond’, (c.1624). National Trust, Wyne Estate, Hampshire, Accession Number: NT 719442.

⁵¹ Oliver, Isaac, ‘Ludovic Stuart, 1st Duke of Richmond and 2nd Duke of Lennox’ (c.1605). National Portrait Gallery, London, Accession Number: NPG 3063.

⁵² Collins, S., “‘A Kind of Lawful Adultery’: English Attitudes to the Remarriage of Widows, 1550-1800”, in P. C. Jupp and G. Howarth (eds.), *The Changing Face of Death: Historical Accounts of Death and Disposal* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), pp. 36-9.

This is not to say, of course, that the feelings on the part of Frances were disingenuous, and indeed Clare Gittings has particularly pointed to the persistent and unrestrained mourning, as well as the seemingly sincere depth of feeling, publicly and openly articulated by the Duchess, following the death of her husband.⁵³ In wearing the portrait miniature, Frances Stuart was able to establish a continued connection between both herself and her husband, though, as Pointon has suggested – and this is ultimately true of all mourning jewellery – it also served a more ambivalent and contrary function, helping “both to underscore absence and to defend the possessor against it”.⁵⁴

Manipulating Remembrance

As the use of portrait miniatures suggested, other individuals, widows in particular, also utilised mourning jewellery as a subtle and shrewd means of directing and manipulating post-mortem remembrance; it was an expedient approach, particularly when the events surrounding the death of the individual in question had, perhaps, been less than savoury.

Both of these portraits, for example, depict the widowed Katherine, Duchess of Buckingham (d.1649), sombrely dressed in mourning and prominently displaying a portrait miniature of her dead husband, George Villiers, 1st Duke of Buckingham (1592-1628).⁵⁵ [FIG. 123]

The unpopular Buckingham had certainly died in less than auspicious circumstances, after he was assassinated, stabbed to death in 1628, by a disgruntled former soldier who had served under him; though a Royal favourite and an influential statesman, Buckingham was not a popular figure amongst sections at Court, or even well liked in popular society more generally, with attempts even being made to impeach the Duke in 1626.⁵⁶

The conspicuous exhibition of the portrait miniature – “a mingling of the realms of the posthumous and the living” – is perhaps a move by Katherine, not only to try

⁵³ Gittings, C., ‘Expressions of Loss in Early Seventeenth-Century England’, in Jupp and Howarth, *Changing Face of Death*, pp. 25-6.

⁵⁴ Pointon, “Surrounded with Brilliants”, pp. 57, 68.

⁵⁵ Beaubrun, Henri (attr. to), ‘Portrait of Lady Catherine Manners, widow of George Villiers, 1st Duke of Buckingham’, (c. 1628-32). Private Collection, Bridgeman Education, Image Number: MOU83979; Dyck, Sir Anthony van, ‘Katherine Manners, Duchess of Buckingham’, (c.1633). Belvoir Castle, Bridgeman Education, Image Number: BEL465973.

⁵⁶ R. Lockyer, ‘Villiers, George, first duke of Buckingham (1592–1628)’, *ODNB*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2011.

and counteract the memory and legacy of her husband's unseemly demise and rather notorious reputation, but also to try and portray herself as a virtuous, dignified, and faithful wife, dutifully commemorating her husband's memory and publicly articulating her grief.⁵⁷

Helt has suggested, for example, that during the early modern period, widows (particularly, aristocratic widows) served as "sites of memory", actively shaping, manipulating, and amending, the "ritual performance of remembering" and playing an influential role in establishing or determining the "memory of a 'good death'".⁵⁸

Elizabeth Honig has similarly examined the idea of the 'Good Widow', a socially constructed ideal which gained currency during the Tudor period, in which a widow was expected not only to be a guardian of the children, custodian of her husband's material goods, but also a faithful "preserver" of his memory.⁵⁹

In another portrait, painted around five years after the murder of Buckingham, Katherine is again depicted dressed in black mourning attire, and conspicuously displays her portrait miniature of the Duke; surrounded by her three young children, the family unit is also overlooked by the Duke himself, with his portrait included in the background of the composition.⁶⁰ [FIG. 124] Kate Retford has suggested that the inclusion of images of the deceased in these elite family groupings in a sense provided a "bulwark against absence", helping to "fill the worrying gap created by the premature loss of the head of the household".⁶¹

The rather melancholy and sombre composition certainly stands in sharp contrast to the happy family group previously depicted in 1628 by Gerrit van Honthorst, featuring Buckingham with his wife and two young children.⁶² However, Katherine has astutely presented herself in these later portraits as conforming to the ideal of the 'good widow', commemorating and honouring the memory of her

⁵⁷ For further information concerning the role of portraiture in the remembrance and memorialisation of the dead, see: Retford, K., 'A Death in the Family: Posthumous Portraiture in Eighteenth-Century England', *Art History*, Vol. 33 (2010), pp. 75-97.

⁵⁸ Helt, J. S.W., 'Memento Mori: Death, Widowhood and Remembering in Early Modern England', in A. Levy (ed.), *Widowhood and Visual Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), pp. 39-40.

⁵⁹ Honig, E., 'In Memory: Lady Dacre and Pairing by Hans Eworth', in, L. Gent and N. Llewellyn (eds.), *Renaissance Bodies: The Human Figure in English Culture c. 1540-1660* (London: Reaktion, 1995), pp. 63-9.

⁶⁰ Dyck, Sir Anthony van (studio), 'Katherine, Duchess of Buckingham, with her children', (c.1633). Government Art Collection, Lancaster House, London, GAC Number: 2174.

⁶¹ Retford, 'Death in the Family', pp. 75, 80-1.

⁶² Honthorst, Gerrit van, 'George Villiers, 1st Duke of Buckingham with his Family', (c.1628). Royal Collection Trust, Windsor Castle, RCIN: 406553.

husband (through the use of mourning jewellery), and acting as a “dynastic bridge”, surrounded by her children, emphasising the continuity of the ancestral line and the hereditary succession of her son, George Villiers, 2nd Duke of Buckingham (1628-87).⁶³

In publicly donning mourning dress (in some cases for the remainder of their lives), wearing mourning jewellery, controlling remembrance strategies - such as the erection of funeral monuments and epitaphs - as well as distributing inscribed memorial rings or other commemorative tokens, widows and other family members were active participants in the process of remembrance, exercising visual, material, and written means through which to influence and inform the “social afterlife” and memory of the deceased individual.⁶⁴

Another proactive step taken by the bereaved through which to influence the remembrance and commemoration of the deceased, can also be seen in the mourning rings which were made following the death of William Jenkyn, in 1685; Jenkyn was a non-conformist Presbyterian minister, who had died whilst imprisoned for his refusal to swear an oath in support of the Anglican Church. His children, clearly alive to the propaganda value of such commemorative tokens, distributed funeral rings in memory of their father, “with this Posie, *William Jenkyns, murder'd in Newgate*”.⁶⁵

Moreover, the very fact that Jenkyn had been particularly denied the solace of taking prayers with visitors or family during his final months perhaps also added a further poignancy and significance to the provision of mourning rings in his memory. In echoing the very sentiments of Jenkyn himself, (who had lamented, whilst imprisoned: “A man might be as effectively murder'd in Newgate as at Tyburn”) the inscription on the rings succinctly conveyed the anger and grief felt by his family concerning the events that had resulted in his death.

The memorial rings not only honoured the memory of William Jenkyn himself,

⁶³ Retford, ‘Death in the Family’, p. 81.

Though depicted as a dutiful mother and a devoted preserver of her husband’s memory, Katherine did actually go on to re-marry – rather controversially – a few years later, in 1635.

⁶⁴ This was a term coined by Nigel Llewellyn, in reference to the role of the post-Reformation funeral monument (the ‘Monumental Body’) in celebrating and maintaining the “social presence of the subject’s ‘Political Body’”.

Llewellyn, N., ‘The Royal Body: Monuments to the Dead, For the Living’, in, Gent and Llewellyn (eds.), *Renaissance Bodies*, pp. 220-240.

⁶⁵ J. Tutchin, *A New Martyrology: or, the Bloody Assizes: Now Exactly Methodized in One Volume. Comprehending a Compleat History of the Lives, Actions, Trials, Sufferings, Dying Speeches, Letters, and Prayers of all those Eminent Protestants, who fell in the West of England, and elsewhere, From the year 1678, to this present time...* (London, 4th Edition, 1693).

but also, perhaps, offered a cathartic outlet for his supporters to express their feelings regarding the State's treatment of Jenkyn. These mourning rings were not just a personalised commemorative token, but in highlighting and acknowledging Jenkyn's ultimate fate, they were also (in a similar vein to some of the Charles I and Jacobite jewellery) a subversive and speaking act of defiance. These small tokens of protest, though perhaps also offering some scant consolation for the wearers, might also have embodied the express hope of seeking some sort of redress, whilst venerating and respecting the moral conviction and fortitude of Jenkyn, in the face of officially-sanctioned condemnation and imprisonment.⁶⁶

The giving and wearing of memorial rings and mourning jewellery was just one method (other public commemorative strategies, of course, included sermons, epitaphs, and funeral monuments) by which both testators and the bereaved might attempt to secure, influence, and shape an individual's post-mortem reputation and memory; in giving away rings inscribed with such a provocative dedication, Jenkyn's family were making clear choices in their attempts to dictate and colour the way in which Jenkyn was to be evoked and remembered.

Other less virtuous prisoners might also turn to mourning jewellery as a useful means of securing remembrance, or as symbolic mark of a 'good death' faced under duress. One criminal, for example, supposedly bestowed a mourning ring upon his betrothed, as token of farewell and affection:

Ten Malefactors under Sentence of Death were carried from Newgate to Tyburn...and all behaved in a decent Manner...Parsons...A little before his Death, he ordered a Diamond Mourning Ring, of Ten Guineas Value to be made, with the following inscription, *William Parsons, Ob. 11th Feb. 1750-1, Aetat. 33*. The Motto was, *When this you see, Remember me*, which Ring he presented to a certain young Lady as the last token of his Affection for her.⁶⁷

Similarly, over twenty-five years later, another condemned criminal on the way to execution turned to mourning jewellery as a practical means of offering a final mark of regard and remembrance. The poignancy of his fate, and the tender pathos expressed in the gift of a mourning ring to the unhappy companion he left behind, may have been journalistic embellishment, but it was, perhaps, also a genuine tactic

⁶⁶ The entry in the ODNB also states that not only did Jenkyn's daughter give out mourning rings, but she also erected a monument to him in 1715, describing him as a "prisoner and martyr". E. C. Vernon, 'Jenkyn, William (*bap.* 1613, *d.* 1685)', *ODNB*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008.

⁶⁷ News, *Old England* (London, England), Saturday, February 16, 1751; Issue 360.

of an individual attempting to solemnise and commemorate their leave-taking, by offering a last farewell and a material symbol of both himself and the relationship:

...the parting scene between Turwood and his friends, was beyond description affecting. The behaviour of the young man was manly, and at the same time resigned...When the unhappy Richard Turwood, convicted for robbing his master of eleven guineas, was put into the cart on Wednesday morning at Newgate, a well-dressed young woman in deep mourning, to whom he was said to be contracted, got upon a bench, and conversed with him for a considerable time: with the greatest difficulty, as his arms were tied, he placed a mourning-ring upon her finger; then bid her an affectionate adieu, and she was taken from the cart by her friends in the most violent agitation of mind.⁶⁸

Clearly, mourning jewellery was not always just a simple token of remembrance, to be donated in a will or distributed at a funeral; it had the potential to incorporate many implicit and assorted functions, and was serviceably bequeathed, used, and received, by an ever-increasing array of individuals and mourners.

