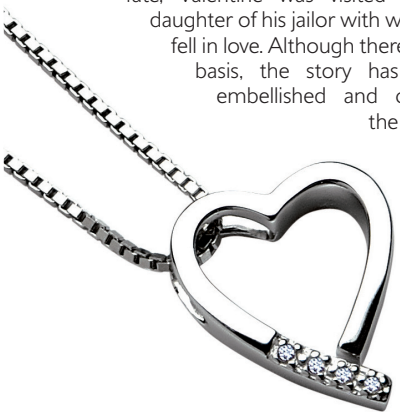


With the Christmas and New Year's festivities behind us we would like to think that the first signs of spring are not far away. But the middle of February is really known for one thing, Valentines Day.

The origins of Valentines Day, which has possibly become the most romantic day of the year, are a little uncertain as it seems that the Catholic church has recognized at least three different saints named Valentine or Valentinus, all of whom were martyred.

However, the Valentine I think we would like to associate with this special day is the story that surrounds Valentine, a romantic at heart priest in the time of Roman Emperor Claudius II. It was said that the Emperor wished to maintain a strong army and considered that married men did not make good soldiers. Consequently he ordered all young men to remain single, however Valentine defied the Emperor and secretly arranged marriages for the young men and women. When the Emperor discovered this defiance he put Valentine behind bars and ordered the priest to be executed on February 14th. Whilst in prison awaiting his fate, Valentine was visited by the young daughter of his jailor with whom he quickly fell in love. Although there is no historical basis, the story has been further embellished and concludes that the evening before Valentine was to be executed he wrote a note to his young lover and on the note wrote "from your Valentine".



While some believe that Valentine's Day is celebrated on February 14th to commemorate the anniversary of Valentine's death, it is also argued that the Christian church in reality may have been "Christianising" the celebrations of the pagan Lupercalia festival.

Apparently at the end of the last day of the festival all the young women in the city would place their names in a big urn. The city's bachelors would then each choose a name out of the urn and become paired for the year with his chosen woman, with these matches often ending in marriage. However it is thought that Pope Gelasius declared February 14 St. Valentine's Day around 498 A.D and at the same time outlawed the Roman "lottery" system for romantic pairing as deemed un-Christian.

In the Middle Ages, where the tradition of courtly love flourished, Geoffrey Chaucer influenced this romantic notion in his poem the *Parlement of Foules* which he wrote to honour the first

anniversary of the engagement of King Richard II of England to Anne of Bohemia.

"For this was Saint Valentine's Day, when every bird cometh there to choose his mate."

It seems it was commonly believed in France and England that February 14th was the beginning of birds' mating season, which in turn reinforced the idea Valentine's Day should be a day for romance. So it was perhaps Chaucer who started the tradition of composing love poetry on what we know as Saint Valentines Day. The oldest known Valentine's or rhymed love letters were sent by the Duke of Orleans to his French wife when he was imprisoned in the Tower of London following the Battle of Agincourt.

It was not until around the seventeenth century that Valentine's Day began to be popularly celebrated, and by the middle of the eighteenth century it was common for friends and lovers in all social classes to exchange small tokens of affection or handwritten notes. Improvements in printing technology led to printed cards beginning to replace written letters. Ready-made cards were an easy way for people to express their emotions in a time when direct expression of one's feelings was discouraged and cheaper postage rates also contributed to an increase in the popularity of sending Valentine's Day greetings.



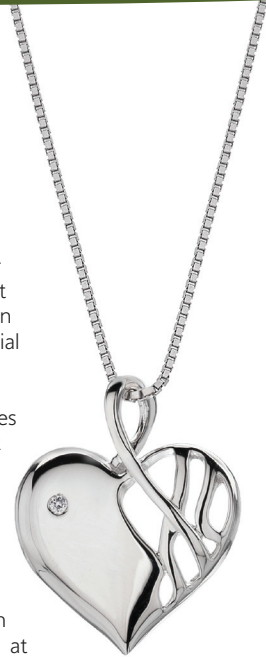
Around the world many traditions developed and in Australia, miners who were suddenly in possession of new found wealth during the Australian Gold Rush gave satin cushions adorned with shells, flowers and the odd taxidermied humming bird or bird of paradise to their loved ones.

So whilst the association of Valentine's Day with romantic verse goes back to Chaucer, it was only by the second half of the twentieth Century that the practice of exchanging cards was extended to all manner of gifts. I'm not sure if I would be overly impressed with a dead stuffed bird, however beautifully presented.

Flowers and chocolates have become a very

popular expression of love, but many prefer something more lasting and hence the current move towards Jewellery as a Valentines Gift. I have found that Jewellery themed on Roses or other flowers are often popular gifts, as of course are heart shaped lockets which can be engraved with a special message.

The bead companies continue to create great ideas for your silver bracelets – Troll have a silver bead with or without engraving and has small hearts on the inside. Look for the 'love within bead' priced at £45.00 which can be engraved on the outside. Chamilia have the popular silver captured hearts bead priced also at £45 and have introduced their jewelled heart in heart beads at £52.00 or silver hug bead at £26.00.



Another subtle way to get your message across is to have a gift hand engraved. It doesn't have to be jewellery as silver key rings, small silver boxes, a wallet with a silver plate engraved with a special message, all make lasting tokens of love. Often something which is used everyday such as a small pewter heart spoon from the English Pewter Company can be a subtle reminder of ones affection.

But let's not forget Valentine's is also a time for popping the question, so Engagement rings may be in order which I wrote about only last month.

"Weddings now are all the go, will you marry me or no"

Sally Thornton, AA Thornton,
1/7 High Street, Kettering
Tel: 01536 513014
www.aathorntonjeweller.com