

The Mourning Rings

Mourning rings were rings made and worn in memory of someone who had died. They were often engraved with the name of the deceased person and their dates. On some occasions a lock of the deceased person's hair would be incorporated into the ring.

Esme Smyth left a mourning ring to her cousin Lewis John Upton Way:

"... the family bible of the late Sir John Smyth and Elizabeth Astry his wife, the two handled silver cup engraved with the Astry arms, the mourning ring and the collection of framed black silhouettes at Ashton Court".

Esme added and re-added many codicils to her will often to take into account that the beneficiary had died. This was the case here, Major Roger Hill Way, Lord of the Manor of Denham, inherited the items, including the mourning ring, which were originally to go to Lewis Upton Way. It is not clear which particular mourning ring this was.

Bristol Museums have a collection of 14 Smyth mourning rings which were given by the Friends of Bristol, Art Gallery in 2014.



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Several rings would have been commissioned at the time of the person's death. Bristol Archives has a receipt from Richard Weeks, a goldsmith, at the Angel at the lower end of High Street Bristol for:

"fifteen of the Best Motto Mourning Rings with [...] & Hairs att 20 Each- - 15.00.00'.

These were ordered for the funeral of Elizabeth Lawford, and form part of the Jarrit Smith papers.

It explains why several of the 14 rings described below are duplicated.

1. Na2504.01 *"Gold hoop with white enamel band on which is inscribed in gilt lettering: 'ANN SMYTH OB: 21 DEC:1760 AE: 68'."* Dated 1726.
2. Na2504.02 *"Gold hoop with black enamel band on which is inscribed in gilt lettering: 'LADY ANN SMYTH OB: 9 SEP 1733 AE 36'. Small rectangular bevel-glazed bezel."* Dated 1733.
3. Na2504.03 *"Gold hoop with white enamel band on which is inscribed in gilt lettering: 'ANN SMYTH OB: 21 DEC:1760 AE: 68'."* Dated 1760.
4. Na2504.04 *"Gold hoop with beaded edges and black enamel band on which is inscribed in gilt lettering: 'DAME.FLORENCE.SMYTH. OB.10 SEP 1767 AE: 66'."* Dated 1767.
5. Na2504.05 *"Gold hoop with finely serrated edges and black enamel band on which is inscribed in gilt lettering: 'SR:JARRIT SMYTH BART OB:18 JAN: 1783 AE: 90'."* Dated 1783.
6. Na2504.06 *"Gold hoop with finely serrated edges and black enamel band on which is inscribed in gilt lettering: 'SR:JARRIT SMYTH BART OB:18 JAN: 1783 AE: 90'."* Dated 1783.
7. Na2504.07 *"Gold hoop with ornately scrolled shoulders supporting a lozenge shaped bezel on which is a small gold-scroll-edged glazed square containing a fragment of hair, black enamel on bezel and shoulders and on hoop with gold lettering: 'IN MEMORY OF' engraved inside 'Jane. Wife of // of // Hugh Smyth Esq'. between 'M.1796' and 'D.1797'."* Dated 1797.
8. Na2504.08 *"Gold hoop with broad band of black enamel between two thin bands of white; black band bears the inscription in gilt letters: THOS SMYTH.ESQ: OB: 11.MAR:1800. AE:60'."* Dated 1800.
9. Na2504.09 *"Gold hoop with broad band of black enamel between two thin bands of white; black band bears the inscription in gilt letters: THOS SMYTH.ESQ: OB: 11.MAR:1800. AE:60'."* Dated 1800.
10. Na2504.10 *"Broad gold hoop, deeper in front; three narrow bands of black enamel separating two rope-twist gold bands; oval glazed compartment containing fragment of hair. Engraved inside hoop: 'Jane Smyth, // Ob. 3 Dec. 1818, Aet 79.'"* Dated 1818.
11. Na2404.11 *"Broad gold hoop, deeper in front; three narrow bands of black enamel separating two rope-twist gold bands; oval glazed compartment containing fragment of hair. Engraved inside hoop: 'Jane Smyth, // Ob. 3 Dec. 1818, Aet 79.'"* Dated 1818.
12. Na2504.12 *"Gold hoop, with serrated edges and broad black enamel band inscribed in gilt letters (gothic script): 'IN MEMORY OF'; engraved inside: 'Lady Smyth Obt 29 Octr 1819 Aet 64'."* Dated 1819.
13. Na2504.13 *"Gold hoop with ornate cast scroll edges, and bezel surround, bezel has glazed rectangular compartment containing interwoven hair, on black enamel, raised lettering on textured ground (gothic script) 'IN MEMORY OF' engraved inside 'Sir Hugh // Smyth Bart. // Ob 28 Jany 1824 // Aet 52'."* Dated 1817.
14. Na2504.14 *"Gold hoop with black enamel on shoulders and oval bezel on which is a single carved white forget-me-not flower within shaped surround. Engraved inside: 'Thos Smyth Upton Esqr // Obt March 10th 1848 // Aet 18 Years'."* Dated 1848.