Making a ‘Good Death’ and Remembering Loved Ones

In her overview of will-making and the experience of death in early modern London, Vanessa Harding has suggested that the attachment of many individuals to their personal and household goods, meant that the disposing of them might be “as much an emotional as a financial project”.⁶⁹ In bestowing their own jewellery, or in leaving bequests for the purchase of rings, it is clear that mourning jewellery had the ability to act as a tool of “social cohesion”, offering testators and mourners a practical, material, and visible means of remembering and marking the various significant ties of kinship and attachment.⁷⁰

Beaver classifies the preparation of the will as a critical first phase in the ritual mortuary process, and a “significant preliminary event” in the early modern “symbolic preparation for death”. It was at this point in the “process of dying”, which marked a move towards the “separation” and “closure” of a dying testator’s position within the family and wider parish community. In considering their final wishes, making provision for dependents, and dispensing bequests and remembrances, the

⁶⁸ News, *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* (London, England), Friday, October 31, 1777; Issue 15200.

⁶⁹ Harding, V., ‘The Last Gasp: Death and the Family in Early Modern London’, in J. Kelly and M. A. Lyons (eds.), *Death and Dying in Ireland, Britain and Europe: Historical Perspectives* (County Kildare: Irish Academic Press, 2013), p. 88.

⁷⁰ Becker, *Death and the Early Modern Englishwoman*, p. 110.

aim, ultimately, was to “effect a peaceful commemoration”, orderly, prepared, and reconciled towards their eventual demise.⁷¹

Similarly, Elizabeth Hallam has also drawn attention to the “ritualized practices” surrounding the making of the will, as the actions, speeches, gestures and bequests of the testator became “imbued with emotional, social and spiritual meanings”.⁷² In making their will, or in addressing the audience gathered around the deathbed, various individuals turned to the bequest or distribution of jewellery as a means of marking their passing, remembering loved ones, and providing a material token of attachment and regard.

Hallam and Hockey, for example, have likewise suggested that will-making and the giving of tokens at the deathbed was “an important part of the social practice of memory” in early modern England; they contend that mourning jewellery – whether as a testamentary bequest or a gift personally imparted – could have a “significant impact on the ways in which the deceased was subsequently remembered”.⁷³

It is no wonder then that numerous early modern testators turned to mourning jewellery at such a critical juncture, indeed some testators were bothered enough to concern themselves with such considered bequests of mourning rings or the careful distribution of a personal commemorative token, even as they lay weakened and afflicted upon their deathbeds. In her study of gift-exchange in early modern England, Ben-Amos has similarly pointed to the “special gifts” which might be offered to offspring at the deathbed, as parents looked to use jewellery and other household possessions to dispense “final symbols of enduring sentiments and bonds” amongst their children.⁷⁴

Tellingly, for example, the day before Ralph Josselin made his will in 1683, he had recorded in his diary: “I was as swelled, and short breathed as if I should not have [lasted the] night, but god had mercy on me”.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, though obviously in a considerably weakened and uncomfortable state, (Josselin was dead less than three

⁷¹ Beaver, “Sown in Dishonour, Raised in Glory”, pp. 394, 398-401.

⁷² Hallam, E. A., ‘Turning the Hourglass: Gender Relations at the Deathbed in Early Modern Canterbury’, *Mortality*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1996), p. 80.

⁷³ Hallam and Hockey, *Death, Memory and Material Culture*, pp. 164-7.

⁷⁴ I. K. Ben-Amos, *The Culture of Giving: Informal Support and Gift-Exchange in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 154.

⁷⁵ Personal Records: Diary of Ralph Josselin, 31.05.1683.

months later) he still made careful monetary provision, so that his two daughters might each be provided with mourning rings as his “last legacy to them”.⁷⁶

Similarly, Martha Langford’s nuncupative will of 1659 testifies to the consequence that some individuals clearly ascribed to the significance and import of mourning jewellery, potentially providing as it did, a functional means of evoking, denoting and embodying the memory of the deceased and their relationship to the chosen recipients. Langford’s recollected stipulations (made before her death around a fortnight later) included the bequest of a few items of clothing and personal belongings, but the main provisions were concerned with the gift of her own two rings - given to her female “cousins” - as well as “mourning rings” bestowed upon seven other specified individuals.⁷⁷

In 1666, John Meeke, a gentleman from Poplar, was recorded in his nuncupative will made very shortly before his death, as having bestowed his ring upon the man he appointed as his sole legatee and executor, whilst also declaring that he did not wish to see his family as he lay upon his deathbed:

...Calling & speaking unto Jonathan Magwick of Poplar...said as followith vizt Jonathan Magwick here Take my Ring and I doe give unto thee...all my Estate both Reall and psonall and I doe make thee my whole and Sole Extr; and then the said Jonathan Replied and said Sr you have Kindred shall some of them be sent for, and the said John Meeke replied Noe Noe I never cared for any of them...⁷⁸

Similarly, in 1685, Bridget Loam, a widow from Middlesex, was recorded in her nuncupative will (a scrivener having not been available) made only two days before her death, bequeathing to her executor, and the man entrusted with the care of her daughters, a ring as a symbol of the confidence she had bestowed in him:

About ten...in ye Evening...Bridget Loam...lying then sick of the sickness whereof she...died...That George Everett...Shipwright was her only friend in ye world and that shee could trust no other pson besides him...that ye said George Everett should take all her goods and Chattells into his hands and dispose of them in Order to ye payment of her debts and she did likewise desire that [he]...would take care of ye sending down her two daughters Mary and Martha into ye Country to their Grandfather...and shee did likewise give to ye said George...a Gold ringe and a pair of Silver buckles and did make him...Executor of her said Will...⁷⁹

When Richard Thomas made his will in August 1665, he looked to use mourning jewellery not as a farewell token given at the deathbed, but rather sought to bestow rings upon his family, as a means of preparing for the worst eventuality. In

⁷⁶ Earls Colne, ERO D/ACW20/79 D/ACR10/144: Ralph Josselin, 01.06.1683.

⁷⁷ Earls Colne, PROB11/291/329: Martha Langford, 10.02.1659.

⁷⁸ Middlesex, MS 9172/59; Will Number: 58.

⁷⁹ Middlesex, MS 9172/73; Will Number: 83.

looking to order his affairs, as well as having given some obvious forethought to his prospective post-mortem remembrance and commemoration, Thomas was preparing for a 'good death' as far as that was possible. Obviously prompted by the Great Plague ravishing London, Thomas recorded in his will his intentions "to goe into the Country to visit friends", bestowing rings of twenty shillings apiece upon his mother and widowed cousin, in recognition of it "being a sickly time, And not knowing how the Lord may deale with mee" he sought to make adequate preparations, which in Thomas' case turned out to be rather percipient.⁸⁰

The pronounced degree of geographical mobility across early modern England meant that often, children and family members were absent from home as their parent, sibling, or close kin, lay dying.

It was perhaps in recognition of the particular efforts made by "mr John Drake of Kighly in the County of Yorke" in coming to see Joshua Lister, that when he made his will in 1705, the Middlesex victualler, not only bequeathed to Drake, "five pounds towards his Charges of Coming to Town", but he was also acknowledged with the gift of a mourning ring and a pair of gloves.⁸¹

A mourning ring or jewel might even stand as a material substitute for the physical presence of the individual, providing a tangible link between those who were separated, but marking the enduring bonds of sentiment and regard, even after death.

For example, when Valentine Belton, a widow from Southwark made her will in 1665, amongst the detailed bequests of her household goods and personal possessions, she specified that a male acquaintance "in the County of Leicester", was to have "my Gold ring and one silver dish".⁸² When Jone Williams, a widow from Clerkenwell, made her will in 1665, seemingly without children, she instead, though lying "weake in bodie", made sure to remember her "loving Mother...in the County of Kent" with the thoughtful bequest of a personal token, bequeathing to her, "my wedding Ring" along with all her household goods.⁸³

The bestowal of a mourning ring might often have been an expedient commission, particularly when the death of the individual in question had been particularly sudden or their demise rapid; furthermore, as Anne Lawrence has noted, the typically short interval between deaths and funerals during this period naturally

⁸⁰ MS 9172/58; Will Number: 57.

⁸¹ Middlesex, DCP/K/C/06/MS 25628/46; Will Number: 37.

⁸² Surrey, DW/PC/5/1665; Will Number: 16.

⁸³ Middlesex, MS 9052/15/6; Will Number: 356.

prevented attendance at either for those relatives and relations who lived at any great distance, and so some testators obviously took pains to ensure that these individuals were still remembered and acknowledged.⁸⁴ Harding has similarly noted the promptness with which pre-modern burials took place, in which the interval following death may have been only a few days.⁸⁵ In his study of the parish registers of St Mary Woolnoth for the second half of the seventeenth-century, Stephen Porter also found that the majority of corpses were “buried within a maximum period of 72 hours after death and that often the interval was much shorter”.⁸⁶

Before the eighteenth century, one of the enduring notions in the fulfilment of a ‘good death’ might also incorporate the conferral of a last parental blessing upon children, as fathers and mothers tried to ensure family harmony or dispensed their concluding words of counsel and advice.⁸⁷ In 1625, Millicent Lucas, a widow from Middlesex, being “sicke and weake in Body”, also chose amongst the legacies she left to her two sons, that “my weddinge ringe” would be kept in trust for her son, Richard, who was at that time absent from home, upon “his voyage wherein he is now employed”. Though instructing that the ring, along with all her other possessions, would be passed on to her remaining son, should Richard “depart out of this lyfe before his returnne home from his said voyage”, Lucas was clearly endeavouring to set aside a personal token of her leave-taking, providing a memento which linked mother and son in remembrance of one another.⁸⁸

According to Scarisbrick, in seeking to promote a sense of familial solidarity and harmony, where once there had been conflict and discord, Cicely Goodman – who had succeeded in reconciling her sons after a family quarrel – in 1583 left to each one of them a ring inscribed with her initials, date of death, and the rather expressive posy: ‘CONCORDIA FRATRUM’ [‘PEACE BETWEEN BROTHERS’].⁸⁹ **[FIG. 122]**

⁸⁴ Laurence, A., ‘Godly Grief: Individual Responses to Death in Seventeenth-Century Britain’, in R. Houlbrooke (ed.), *Death, Ritual and Bereavement* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 65.

⁸⁵ V. Harding, *The Dead and the Living in Paris and London, 1500-1670* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 187.

⁸⁶ S. Porter, ‘Death and Burial in a London Parish: St Mary Woolnoth 1653-99’, *London Journal*, Vol. 8, 1 (1982), pp. 76-80.

⁸⁷ Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family*, p. 188.

⁸⁸ Middlesex, MS 9172/36; Will Number: 193.

⁸⁹ D. Scarisbrick, *Rings: Symbols of Wealth, Power and Affection* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993), p. 52.

An almost identical ring to the one described by Scarisbrick, can be found in the British Museum. The circular bezel is decorated with a white enamelled death’s head, surrounded by the inscription:

Margarett Candishe's nuncupative will of 1592 also utilised the gift of a mourning ring to ensure that her son was remembered and acknowledged, as well as a symbolic token given in the hope that both of her sons (the second of whom she had appointed executor) would be good to one another: "to my Sonne Roger Candishe my ring of gold wth a Deathes head trusting that my Sonne Edward will be good to his brother whome I have alreddy advanced".⁹⁰

In 1665, Hugh Peasly's nuncupative will shows that one of his prevailing concerns in the days before he died, was to see that his brother would inherit a mourning ring with personal and family associations; upon his deathbed, being "Sick of the Sickness whereof he dyed", in granting the rest of his estate to his wife, Peasly made just one other bequest: "He gave to his Brother William Peasly the Ring which was his Father's".⁹¹

For married women, in particular, due to their "restricted control of property", and their "limited opportunities to bestow more tangible benefits upon their children", this last "exercise of matriarchal power", perhaps, gained an even greater degree of importance.⁹² It is testament to the emotive significance of mourning jewellery, that women might mark or incorporate their final blessing with the distribution of mourning rings to their children.⁹³ John Evelyn's mother certainly did, and he recorded the poignant scene that passed between them, as his mother lay dying in 1635:

Therefore summoning all her children then living (I shall never forget it), she expressed herself in a manner so heavenly, with instructions so pious and Christian, as made us strangely sensible of the extraordinary loss then imminent; after which, embracing everyone of us she gave to each a ring with her blessing and dismissed us.⁹⁴

Ben-Amos has also drawn attention to these deathbed exchanges, with parents bestowing rings upon their children, conferring blessings upon their offspring, and bidding a last farewell. With the growing recourse to such personal mementoes during the post-Reformation era, some perhaps enhanced further with the addition of

'FÆLIX.CONCORDIA.FRATRVM:' ['A HAPPY CONCORD OF BROTHERS']. The back of the bezel is also inscribed with three initials, the letter H over IA, presumably commemorating members of the same family.

British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1521.

⁹⁰ Surrey, DW/PC/5/1592; Will Number: 80.

⁹¹ Middlesex, MS 9172/57; Will Number: 90.

⁹² Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family*, pp. 189-90; Becker, *Death and the Early Modern Englishwoman*, p. 155.

⁹³ Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family*, p. 189.

⁹⁴ W. Bray (ed.), *The Diary of John Evelyn* (London: MW. Dunne, 1907), p. 7.

personalised inscriptions, Ben-Amos had contended that such gift-offering indicated the dying parent's desire to sustain memory, and support the close and intimate bonds with their children. Unlike mourning dress, the giving of these small intimate tokens of personal remembrance – in line with the exchange of rings at other pivotal moments of relationship affirmation – came to “cement generational ties” and visibly “signal bonds of affection and commitment”.⁹⁵

Indeed, it was not just mothers, siblings too might also bestow jewellery upon their family as a final blessing and as a fond remembrance of their enduring love and affection. In 1661, for example, Susanna Perwich, though lying upon her deathbed, made a deliberate display of allocating her own rings as tokens of remembrance which were given to her immediate family:

[She] distributed to everyone according to her own mind, her several Rings to be worn distinctly, as she directed, by her Father, Mother, and Sisters; two of these rings she put upon her fingers, and taking them off again, gave them to be kept for her two Brothers beyond the Sea, as a token to them from her dying hand...⁹⁶

However, even for executors tasked with supplying mourning rings to those who warranted a token of remembrance, yet had been unable to attend on the dying individual or who had missed the funeral obsequies, the process could be a seemingly convoluted and drawn out business.

In November, 1724, for example, Edward Harley, 2nd Earl of Oxford, following the death of his father in May, 1724, wrote to Jonathan Swift, informing him: “I desire your acceptance of a ring, a small remembrance of my father. How shall I send it to you?”⁹⁷ Writing from Dublin at the beginning of December, Swift engaged a friend, based in London, to collect the ring on his behalf: “He is very kind and has promised me his Father's Picture; and (by the way) has a Ring for me, which I desire you will be so kind as to get from him, and send by the first Person you know who comes hither”.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Ben-Amos, *The Culture of Giving*, pp. 155-6.

⁹⁶ J. Batchiler, *The Virgins Pattern* (1661), quoted in, Becker, *Death and the Early Modern Englishwoman*, p. 132.

⁹⁷ Edward Harley, 2nd earl of Oxford, "Edward Harley, 2nd earl of Oxford to Jonathan Swift: Monday, 13 November 1724," In, *Electronic Enlightenment Correspondence*, edited by Robert McNamee et al. University of Oxford. < <http://dx.doi.org/10.13051/ee:doc/swifjoOU0030038a1c> >.

⁹⁸ Jonathan Swift, "Jonathan Swift to Charles Ford [Samuel Bridges]: Friday, 8 December 1724," In, *Electronic Enlightenment Correspondence*, ed. McNamee et al. < <http://dx.doi.org/10.13051/ee:doc/swifjoOU0030041a1c> >.

At the beginning of 1725, however, letters reveal that Swift had still not yet managed to obtain the ring, and, in fact, the whole business dragged on into the summer of that year. In August 1725, Swift again wrote to his friend in London, after receiving a letter from the Earl in July, reminding him about the memorial ring:

I had a Letter yesterday from the Earl of Oxford, telling me that he had his Fathers Picture ready for me. And I remember he desired I would get somebody to call for a Ring which was to be a Memorial of His Father; and I desired you to do that Favor for me; but his or your both being out of Town prevented it. For my Lord says nobody called for it...I entreat you would see him, and so to concert Matters, that I may have the Picture and Ring, and that both may be lodged with You, the Ring sent me by some private Hand; and the Picture kept till it can be sent conveniently. I suppose it may go by long Sea; or as you please.⁹⁹

Nevertheless, Swift's endeavours in writing to various friends in London, in an attempt to acquire the mourning ring, had obviously still not met with success, as Edward Harley wrote again to him in September, 1725, in an attempt to finally try and conclude the matter, which – from the writing of the original letter in November, 1724, to Swift finally receiving the ring – had dragged on for almost a full year:

I am vexed that the trifle of the ring should not have reached you; I found where the fault lay; I hope you will soon receive both the picture and the ring safe: I have ordered them to the care of Erasmus Lewis, Esq; our old friend, and he is a punctual man...so I hope this method will not fail that I have now taken. I would not be wanting in the least trifle, by which I might shew the value and esteem I have, and always must and will have for you.¹⁰⁰

In bequeathing money for the future purchase of a mourning ring, or with testators who relied upon the discretion and diligence of their executors to provide mourning rings for their intended recipients after their decease, as well as those mourners who sought to commission and direct the specific fashioning and design of a bespoke piece of mourning jewellery, the process of actually obtaining the anticipated memorial token could be a drawn-out and convoluted business.

Where rings or monetary bequests for their purchase had been specified by the testator, the gap in receiving these gifts might also depend upon how quickly the probate process was completed. Registering the will, obtaining a grant of probate, appointing executors who would then administer the estate, and the drawing up of an inventory took time and money; many executors must have looked to their primary

⁹⁹ Jonathan Swift, "Jonathan Swift to Charles Ford [Samuel Bridges]: Saturday, 25 August 1725," In, *Electronic Enlightenment Correspondence*, ed. McNamee et al. < <http://dx.doi.org/10.13051/ee:doc/swifjoOU0030086a1c> >.

¹⁰⁰ Edward Harley, 2nd earl of Oxford, "Edward Harley, 2nd earl of Oxford to Jonathan Swift: Monday, 10 September 1725," In, *Electronic Enlightenment Correspondence*, ed. McNamee et al. < <http://dx.doi.org/10.13051/ee:doc/swifjoOU0030092a1c> >.

and most pressing concerns, such as organising the funeral, settling debts and paying necessary expenses and dispensing the foremost legacies, before even thinking about (or having the required funds) for obtaining mourning jewellery and making plans for its delivery.

Indeed, some testators even specified in their wills, that their bequests of mourning rings were not to be given before a certain time, or had inserted a prescription into their wills permitting the executor a lengthier period of time within which to ensure their instructions were appropriately fulfilled. Moreover, the length of time testators set for their bequests of mourning rings to be realised, could vary significantly between individuals. For example, John Markham, a gardener from Middlesex, specified that the forty shillings apiece which he bequeathed to his brother and sister was “to be paid them imediatlie after my decease to buy them Ringes if they please”;¹⁰¹ in contrast, when John Smith, a ship-carpenter made his will in the same year, including among his bequests twenty shillings to his cousin “to buy him a Ringe”, as well as a ten shilling piece of gold to his brother-in-law, “as a memoranda of mee,” he instructed that his executrixes would pay all of the legacies “within halfe a yeare after my decease”.¹⁰²

Whilst some testators clearly hoped that their beneficiaries would receive the legacies they had intended for them as quickly as possible after their deaths, other individuals might indicate a couple of months, and, in some instances, even up to a year or more to see their bequests dispensed. Rather surprisingly, for example, when Mary Morgan, a widow from London made her will in 1704, in granting rings to her daughter, granddaughter, and two grandsons, she distinctly specified that they were to have: “ten shillings a piece to buy each of them a morning Ring at three yeares after my decease”.¹⁰³

The Healing Effects of Mourning Jewellery

In thinking about the role and function of mourning jewellery, the iconography which was employed or adopted can also reveal something about the way in which mourning jewellery was used and how testators and the bereaved viewed it as a suitable and applicable approach to personal mourning and remembrance. With prevalence of *memento mori* imagery – discussed in Chapter 2 – which was used to

¹⁰¹ Middlesex, MS 9052/6; Will Number: 185.

¹⁰² Middlesex, MS 9172/35/2; Will Number: 212.

¹⁰³ MS 9172/97; Will Number: 99.

decorate mourning jewellery throughout much of the period, even well into the eighteenth century, the presence of the dead was still vividly acknowledged and explicitly alluded to in the majority of the mourning jewellery produced and worn during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The skulls, skeletons, coffins, and various other symbols of mortality, not only explicitly implied the corruption and death of the ‘natural body’ of the deceased individual commemorated, but such iconography also concurrently provided the wearer with a conspicuous reminder of their own future demise. Thus, a mourning ring, or jewel, could be a surprisingly complex piece, not merely an unassuming token of remembrance, but often loaded with meaning, encompassing statements about past, present, and future relationships, and offering – through the medium of *memento mori* – a didactic means by which the dead could still address the living.

In a sense, by displaying and acknowledging the very presence of death itself, through visual signs and symbolism, mourning jewellery could also help to “extend the process of death”; thus, in serving not only to sustain the memory and presence of particular individuals, but, also, by “placing death in life”, these objects fulfilled a “therapeutic” role, aimed at “softening” the impact and potentially damaging effects of bereavement.¹⁰⁴

Equally, Llewellyn has pointedly contended that, the “visual culture of mourning” – encompassing artefacts such as jewellery – was aimed squarely at the bereaved, particularly in a post-Reformation England, in which the living subsequently had little to do with the fate of the deceased. Though testators obviously bequeathed items of mourning jewellery and looked to supply tokens of remembrance, Llewellyn perceives the leading function of such items as providing a means of serving the *living*, primarily by easing the “psychological burden of bereavement”.

Memorial jewellery was a wearable approach to mourning, through which a bereaved individual could look to “spread the potentially damaging effects of loss”; by offering a token of remembrance and a connection to the absent individual, mourning jewellery was not just intended as a means of memorialising the dead, but also a memento “designed to release a palliative emotional response”.¹⁰⁵ As Houlbrooke comparably suggested, the retention and wearing of mementoes

¹⁰⁴ Llewellyn, *Art of Death*, pp. 85, 95, 134, 136.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

connected with the dead, might help to “assuage grief” or provide some sort of comforting link to the dead, particularly during moments of intense grief and personal distress.¹⁰⁶

Furthermore, Clare Gittings has also suggested, that as the desire for personal remembrance grew more important and the secular elements of the funeral ritual assumed an ever-greater significance, that mourning jewellery could exert a “powerful healing effect”, helping to realise the reintegration or “regeneration of the social group”.¹⁰⁷ Through the giving of funeral gifts and mourning rings, the fracturing consequences of a death within the community or family might be “mitigated”, creating and fostering a sense of continuity and collective solidarity.¹⁰⁸ In a similar manner, Arianne Fennetaux has also suggested, that by the end of the eighteenth century, mourning jewellery – now less an indicator of social rank and status – fostered and created, instead, “communities of sympathy”, constructed around shared feelings of sentiment and attachment to the deceased.¹⁰⁹

It is, of course, difficult to confidently reconstruct and measure supposed changes in emotion and affective relations over the course of this period, though mourning jewellery does offer the historian, at least, a physical manifestation of one of the ways in which thousands of bereaved early modern men and women, expressed and represented their own feelings of grief and loss.¹¹⁰ There are, of course, also issues surrounding the psychology of sentimental and mourning objects, and the extent to which they can really be viewed as a faithful representation of the emotional bonds between individuals, an accurate illustration of personal sentiment, or a fitting expression for the full intensity of feeling experienced following a bereavement.

Significantly, Clare Gittings, in studying the funeral practices and commemorative strategies existent across early modern England, has argued that, particularly from the early decades of the seventeenth century onwards, there was a “major revolution in attitudes towards life and death”. In her view, a transformation in

¹⁰⁶ R. Houlbrooke (ed.), *Death, Ritual and Bereavement* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 15.

¹⁰⁷ C. Gittings, *Death, Burial and the Individual in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 158, 160.

¹⁰⁸ Gittings, C., ‘Sacred and Secular: 1558-1660’, in, P. C. Jupp and C. Gittings (eds.), *Death in England: An Illustrated History*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), pp. 153, 159, 169.

¹⁰⁹ Fennetaux, A., ‘Fashioning Death/Gendering Sentiment: Mourning Jewelry in Britain in the Eighteenth Century’, in, *Women and the Material Culture of Death*, ed. M. D. Goggin and B. F. Tobin (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), p. 33.

¹¹⁰ Laurence, A., ‘Godly Grief: Individual Responses to Death in Seventeenth-Century Britain’, in, *Ibid.*, p. 62-76; Llewellyn, *Art of Death*, p. 28

mortuary and mourning practices during this period, clearly reflects the “commemoration of the dead with greater individuality”, which was, in turn, stimulated by the “irrevocable loss and change [felt] when an individual died”.

For Gittings, a growing emphasis on the “unique individual”, produced increasing problems for those left behind when that individual subsequently died, and this helps to explain “changes in how the dead were commemorated”. She sees in an atmosphere of post-Reformation “uncertainty” surrounding death, that there was an “increasing focus on the impact of loss on the bereaved”, a re-direction of emphasis centred upon the expression of “personal relationships” and the increasingly open display of grief on the part of the *bereaved*.¹¹¹

Certainly, the period did witness an increase in the production and prevalence of personalised memorial jewellery, though whether it can be patently ascribed to a rise in the somewhat protean concept of ‘individualism’ is rather less clear.¹¹² Furthermore, until the last quarter of the eighteenth century, the *memento mori* imagery and iconography of much of the mourning jewellery produced predominantly tended to centre the attention firmly upon the deceased and the concept of Death itself. It was only with the introduction of miniature mourning scenes, typically featuring grief-stricken females melancholically draped over tombs, coupled with the inclusion of sentimental mottoes, that the focus seems to have fundamentally shifted onto the bereaved, granting an overwhelming primacy to the mourner and celebrating *their* experience of grief and loss.

The Changes in Mourning Jewellery Iconography: A Rising Culture of Sensibility

Gittings’ interpretative framework, in centring upon the “uniqueness and importance” of each individual, maintains that changing perceptions of the self in early modern England had a fundamental impact on mortuary practices and attitudes towards death. A heightened sense of individuality meant that the period was characterised by an increasing “anxiety” over death, which led to a “mounting desire for worldly remembrance”.¹¹³

Within this developing “unease” surrounding death and mortality, Gittings also recognises a cause for the distinctive changes in imagery and iconography which

¹¹¹ Gittings, ‘Expressions of Loss’, pp. 19-32.

¹¹² Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family*, pp. 1-2.

¹¹³ Gittings, *Death, Burial and the Individual*, pp. 9-11, 13-14, 146, 160.

occurred over the course of the eighteenth century. In conjunction with analogous developments occurring on gravestones and in other forms of mortuary art, there was, of course, an undeniable evolution in the motifs used to adorn and decorate the mourning jewellery of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.¹¹⁴

The uncompromising imagery of *memento mori* had provided a “direct and unequivocal reminder of physical decomposition”, however, particularly after the mid-eighteenth century, such morbid depictions of death and decay were swiftly replaced with “far softer images”, characterised by the dominant popularity and ubiquity of Neo-classical scenes and devices, by the end of the period.

Gittings sees in this rapid shift towards Classicism - with which the “older, more direct representation of death was completely ousted by the gentler, more sentimental images” - a clear indication of a “major shift in attitudes”. As the skulls, coffins, and skeletons, gave way to urns, weeping willows, and cherubic messengers, Gittings suggests it was not merely a change in fashion, but a complete revolution in sensibility. In her view, the “trauma” which now accompanied the death of the unique individual, led to mourning devices which effectively sought to “swathe the reality of decomposition in a Romantic aura”, essentially “masking and denying the actuality of death”.¹¹⁵

Sarah Tarlow has also offered similar conclusions, seeing in the decline of *memento mori* devices during the eighteenth century an increasing aversion to the physical processes of bodily decay and corruption. She suggests that the “highly individualized” character of the deceased as a “unique person”, meant that it was “no longer appropriate to think of the dead in terms of putrefaction”, or as a means of offering an objective moral warning to the living. Instead, “grief replaced fear as the dominant emotion of death”, and “new metaphors” developed, which sentimentally and metaphorically alluded to the death of the individual commemorated: “blessed sleep replaced wormie clay as the body – individualized, beautiful and beloved – rested in peace”.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ See Chapters 2 and 3 for a fuller discussion concerning the chronology and detail of these stylistic developments.

¹¹⁵ Gittings, *Death, Burial and the Individual*, pp. 125, 149.

See also: P. Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 461.

¹¹⁶ Tarlow, S., ‘Wormie Clay and Blessed Sleep: Death and disgust in later historic Britain’, in, S. Tarlow and S. West (eds.), *The Familiar Past?: Archaeologies of later historical Britain* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 183-197.

The surviving material evidence certainly confirms the arguments of Gittings and Tarlow, that into the later eighteenth century, the grim *memento mori* images, depicting bodily decay and decomposition, were “no longer so accepted or so acceptable”.¹¹⁷ Vivienne Becker has, likewise, suggested, that the replacement of the skull or death’s head motif with more sentimental and allegorical mourning scenes, reflected a society, which “no longer wished to look death directly in the face”; instead, in its place, mourning jewellery was fashioned, which “contemplated the sorrow of those left behind”.¹¹⁸

This is not to say, of course, that the skeletons and death’s heads which had adorned so much of the mourning jewellery of the past three hundred years, disappeared entirely; indeed, hundreds of items have survived, evidently kept and retained – though not necessarily worn – by their owners.

For example, in 1783, an advertisement appeared appealing for the recovery of 4 mourning rings which had been stolen from a house in Essex; surprisingly, one of the rings, commemorating the death of a woman less than a year previously, is described as being decorated in a much more traditional manner: “a Fancy Mourning Ring, with the Figure of Death, the Hour-Glass, &c. and inscribed ‘Margaret Colen, ob. 1st September, 1782, aged 41;’”.¹¹⁹

Thus, it would seem that a few mourners, at least, were still comfortably resorting to the use of *memento mori* imagery, even at this rather late date. Perhaps it reflected the outlook of a more traditional individual, who did not see anything amiss in the use of such seemingly archaic decoration; likewise, the ring may also have been a re-cycled or reconditioned piece, with the inscription added to a ring produced according to designs, which had been in vogue some decades before.

Nevertheless, the overall sea-change in aesthetics in the mourning jewellery of the later eighteenth century, during which – as Fennetaux suggested – “death was euphemized into sentiment”, may have had an opposing effect, in actually making death *more* conspicuous.¹²⁰ Pointon has suggested, for example, that the very notion of a mourning jewel in itself, is something that “not only commemorates, but makes

¹¹⁷ Gittings, *Death, Burial and the Individual*, p. 213.

¹¹⁸ V. Becker, *Antique and Twentieth Century Jewellery: A Guide for Collectors* (London: NAG Press, 1980), pp. 88-9.

¹¹⁹ Classified ads, *Daily Advertiser* (London, England), Friday, March 14, 1783; Issue 17205.

¹²⁰ Fennetaux, ‘Fashioning Death/Gendering Sentiment’, pp. 33-4.

death visible”.¹²¹ Admittedly, it was now a vision of mortality that was euphemised and romanticised, but in the increasing utilisation and recourse to mourning jewellery, these pieces were an explicit proclamation and open display of bereavement and remembrance on the part of their wearers.

Furthermore, in its very makeup, the memorial jewellery of the later eighteenth century was perhaps even more noticeable than its sixteenth-, seventeenth-, and early eighteenth-century counterparts. For example, Shirley Bury has suggested that whereas the heavily-faceted rock-crystal covers of the typical Stuart mourning ring or memorial slide meant the compositions contained inside were obscured and private, the characteristically sizeable memorial pieces of the later eighteenth century were “easily visible”, their contents revealed through covers of thin and un-faceted glass or crystal.¹²²

The substantial miniature mourning scenes and outsized hair-work compositions of the eighteenth century not only overtly asserted their subject matter and proclaimed their mourning function, but the inclusion of sentimental and personalised mottoes also provided a suitable means of individual remembrance and commemoration. Some of the poignant memorial mottoes included in these compositions included demonstrative dedications such as: ‘No time his dear Remembrance can Remove’;¹²³ ‘Not lost but gone to bliss’,¹²⁴ and, ‘affection weeps Heaven Rejoices’.¹²⁵

Mitigating Tragic or Untimely Deaths

Mourning and Memorialising Children

This final motto was included on a mourning ring that was made to commemorate the death of a three-year old girl, who had died in 1794. There has, of course, been much debate – most influentially from historians such as Lawrence Stone and Philippe Ariès – centring around the presumed changes in affective relations within families, and the supposed existence of ‘parental indifference’

¹²¹ Pointon, M., ‘Valuing the Visual and Visualizing the Valuable: Jewellery and its Ambiguities’, *Cultural Values*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (1999), p. 8.

¹²² S. Bury, *An Introduction to Sentimental Jewellery* (London: HMSO, 1985), pp. 36, 40.

¹²³ Museum of London, Museum Number: 62.120/33.

¹²⁴ Museum of London, Museum Number: 62.120/100.

¹²⁵ Museum of London, Museum Number: 62.120/93.

concerning the emotional responses to the deaths of infants and children during the early modern period.¹²⁶

It does seem, however, certainly from the surviving material evidence at least, that mourning jewellery was increasingly utilised into the eighteenth century by bereaved parents as a suitable means through which to express and articulate the feelings of grief and loss which accompanied the death of a child. The sentimental and affecting inscriptions commemorating both parents and children, which were repeatedly included in the mourning rings, slides and brooches, perhaps also attests to the idea that these belongings reflect an increasing focus on the smaller family unit, in which the “emotional intensification of the nuclear family” finds concurrent expression in the mourning jewellery of the period.¹²⁷ In the closing years of the eighteenth century, for example, a mourning brooch, enclosing hair and featuring a typical Neoclassical scene of a woman weeping by a funerary urn, has also been personalised with the addition of an overarching motto at the top of the composition, which reads: ‘SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF DEAR PARENTS’.¹²⁸

The role of mourning jewellery as an emotive mourning accoutrement within the family might also be enhanced through the emotional poignancy evident in those pieces which mourned more than one individual, as well as jewellery which was kept and worn over the course of several years, to those pieces which held a particular family significance, associated with certain individuals or which commemorated other previously deceased family members, and were thus held on to, passed on and re-bequeathed as family heirlooms. For example, when Elizabeth Costillo, a widow from Surrey, made her will in 1744, she bestowed only one mourning ring, bequeathing to her son a cherished token of family remembrance which she generally wore herself; with this keepsake, Costillo also provided a short explanation as to the significance of the gift, and which would, in being passed on, also serve to connect three successive generations of the family: “I likewise give the mourning Ring I usually wear (which was given me by my late mother) unto my dear son John Costillo”.¹²⁹

In advertising the discovery of a ring, suspected to have been stolen in 1729, the individual who hoped to return it to its rightful owner, by asking for the correct

¹²⁶ See: R. Woods, *Children Remembered: Responses to Untimely Death in the Past* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006).

¹²⁷ Brewer, J., and Porter, R., (eds.) *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 5.

¹²⁸ V&A, Museum Number: 938-1888.

¹²⁹ Surrey, DW/PA/5/1745; Will Number: 19.

identification of the biographical inscription included upon the piece, tellingly chose to describe it as “a Family Mourning Ring”.¹³⁰ Perhaps the lavishness of the materials or the specificity of the design indicated to the finder that this was not the generic and disposable gold funerary band of the type suggested by Pointon, but rather a precious family memento which would be missed.

Additionally, it is interesting to note that when armed burglars plundered the London dwelling house of a Mr. Grubb in 1777, amongst the items which were advertised as having been stolen were several mourning rings. However, it was only an old mourning ring, dedicated to the memory of a family member, which the owner specifically recalled and described in any great detail: “a mourning ring, the middle stone out, two sparks on each side, inscribed, ‘A. Grubb, obiit 11th March, 1722’”. The fact that Grubb could precisely recall the biographical details and carefully describe the appearance of a mourning ring which was over fifty years old, attests to the significance and emotional attachment which some individuals must have ascribed to these relics of family mourning and remembrance; in contrast to Grubb’s familiarity with an old family mourning ring (which though in poor condition must originally have been an opulent piece having been set with diamonds), the other pieces were perhaps those which had been acquired more generally, for they are merely described as “many other mourning rings”.¹³¹

In considering the recourse to mourning jewellery as a means of mourning children, Gittings has particularly suggested, that as death became an even greater trauma for the bereaved, that profound feelings of loss dominated and shaped responses to bereavement and death.¹³² It might be suggested, therefore, particularly with the changes in imagery and the increasing recourse to sentiment and feeling, which occurred over the course of the eighteenth century, that mourning jewellery offered a particularly beneficial outlet for parents looking to mourn and commemorate the memory of their children.

This is not to say, of course, that children were never mourned or commemorated through the use of mourning jewellery before this time, as has been evidenced by the actions of some seventeenth-century parents, such as Mary and

¹³⁰ Classified ads, *Daily Post* (London, England), Saturday, July 12, 1729; Issue 3061.

¹³¹ Classified ads, *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* (London, England), Friday, November 12, 1777; Issue 15218.

¹³² Gittings, *Death, Burial and the Individual*, pp. 58-9, 80-2.

Ralph Verney,¹³³ or John Evelyn, who upon the death of his five-year-old son, Richard, in 1658, distributed mourning rings to various friends and relations at the funeral:

...to our inexpressible grief and affliction, five years and three days old only...I distributed rings with this motto: 'Dominus abstulit' ['The Lord has taken away']...Here ends the joy of my life, and for which I go even mourning to the grave.¹³⁴

Nevertheless, there does seem to be an increasing amount of inscribed and personalised mourning jewellery, which was specifically created in the eighteenth century, in order to mourn the deaths of children and, most noticeably, babies and infants.¹³⁵

It should also be noted that there is strong evidence that children themselves were also the owners and wearers of mourning rings during this period, with diminutive examples found in both the Fitzwilliam and Science Museum collections.¹³⁶ Similarly, in 1727, a newspaper advertisement, which detailed the loss of a jewellery box, also noted that the contents included: "seven or eight Mourning Gold Rings, two of them small for Children".¹³⁷

In the same year, another newspaper advertisement also appealed for the return of a lost or mislaid "Mourning Ring, with a stone in it", informing readers that the motto on it read: "Anna Clifton Æt. 14 Days".¹³⁸ Another mourning ring – contemporarily styled, enamelled in white and set with a large rose-cut diamond – also commemorated the death of a baby who had died in 1742, at the age of only eight months.¹³⁹ Similarly, in 1785, a newspaper notice advertised the theft of:

...an enamelled Mourning Ring, with a Hair Device under a Chrystal Stone, a Willow and an Urn, and J.C. on the Urn; Jane Culverwell, obiit 19th Oct. aetatis 9 Months, is also inscribed around it.¹⁴⁰

The deep sense of loss obviously felt by many parents at the demise of such young children is perhaps also telling through the way in which they obtained

¹³³ See Chapter 3 for further information.

¹³⁴ W. Bray (ed.), *The Diary of John Evelyn* (London: MW. Dunne, 1907), pp. 320-22.

¹³⁵ See, for example: Museum of London, Museum Number: 62.120/43; 62.120/76; 62.120/48 V&A, Museum Number: M.373-1923; 864-1888; M.162-1962; British Museum, Museum Number: AF.1718.

¹³⁶ V. Avery, M. Calaresu, and M. Laven (eds.), *Treasured Possessions: From the Renaissance to the Enlightenment* (London: Philip Wilson Publishers, 2015), pp. 237, 272; Science Museum, Object Number: A641567.

¹³⁷ Classified ads, *Daily Courant* (London, England), Monday, May 1, 1727; Issue 7969.

¹³⁸ Classified ads, *Daily Post* (London, England), Tuesday, March 21, 1727; Issue 2337.

¹³⁹ V&A, Museum Number: M.28-2006.

¹⁴⁰ Classified ads, *Public Advertiser* (London, England), Friday, August 19, 1785; Issue 15986.

mourning jewels characteristically featuring carefully rendered mourning compositions, perhaps incorporating the hair of the child, designs to which parents also consciously included personalised details and attached tender commemorative inscriptions.

For example, a mourning pendant from 1790, fashioned to appear like a contemporary signet or seal, and which might also have been worn by a father attached to a fob chain, has been sensitively personalised in memory of the deceased child; upon a background of woven hair, the characteristic Neoclassical composition features a white enamelled urn supported on a pedestal which is inscribed with the child's initials and date of death. This small reliquary of parental love has been further enhanced, however, with a dedicatory and emotive inscription, around the border of the pendant, encircling the urn, which reads: 'SACRED.TO.THE.MEMORY.OF.AN.ADOPTED.CHILD'.¹⁴¹

The stark sense of heartache and the expression of sentiments which detailed a life cut short are also heightened through the often precise and careful way in which mourning parents had the exact ages of their infant children added to the personalised memorial inscriptions and engravings to be found upon several pieces of eighteenth-century mourning jewellery.¹⁴² As the previous newspaper advertisements illustrate, some parents were obviously utilising mourning jewellery as a means of commemorating and memorialising the short lives – sometimes of only a few days – of their infant children. Perhaps these carefully inscribed pieces not only served as a refined mark of a parent's grief, but also acted as something of a bulwark to memory, materially recording and recalling the transitory and fleeting presence of their absent children. One of the earlier examples, of this approach to the use of mourning jewellery, can be seen in this memorial slide, dating from around 1700. Though still utilising the starker *memento mori* imagery typical of the period, featuring an enamelled figure of a skeleton holding an hourglass and a dart, the more sentimental and individual additions of a hairwork component and a dedicatory inscription are also in evidence; upon a ground of tightly woven blonde hair, the initials of the young child have been added in gold thread, whilst the back of the slide is also inscribed

¹⁴¹ Avery, Calaresu, and Laven (eds.), *Treasured Possessions*, pp. 11, 272.

¹⁴² See also, for example, Museum of London, Museum Number: 62.120/76. An oval pendant brooch, decorated with cherubs, which commemorates the death of John Savill, who died in 1790 aged 2 years and 8 months.

with the age and date of death: 'IC obt 6 July æta: 3ye:8mo'.¹⁴³ [FIG.138] A slightly later piece, also featuring hairwork set under a cover of rock crystal, the mourning buckle commemorates the death of another young child, with an intricately realised inscription composed from looping gold thread set over the hairwork panels, recording the child's name, age and date of death: 'Hannah Kill/ Dyed 17 AP/Aged 3 years/ & 8 Days/ 1725'.¹⁴⁴ [FIG.139]

One of the most opulent examples of mourning jewellery fashioned in response to the death of a child, can be seen in the mourning ring which was produced to commemorate the death of Henry Harley, son and heir of the 2nd Earl of Oxford and his wife Lady Henrietta Cavendish, who lived for only four days in October 1725. The dual tragedy of losing both a new born son as well as the dynastic implications of a great aristocratic family having lost the future male heir, is clearly apparent in the decoration of the ring. The lavish heraldic enamelling at the back of the bezel, which is set with a large sapphire, features a colourful depiction of the family crest and arms. The emotional pathos of the family's bereavement is further commemorated with the careful addition of an inscription around the outside of the white enamelled hoop recording the name and the dates of birth and death, whilst the inside of the band features the tender and expressive dedication: 'UNE.VIE.SI.COURT.GRAND.AFFLICATION' ('So short a life, great sorrow'). Rather affectingly, two small crystal obelisks set at either side of the bezel also reveal the poignant addition of locks of hair, obviously collected to be retained and set within this mourning ring.¹⁴⁵

Indeed, many of the mourning jewels made to mourn the deaths of children were particularly lavish in their design and composition, obviously commissioned by parents with a keen eye for detail, who had carefully prescribed the inclusion of particular images or the addition of tender dedicatory inscriptions.

For example, this late eighteenth-century mourning ring which, according to the engraved inscription on the back of the bezel, commemorates the death of Butterfield Harrison, who died in March, 1792 aged only 2 years, 9 months and 14 days. The large oval bezel features the rather delicate depiction of three white rosebuds (perhaps representing three children from the same family) sprouting from a ground seemingly

¹⁴³ V&A, Museum Number: M.11-1960.

¹⁴⁴ V&A, Museum Number: 1581-1902.

¹⁴⁵ D. Scarisbrick, *Rings: Jewelry of Power, Love and Loyalty* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2007), pp. 179-83.

composed from chopped up hair; in one of the stems, however, the rose head has been cut off, falling to the ground, obviously symbolically representing the dead Butterfield, cut off in the flower of his youth, before he could blossom into adulthood, a feeling echoed in the motto arching over the three flowers, which reads: ‘NIP’T IN THE BUD’.¹⁴⁶ **[FIG.140]** A mourning ring featuring the very same motto and concurrent imagery was also made, as the inscription on the back of the bezel reveals, ‘In Memory of Augusta Bruce’; simpler and less lavish, the composition in this mourning ring lacks the more vibrant colour and delicate enamel decoration of the previous piece, the picture executed rather in dour sepia tones, in which two stems are depicted in full flower, whilst a closed bud again falls to the ground.¹⁴⁷ **[FIG.141]**

The delicate mourning pendant made following the death of ten-month-old Henry Halsey, in 1798, for example, not only features a miniature landscape intricately carved from ivory and framed with pearls, but the reverse is also inscribed with the sustaining verse: ‘Fond Parents grieve not for thy Infant Son Your God has called him and his Will be done’.¹⁴⁸ **[FIG. 131]**

Two almost identical mourning rings – likely made for the parents or close family members of a three-year-old girl who died in 1769 – both feature an urn composed from the hair of the deceased, and are inscribed on the back of each bezel with the name, age and date of death.¹⁴⁹ **[FIG. 132]**

Perhaps one of the most affecting examples of mourning jewellery produced following the death of a child, however, was created towards the very end of the period. Depicting, in a typical Neo-classical style, both mother and father weeping disconsolately beside an urn, the enamelled dedication around the piece informs the viewer that the ring is: ‘SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF 5 CHILDREN’, who are each named individually on the reverse of the bezel.¹⁵⁰ **[FIG. 133]**

An even starker mourning token which records the deaths of several children, can also be found in an understated and rather austere gold mourning ring dating from

¹⁴⁶ V&A, Museum Number: M.162-1962.

¹⁴⁷ Science Museum, Object Number: A641560.

¹⁴⁸ V&A, Museum Number: M.112-2007.

¹⁴⁹ Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, Accession Number: 1927M308 and 1927M309.

¹⁵⁰ Museum of London, Museum Number: 62.120/98.

Another mourning ring which commemorates the deaths of several children is also recorded in the Crisp Collection of memorial rings (No.632). Painted on ivory with seven cherubs’ heads, surrounding the words: ‘To eternal bliss’, the ring memorialises the seven children from one family, all under the age of 10, who died in a housefire in London in 1782. B. Marsh (ed.), *Memorial Rings: Charles the Second to William the Fourth, in the Possession of Frederick Arthur Crisp* (Grove Park Press, 1908), pp. 6, 197.

1801, the sombre and restrained nature of the piece perhaps indicating that it was intended for the children's father or another male family member. The outside of the hoop is simply inscribed with the initials and ages (ranging from 16 to 2 years) of the seven deceased children, picked out in gold letters upon a ground of black enamel; the directness with which the children have been recorded around the outside of the hoop is made even more poignant by the straightforward but rather heartrending engraving, around the inside of the band, which would be known only to the wearer of the ring, recounting the dreadful swiftness with which this young family was wiped out: 'Died from the 16th to the 23rd Feby. 1801'.¹⁵¹

With such tender and involved commissions, it is no wonder then, that some parents subsequently must have sought to pass on these treasured and personal tokens of family remembrance and loving commemoration to other family members after their deaths. In 1745, for example, Raphael Dent, a baker from Middlesex, who had been preceded by his wife and children, not only made preparation in his will that he would be buried as near to them as would be conveniently possible, but he also made bequests gifting the personal mourning rings he had in his possession. In particular, he requested that his niece was to have: "my late Wifes Mourning Ring which she had made and wore in Remembrance of my said Children"; to his brother (also joint executor), along with his watch, he also passed on to him: "the Mourning Ring which I had made for my said Children".¹⁵² Perhaps these two mourning rings, made for both a mother and a father were comparable to the matching pair made in 1769 discussed above; in bequeathing both rings to his surviving family members, Dent was passing on emotive family memorial tokens, mourning not just himself, but also his dead wife and children, connecting dead and living kin together in a web of ongoing remembrance.

Lost at Sea

Another striking utilisation of mourning jewellery can be seen in some other surviving eighteenth-century pieces which were made to commemorate the deaths of those who had died in battle or who had been lost at sea. It was, perhaps, the lack of a body to bury, or the closure and healing effects which might have been felt in

¹⁵¹ V&A, Museum Number: M.18-2004.

¹⁵² Middlesex, DCP/K/C/06/MS 25628/86; Will Number: 22.

organising and attending the expected funeral obsequies, which prompted the bereaved to particularly commission these items of mourning jewellery.

The trauma and perhaps violent or unseemly nature or events surrounding these deaths, whilst they might be alluded to in the piece, the imagery and inscriptions which these mourning objects showed, tended to be sentimentally idealised, whilst the attractiveness of the piece itself, perhaps also went some way towards obscuring and offsetting the unpalatable realities of the individuals' actual demise.

This mourning plaque, probably originally worn as a bracelet attached to strings of seed pearls, features a small Neoclassical scene, in which a female mourner plaintively holds out her arms to what appears to be a sinking ship in the distance, whilst a winged cherub points to the same, and a dove ascends to heaven. A typical sentimental inscription of 'NOT LOST BUT GONE BEFORE' tops the composition, whilst the back of the piece is engraved with a dedicatory inscription: 'In Memory of Henry Bryne of the Andromeda'; perhaps commissioned by a loving wife, who represented herself in the piece, she was able to console herself with this mourning token, when Captain Henry Byrne, was drowned in October 1780, after the said twenty-eight-gun frigate was lost during a hurricane in the West Indies.¹⁵³ **[FIG.142]**

One of the most affecting pieces of this genre of mourning jewel, most likely commissioned by a bereaved wife and mother, is a mourning brooch or pendant, which actually commemorates the deaths of three separate individuals from the same family. Featuring an intricately rendered miniature, which also incorporates strands of hair, the animated mourning scene shows two beseeching figures huddled in a rowing boat which is being dashed against the rocks, whilst a large ship in the background founders in the waves. **[FIG.143]**

The scene depicted recalls the actual events surrounding the deaths of two of the individuals commemorated in the piece; in a surrounding border of white enamel, a dedication can be read: 'JAMES GILBARD OB 2 SEP 1786 AET 58', whilst the back of the piece is also inscribed: 'Willm Gilbard ob 2 Sepr 1786 aet 15'.¹⁵⁴ A contemporary newspaper report from a month later recounts the events surrounding the two deaths, of a ship's captain and his son, during a hurricane in Barbados:

¹⁵³ Royal Museums Greenwich, Object ID: MNT0061.

For other objects of mourning jewellery which commemorate those who were lost or died at sea, see: V&A, Museum Number: M.124-1962; Ashmolean Finger Ring Collection, Accession Number: LI1045.13; Royal Museums Greenwich, Object ID: JEW0179; JEW0183.

¹⁵⁴ British Museum, Museum Number: 2008,8007.4.

PLANTATION NEWS. Bridge-Town, Barbados, Sept 9, 1786.

On Saturday night, the 2d, the inhabitants of this island were alarmed by a storm...On Sunday morning Carlisle-bay exhibited the most striking picture of desolation, not a vessel having rode out the storm...Polly and Charlotte, Gilbard...went out in the Storm, and have since returned. Capt. Gilbard, and the two Lads with him, perished in attempting to get on board the Polly and Charlotte.¹⁵⁵

The events surrounding the death, three years previously, of the other individual commemorated in this particular piece of mourning jewellery – the inscription on the back reading: ‘Saml Gibard ob 22 Sepr 1783 aet 16’. – can also be found in a newspaper report of the time:

On Saturday was landed at Tower Wharf the Body of Mr. Gilbard, Son of Capt. Gilbard, lately arrived from Barbadoes; this unfortunate Youth on the 21st, going aloft, fell from the Mizzen-Mast, fractured his Skull, and died in a few Minutes after.¹⁵⁶

The fact that the body of this individual had been returned to the family for burial, perhaps explains why it was only with the drowning and loss of the two subsequent family members a few years later, that a mourning accoutrement was then thought necessary to commemorate all three. Emotionally bereft or experiencing feelings of incompleteness engendered by a death which had occurred so far from home, perhaps meant that the ability to fashion and still mourn the individual with a small, personal and portable monument where there was no grave, gave some solace to the bereaved. Indeed a few pieces even surprisingly managed to incorporate the hair of the deceased - which had, presumably, been recovered from the body and sent back to England for such a purpose – providing a physical memento and a reliquary of the dead individual who was mourned.

The Life-Cycle of Mourning Jewellery

The eventual fate of mourning jewellery - once it had passed into the hands of a mourner at a funeral, or been received by a bereaved individual - was largely dependent upon the type of object itself and the emotional investment expended in the piece.

For those rather more generic rings, which might be handed out in fairly large numbers as part of the lavish funeral provisions of the affluent elite, it is likely that

¹⁵⁵ News, *Morning Herald* (London, England), Monday, November 27, 1786; Issue 1900.

¹⁵⁶ News, *St. James's Chronicle or the British Evening Post* (London, England), September 27, 1783 – September 30, 1783; Issue 3520.

they were regarded objectively as mere token remembrances, which might be dispensed with or soon put away.

Indeed, Oman, suggested, for example, that with the “excessive” distributions of mourning rings, even by the close of the seventeenth century, if jewel caskets were not to become like “portable graveyards”, it is likely that the rings were soon prudently traded back in to a goldsmith or jeweller.¹⁵⁷ Moreover, he suggests that, particularly for well-to-do families, the cumulative accrual of potentially so many mourning rings, reasonably suggests that if these individuals were not to be “overwhelmed” by such a profuse quantity of mementoes, that many must have been exchanged or eventually “melted down”.¹⁵⁸

Pointon has suggested, for example, that the explicit inclusion of “Mourning-Rings”, in the Goldsmiths’ Hall statute of 1739 – which introduced new hallmarking regulation and set the standard permitted for gold at 22 carats – is explained by the fact that the “simple gold bands” being distributed at funerals during this period, were quickly rendered “redundant or recyclable”. Thus, the statute, in recognising that this particular type of mourning ring was largely “disposable”, and “capable of being melted down”, was essentially a move by the Assay Office to try to police and protect the gold standard.¹⁵⁹

Certainly, the records of the Old Bailey, and the numerous appeals for the recovery of stolen items of mourning jewellery, during the eighteenth century, attest to the frequency and commonality with which mourning rings and other jewels must have been habitually pawned, pledged, and sold during this period. Often, it was only through the issuing of tickets or advertisements distributed amongst London’s jewellers and goldsmiths by the Bow-Street runners, that these traders were able to expose the misconduct of the individual from whom they had recently purchased a piece of second-hand mourning jewellery.

Correspondingly, Pointon has also pointed to the “fluid, adaptive, and transformative” character of the eighteenth-century jewellery market, in which it was

¹⁵⁷ C. Oman, *British Rings, 800-1914* (Totowa: Rowman and Littlefield, 1973), p. 75.

¹⁵⁸ Oman, C., ‘Mourning Rings’, *Apollo*, Vol. 43 (1946), p. 73.

¹⁵⁹ Pointon, M., ‘Jewellery in Eighteenth-Century England’, in M. Berg and H. Clifford, (eds.), *Consumers and Luxury: Consumer Culture in Europe, 1650-1850* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), pp. 123-135; Anon., *Extracts from Acts of Parliament for Preventing Frauds in Gold and Silver Wares, and Preserving the Standards appointed for Wrought Plate; and also From the Charters granted to the Company of Goldsmiths of the city of London: With some Notes and Observations thereon* (London, 1773), p. 6.

normal for pieces to be “re-set, repaired, and re-invented into new forms”.¹⁶⁰ It seems this was certainly true even of mourning jewellery, with items being re-fashioned and sold on by jewellers and goldsmiths to customers looking to acquire a suitable memorial token. In 1798, for example, a trial at the Old Bailey recounted the theft of fourteen mourning rings from a jeweller based in Cheapside; in describing the memorial rings, which had been expressly acquired from a specialist ring-maker and offered for general sale, it was noted that some of them were: “family rings of different inscriptions”.¹⁶¹

As time progressed and fashions changed, certain items of mourning jewellery must also have been considered unfashionable or rendered increasingly obsolete, better off being traded in, and exchanged for their monetary value. It was not always as simple as that, however, particularly in a jewellery market in which forms soon developed and changed, swiftly falling in and out of fashion. Though Neo-classical designs might have been all the rage during the last quarter of the eighteenth century, by 1817, an attempt to sell a mourning ring, “with an urn worked in hair”, was quashed by a pawnbroker, who declined buying it, because it was deemed to be too “old-fashioned”.¹⁶²

Equally, of course, some individuals – some of which are represented by the testators of Middlesex and Surrey – must have treasured and cherished their items of mourning jewellery, wearing them still, long after the funeral was over and the appropriate period of mourning was at an end. Newspaper reports which detail items of inscribed and dated mourning jewellery which had been lost or stolen provide some revealing insights about the potential length of time some individuals might continue to wear such tokens of remembrance.

In 1743, one advertisement appealed for the return of: “a small Mourning Ring, engrav’d PAE, Jan. 28, 1702”; thus, before it was lost, this particular mourner had seemingly sported their memorial ring over the course of several decades.¹⁶³ Ten years later, another individual was advertising for the return of: “a Mourning Gold Ring, with a Stone, having this inscription, Eliz. Jones, ob. 24 Aug. 1737, Æt. 42.”,

¹⁶⁰ Pointon, ‘Valuing the Visual’, p. 16.

¹⁶¹ Old Bailey Proceedings Online, April 1798, Trial of William Marson (t17980418-54).

¹⁶² Old Bailey Proceedings Online, July 1817, Trial of James Pitfield, Charles Jackson (t18170702-30).

¹⁶³ Classified ads, *Daily Advertiser* (London, England), Wednesday, August 31, 1743; Issue 3937.

which had been, “Lost...from off a Gentleman’s Finger”; again, this was a mourning ring of some longevity, having been in use for over sixteen years.¹⁶⁴

The physical form of the mourning jewel itself, the deceased individual it was intended to commemorate, and the owner of the piece themselves, understandably, must have exerted a considerable influence upon whether or not it was to be a remembrance token which would be worn and cherished. As has been shown, mourning jewellery was available in a variety of guises, from the simple gold mourning bands, to much more decorative pieces, perhaps featuring miniature mourning configurations, or which might be richly set with gems or elaborate hair-work compositions. The further inclusion of bespoke inscriptions and personal dedications – such as the poignant examples found on two late seventeenth-century mourning rings, which commemorated both a “dear neece”, as well as a mother estimated to be “the Glory of her Children” – might also serve to provide the object with an additional emotive charge, calling to mind a well-beloved and much-missed relative or friend.¹⁶⁵

The emotional connection felt in regard to rings and jewellery, which commemorated close family members, might be a highly charged one, well above the inherent monetary value of the piece. For example, when thieves attempted to take a mourning ring, which a Mr. Pretty, Esq., had “had for his wife”, he was reported to have avowed that he would “defend the ring at the hazard of his life”.¹⁶⁶

Other mourning rings were perhaps less well regarded, whilst the haphazard manner in which they were sometimes acquired meant that owners were often forced to resort to more resourceful ways of wearing and displaying their prized items of mourning jewellery. Some seventeenth-century portraits, for example, depict women sporting rings attached to a black silk ribbon or cord, which is then wound around the wrist. Other individuals also donned mourning jewellery which might be attached to a watch or fob-chain, threaded onto ribbons of velvet, silk, or even hair, which were then tied around the arm, fastened around the neck, or even pinned to the front of the bodice or tunic.¹⁶⁷

The habitual distribution of mourning rings at the funeral which had not been specifically fitted to the hand of each individual mourner, also meant that they might

¹⁶⁴ Classified ads, *Public Advertiser* (London, England), Saturday, September 15, 1753; Issue 5892.

¹⁶⁵ PAS, Finds Database, Unique ID: CORN-0DD6D3; DENO-77F092.

¹⁶⁶ News, *General Evening Post* (London, England), May 31, 1774-June 2, 1774; Issue 6337.

¹⁶⁷ S. Bury, *An Introduction to Rings* (London: HMSO, 1984), pp. 9-10, 24.

be a poor fit or difficult to wear. In 1782, for example, when a man was assaulted and robbed by highwaymen, he was relieved of a mourning ring which he carried in his pocket; the ring, which was later pledged at a pawnbroker for 9s., was soon discovered after the distribution of “hand-bills”, subsequent to which, the stolen item was reported to officers in Bow-Street. In describing the ring itself, the victim noted that he had originally received it from the father of a child to whom he had been engaged to teach music; the white enamelled ring, however, he described as: “too small for me, I was not measured for it”.¹⁶⁸

Similarly, in 1760, a newspaper advertisement showed that despite the best efforts of the owner, an outsized mourning ring had slipped from their finger:

Lost at the Pyed Horse in Chiswell-street, on Monday in the Afternoon, a Mourning Ring, the name Sarah Pickard, with a Bit of black Thread tied to keep it on the Finger, being rather too wide.¹⁶⁹

Some of these personally-owned items of mourning jewellery even went on to assume a dual remembrance purpose, in that they might be passed on and bequeathed again in turn. Susan E. James, has termed these particular kinds of items as “mortuary heirlooms” in being passed on by testators to the next generation, whilst for those testators choosing specifically to leave their own personally-owned mourning rings, she has also proffered the term “legacy rings”.¹⁷⁰ In analysing some of the bequests of mourning rings given by testators, it is sometimes difficult, however, to clearly ascertain whether these items were passed on as keepsakes that betokened a sentimental regard - as in the case of Dent and Costillo - or were merely considered as a valuable possession which was granted as a form of monetary legacy.

In 1697, for example, Joan Woolfe, a spinster from Surrey, left a tender bequest to the grandson of her executor, passing on to him: “my gold Ring that was his mothers funerall Ring”.¹⁷¹ In contrast, in 1705, William Coltman, a Gentleman from Surrey, bequeathed to his daughter: “one of those funeral Rings which are now in my possession”.¹⁷² In 1731, the widowed Elizabeth Cressener, as well as leaving several

¹⁶⁸ Old Bailey Proceedings Online, January 1782, Trial of Francis Curtis and John Coleman (t17820109-21).

¹⁶⁹ Classified ads, *Public Advertiser* (London, England), Wednesday, June 11, 1760; Issue 7987.

¹⁷⁰ James, *Women's Voices* [Chapter 2].

¹⁷¹ Surrey, DW/PC/5/1697; Will Number: 24.

¹⁷² Surrey, DW/PA/5/1705; Will Number: 21.

separate bequests of jewellery and gifts of mourning rings, also willed that her niece should receive: “all my funeral rings”.¹⁷³

In what seems like a much more intimate bequest of valued items of personal mourning jewellery, the widowed Joanna Eccles, also left to her niece: “my Mourning enamelled Ring and a Gold enamelled Ring with a Death’s Head upon it”.¹⁷⁴ Similarly, in 1759, another widow also left meticulous bequests of her personally-owned items of opulent mourning jewellery, itemised through their former connection to the individuals they once commemorated:

I give to my Daughter Anna Maria Pridham a Ring with two Hearts Amethyst and Seven Brilliants. I Give to my Daughter Elizabeth Salter a Mourning Ring with an Amethyst which was Mistress Challis. I Give to my Daughter Mary Pridham a Mourning Ring with four Amethysts which was Mrs Dardenes. I Give to my Son in Law David Salter a Mourning Ring with an Amethyst set in Losenge which was Mr Pridhams...¹⁷⁵

Indeed, several of the newspaper advertisements in appealing for the return or recovery of stolen items of mourning jewellery attest to the large collections of mourning rings which a well-placed eighteenth-century individual could seemingly amass. In 1728, the thieves who had forced open a “Chest of Drawers, in a Gentleman’s Bed-Chamber”, had managed to obtain a whole host of articles, including, “about 19 Mourning Rings”.¹⁷⁶ Similarly, “between 20 and 30 Mourning Rings”, were listed amongst the items stolen from a “Gentleman’s House”, in 1788.¹⁷⁷

In breaking into the house of Thomas James, Esq., burglars were also reported to have stolen the sizeable collection of mourning rings he had obviously acquired over the years, “some of an old and some of a late Date”.¹⁷⁸

Unsurprisingly, the fact that some wealthy individuals clearly owned such a large number of mourning rings also meant that it was impractical that they should wear them all, or even maintain a passing sentimental attachment to such tokens, with many merely stowed away and deposited with other general valuables and expensive personal goods. Tellingly, the individual who advertised the loss – “suspected to be stolen” – of a large collection of “about eighteen Mourning Rings for Friends

¹⁷³ Earls Colne, ERO D/DU234/2: Eliz Cressener widow of Jn, 05.03.1731.

¹⁷⁴ Surrey, DW/PA/5/1745; Will Number: 28.

¹⁷⁵ Middlesex, MS 9172/166; Will Number: 24.

¹⁷⁶ Classified ads, *Daily Journal* (London, England), Saturday, July 13, 1728; Issue 2344.

¹⁷⁷ Classified ads, *Public Advertiser* (London, England), Thursday, February 14, 1788; Issue 16769.

¹⁷⁸ Classified ads, *London Gazette* (London, England), July 1, 1783- July 5, 1783; Issue 12454.

deceased”, was unable to precisely determine when they had first gone missing, but presumed it was probably “within these three Months past”.¹⁷⁹

Other wealthy individuals and members of aristocratic and gentry families occasionally made much more imaginative use of some of the pieces of mourning jewellery they were bequeathed or had inherited.¹⁸⁰ Some resourcefully re-fashioned these tokens to form new items or incorporated them as a striking material component into a new – perhaps more useful or attractive – token of remembrance.

This silver case, probably created sometime in the first half of the eighteenth century by an individual wishing to retain, but perhaps no longer wear these items of mourning jewellery, features a lid which is ornamentally set with a collection of six customary Stuart sentimental ribbon slides; five, feature gold wire monograms set under rock-crystal covers, whilst a sixth, depicts a skeleton, reclining upon a coffin, which is inscribed: ‘MEM-MOR’.¹⁸¹ **[FIG. 135]**

Another particularly unusual use of similar Stuart ribbon slides, can also be found in at least three existent examples of necklaces, the links of which are formed from the individual slides, which have all been adroitly linked together, in order to form a striking necklet and a novel new item of memorial jewellery.¹⁸² **[FIG. 136]**

Finally, one of the most extraordinary examples of mourning jewellery being re-fashioned or re-cycled, can be seen in the ‘Palmerston Gold Chocolate Cups’.¹⁸³ Thought to have been commissioned around 1700, by Anne Houblon, the first wife of Henry Temple, 1st Viscount Palmerston (1676-1757), the cups were made by the goldsmith John Chartier, supposedly from gold obtained from melted down mourning rings.

The attractive but rather diminutive pair of cups were not merely the accoutrements of fashionable social practice, and though used for the drinking of chocolate, the inclusion of pointed inscriptions on both the bases and inside of the

¹⁷⁹ Classified ads, *Public Advertiser* (London, England), Monday, November 21, 1757; Issue 7199.

¹⁸⁰ Some aristocratic and gentry families have still preserved large collections of family mourning rings, such as can be seen at Grimsthorpe Castle, Lincolnshire and Erddig, Wrexham.

D. Scarisbrick, *Ancestral Jewels* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1989), p. 62; National Trust Collections, National Trust Inventory Number: NT 1151673; NT 1151662.1 to NT 1151662.15.

¹⁸¹ British Museum, Museum Number: 1978,1002.242.

¹⁸² Christie’s, *The Phyllis Phillips Collection: Mediaeval and Renaissance Jewellery*, [Sale Catalogue: Wednesday, 13 December 1989 at 3.00 pm] (London: Christie’s, 1989), pp. 46-7; Christie’s, Sale 5217: ‘A collection of ten late 17th/early 18th-century gold mounted memorial and love jewels mounted as a necklace’, London (6 November, 2007), Lot 99; Sotheby’s: ‘A gold necklace mounted with ten Stuart crystal mourning slides and buttons’, London (11 June, 2015), Fine Jewels, Lot 221.

¹⁸³ British Museum, Museum Number: 2005,0604.1 and 2005,0604.2.

handles, maintains a physical and functional link with the original utility of the mourning rings.

The first cup features an inscription around the handle which reads: ‘DULCIA NON MERUIT QUI NON GUSTAVIT AMARA’ [‘He has not deserved sweet unless he has tasted bitter’]; and on the base: ‘MANIBUS SACRUM’ [‘to the shades of the departed’].¹⁸⁴ The second cup contains inscriptions in both English and Latin, one around the inside of the handle which reads: ‘Think on yr friends & Death as the chief’; and on the base: ‘MORTVIS LIBAMVR’ [‘Let us drink to the dead’].¹⁸⁵

Thus, the cups retained an aspect of commemoration, whilst also acting as a tangible *memento mori*, a daily prompt through which to both remember the deceased and contemplate one’s own mortality. **[FIG. 137]**

Furthermore, when Lady Palmerston made her will in 1726 – bequeathing to her husband, “the 2 lesser Chocolate Cups you would sometimes look on as a Remembrance of Death, and also of the fondest and Faithfullest Friend you ever had” – the cups took on an additional function, not only as a *memento mori* and a remembrance of the dead, but also now as a specific and personal memorial to Anne herself. It was a commemorative function that would endure, even after Anne’s death, in 1735, as the cups were preserved, to be bequeathed, in turn, down along the Palmerston family, as a continued token of remembrance and commemoration.¹⁸⁶

Conclusion

Mourning jewellery was utilised throughout the early modern period in a variety of ways and by a variety of individuals. It could stand as a simple token acquired as part of customary funerary practice, soon to be disposed of or forgotten about, or it might be a precious and treasured family keepsake, constantly worn and later passed on again.

A mourner’s emotional attachment to these objects could vary significantly, dependant upon several factors, including how it had been acquired, its intended purpose, the individual it commemorated, the look of the piece itself and the materials used in its construction.

¹⁸⁴ British Museum, Museum Number: 2005,0604.1.

¹⁸⁵ British Museum, Museum Number: 2005,0604.2.

¹⁸⁶ For more information concerning the cups, see the accompanying curator’s comments and acquisition notes.

http://www.britishmuseum.org/about_us/news_and_press/latest_news/palmerston_gold_cups.aspx.

Those who bequeathed mourning jewellery also approached their gift-giving from a variety of angles. For women, and widows in particular, mourning jewellery seemed to offer an increasingly appealing and applicable means of leaving a token remembrance amongst their friends and family, as well as offering a post-mortem bequest which would affirm and mark the various connections within their female network group.

In controlling remembrance strategies and manipulating post-mortem remembrance, the dying and the bereaved also utilised mourning jewellery in a number of imaginative ways. For some testators the bequest of these items was a means of achieving a 'good death', preparing their leave-taking and issuing emotive farewells. In cases where the demise of certain individuals had been particularly tragic or had occurred in less than auspicious circumstances, mourning jewellery might also offer a panacea for the bereaved, a bulwark to memory, or even a piece of commemorative propaganda used to depict and shape remembrance.

As the eighteenth century progressed, the distinct change in iconography from the starkness of *memento mori* to the sentimentalism of the Neoclassical also suggested a change in the function and utilisation of mourning jewellery itself. Whereas the morbid skulls and skeletons had unambiguously proclaimed the presence and fate of the dead, into last quarter of the eighteenth century, the design and preoccupation of mourning jewellery seemed to focus increasingly on the bereaved instead. Perhaps signalling a change to the way in which death was processed and commemorated, the sentimental designs euphemised and beautified death, as well as seeming to embody a preoccupation with the grief of the living. These changes were correspondingly accompanied by an increasing focus on the nuclear family, with husbands, mothers and children, in particular, now lamented and lovingly recalled in the mourning jewellery of the period.

CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSION

*Then let my moments haste away,
My flesh return to lifeless clay,
My spirit fly to worlds unknown,
Beyond where suns or stars o'er shone;*¹

From relatively indeterminate and tenuous beginnings, by the close of the eighteenth century, mourning jewellery had grown and evolved to become a socially pervasive and culturally recognisable custom of remembrance and commemoration.

In its embryonic beginnings before the sixteenth century, the gift of personally-owned items of jewellery had, of course, always afforded men and women of means, with an applicable avenue through which to provide family and friends with a token of affective regard and acknowledgement, or a material keepsake of post-mortem remembrance. Such an ill-defined practice eventually assumed the role of a more formalised custom as the sixteenth century progressed, and in converging with the flourishing tradition of *memento mori*, an identifiable convention was soon established, of testators leaving money to buy a mourning ring in their remembrance, or with the bereaved looking to commission a personalised piece of jewellery to commemorate a deceased friend or relative.

Concurrently, the major religious upheavals and divisions of the sixteenth century had a profound effect on the ways in which the dead were both memorialised and remembered. In a post-Reformation atmosphere of uncertainty and ambiguity, in which the tangible link between the living and the dead had been painfully severed, and where the bereaved were now cut off from assisting and supporting the deceased, *memento mori* imagery provided a reassuring sense of continuity and connection. The previous commemorative framework, structured so intensely around intercessory prayer for the dead and investment in pious provision, had been overwhelmingly swept away, and it was in this atmosphere that other approaches to the remembrance of the dead and new forms of memorialisation now developed and evolved.

Moreover, the didactic and moralising message of mortality, embodied in the morbid decorations of skulls and skeletons, eventually transfigured into the personalised memorial jewel, which, into the seventeenth century, progressively became established as a method by which affluent testators might look to provide close family and friends with a token of regard and remembrance.

¹ Turner, D., 'On Being Presented with a Mourning Ring', in, D. Turner, *Poems Devotional and Moral, in Two Parts* (Henley, 1794), p. 148.

In the longer term, personal commemoration and memorialisation of the individual assumed a new and more noticeable significance, and this is partly reflected in the composition of the mourning jewellery itself, which saw the habitual addition of names, initials, dates of death, commemorative posies, even elements of hair-work added to pieces of bespoke mourning jewellery.

As the custom progressed over the course of the seventeenth century, and became an increasingly popular memorial strategy amongst affluent testators, mourning jewellery might assume a role progressively detached from its original intended function of providing a personalised mark of remembrance and regard.

Some testators and mourners now looked to the generous distribution and display of mourning jewellery as a visual means through which to subtly convey and articulate statements about position, status and social standing. Concurrent changes and fluctuating social currents which dictated and informed the conduct of a 'decent' funeral and the increasing import surrounding the appropriate material trappings and secular elements of the mortuary ritual meant that by the end of the seventeenth century, mourning jewellery was no longer just a simple object of commemoration, but might also be employed to implicitly project the motivations and aspirations of a deceased individual and their family.

The steady establishment and spread of the custom from the second half of the seventeenth century onwards, which can be viewed through a distinguishable sequence of standardised 'types' and prevalent motifs, also indicates the growing popularity of the mourning ring, in particular, as an acknowledged and desirable adjunct to fashionable and recognised early modern mourning practice.

Into the latter decades of the seventeenth and into early eighteenth century, mourning and sentimental jewellery was adopted and utilised more widely and by a broader range of consumer, particularly as the influential middling sorts increasingly shaped and drove the custom as a cumulatively significant and influential consumer base. Additionally, a swelling number of goldsmiths and retail jewellers were seemingly just as enthusiastic to accommodate and supply that demand, introducing new forms and styles, which were increasingly advertised for purchase, available to those the further down the social ladder as well as distant from the Capital.

Mourning jewellery, as both a broadly distinctive element of early modern mortuary ritual, and a discrete personal response to the deaths of specific individuals, could serve a variety of functions. A mourning ring or jewel might offer a

straightforward material token of remembrance, a keepsake that expressed grief and loss, an acknowledgement of the ties of kinship and attachment, through to a funeral accoutrement which articulated notions of social position and tacit status hierarchies. The giving and receiving of mourning jewellery was used to mark relationships, offer a token of thanks, adhere to expected social conventions, whilst also helping to shape memory and remembrance.

Thus, in looking to provide some context to the changes which occurred concerning the consumption and utilisation of mourning jewellery over the course of a three-hundred-year period, has revealed a custom of surprising complexity and import. Recognised and adopted by countless men and women across England, a wealth of surviving material mementoes and the evidence of wills relating the ways in which testators bequeathed mourning jewellery, attest to a mortuary custom that had become conventionally popularised by the end of the period.

Whilst the use of wills and the analysis of testamentary bequests has provided an illuminating insight into the process of personal remembrance and the approach to individual commemorative strategies, they are, perhaps, less informative as a source through which to fully reconstruct and portray all the various facets of the practice in action. The wills, in particular, place a concerted focus on the outlook, attitudes, and concerns of those facing death, but this is sometimes to the detriment of revealing and uncovering the concurrent motivations and actions of the bereaved, which is an important consideration, particularly into the later eighteenth century, as they exerted an increasingly dominant influence upon the development and direction of mourning customs. For example, accompanying the profound change in mourning imagery and iconography which occurred into the last quarter of the eighteenth century, it can also be argued that the emphasis of much of the mourning jewellery produced during this period focussed on the bereaved, their grief, and how they were to cope with the loss of the deceased. Moreover, one of the challenges of studying mourning jewellery has been to try and discover what happened to it once it had been bequeathed or received at the funeral and what role or function it might assume thereafter.

Furthermore, the popularity and prevalence of mourning jewellery, as suggested by the abundant material evidence, particularly into the eighteenth century, is certainly not reflected to the same extent in the sampled wills of the period which make up this study. Though the total proportion of testators specifically leaving bequests of mourning rings shows a steady proliferation into the latter years of the

seventeenth century and into the opening years of the 1700s, from there on there is also a decline in the percentage of testators making specific mention of mourning rings at all. Additionally, the overall percentages of the proportion of testators from Middlesex and Surrey suggest that for many individuals the bequest of mourning rings and jewellery was not a pressing concern when they came to compose their wills and dispense their bequests.

Nevertheless, the testamentary evidence has served to uncover other important underlying features of the custom, proving particularly informative in terms of elucidating the development of the practice as a post-mortem mourning strategy during the crucial progressive stages of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Additionally, the wills have also particularly served to highlight the prominence and power of women and widows as key actors in the bestowal and transmission of mourning jewellery, as well as the significant role it played in articulating the bonds of affection and attachment.

Fundamentally, by the end of the period, mourning jewellery – reflecting trends which emphasised the secular, personal, and private aspects of death – had established itself as a significant method for the remembrance and commemoration of the deceased. It was now an established and conventional mourning strategy, and one which was more attainable and more accessible, than it had been almost a century before.

Into the early nineteenth century as mechanisation and mass production methods increased and dominant styles changed again, personalised mourning jewellery perhaps lost some of its former attraction. Whilst it might be more readily available to those at the lower end of the market, by the end of the Victorian period mourning jewellery had reached its nadir.

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