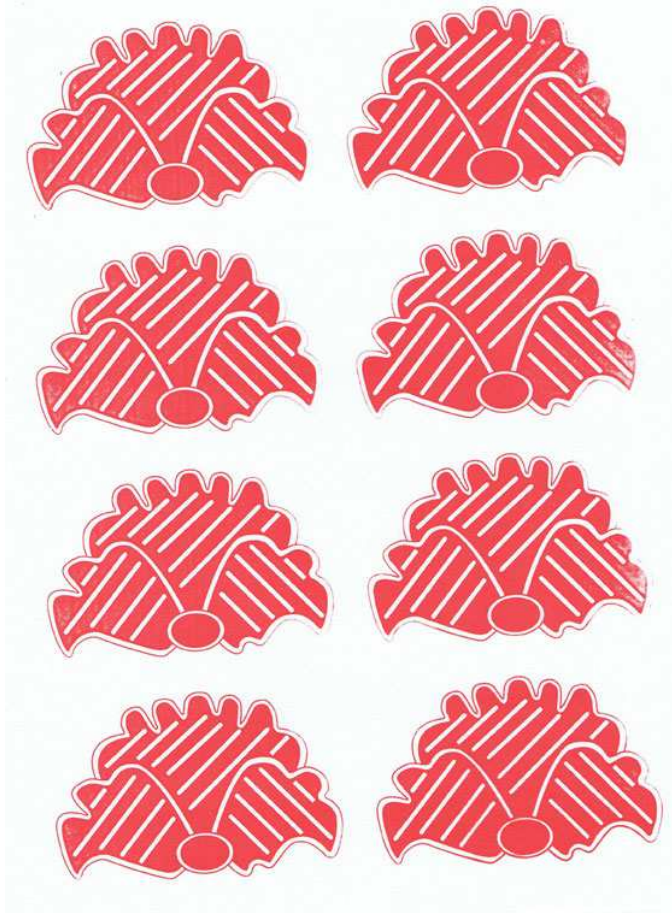


# Carpe Diem

Shelagh Ward

Bradford College



Screenprint by Poeyen Chan, student, Bradford College.

### Background

Founded in 1832, Bradford College is a substantial provider of Further and Higher Education offering opportunities for progression from entry level to Masters Degrees.

The College is custodian of the Bradford Textile Archive, a diverse collection of textiles and related materials including fine silk jacquards, rayon, velvets, mohair, woollens and worsteds dating from over the last 150 years. This includes more than 10,000 samples drawn from manufacturer pattern books; a large number of fabric sample books including the collections of Hind Robinson and Denholme Velvets; unique student workbooks plus a vast quantity of records and publications.

The Archives' inception dates from the nineteenth century when Bradford enjoyed an enviable position as wool capital of the world, which is reflected in the international scope and significance of many of the collections. Highlights include the extensive Indian collection from the 1860s and 1870s and a substantial mid-twentieth century American collection, which features original fabrics designed by Salvador Dali.

### Expectations

Digitising the Bradford Textile Archive will make this valuable resource available to researchers, students, professionals, and communities locally, nationally, and internationally. This is a way of attracting interest, donors, funders, and possible commercial applications which will safeguard its future.

Preliminary plans to commence digitisation of the Textile Archive with external funding were delayed when a bid for external funding submitted in July 2009 was unsuccessful. However, following an introduction made at the Digital Imagery Seminar organised by the Visual Arts Data Service (VADS) in September 2009, Bradford College was invited to join the VADS-led Look-Here! project as an unfunded partner to inform, reinforce, and support the digitisation process. A further external funding bid by the Archive in 2010 was unsuccessful and a subsequent plan to use in-house expertise to build a bespoke website also had to be revisited following the departure of the College's web developer in August 2010. A revised position of preparing images and metadata for deposit with VADS during 2011 was adopted with the intention of developing a dedicated website at a later stage.

Besides lack of funding, Bradford's digitisation journey has been further complicated by the temporary closure of the Archive several years ago. Throughout this period, the Archive's manager has been focused on ensuring that the Archive became a physical reality again. Without funding to provide staff resources, work on the Archive has been hampered by the fact that the small staff team already have other full-time duties, which has exacerbated the problems of non-familiarity with the collections and prolonged inaccessibility, which many established archives do not face.



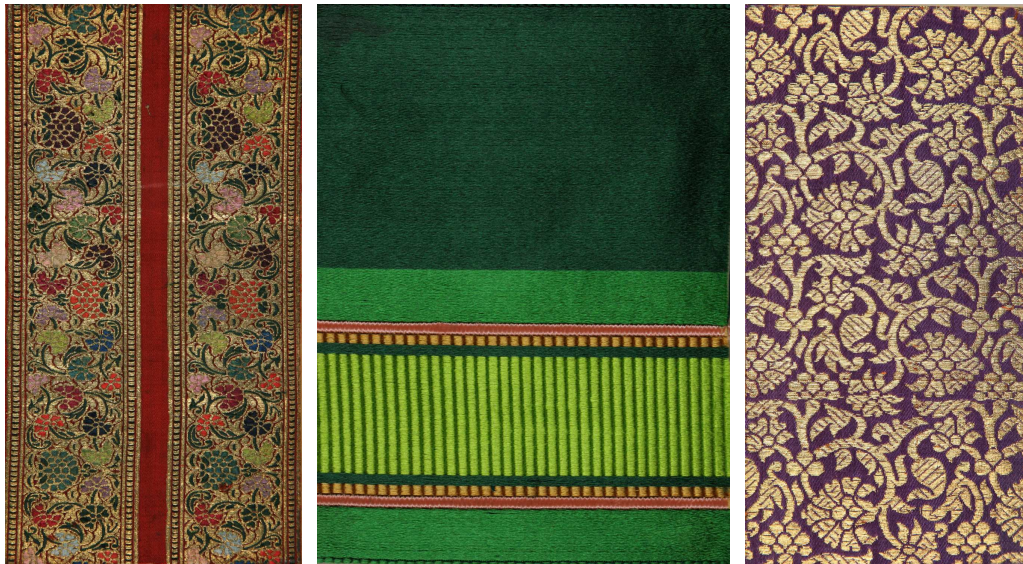
Clare Lamkin with some of the archive during relocation in 2010.

However, whilst the long-term objectives and strategy of digitising this major collection requires careful planning, given that other collections, research communities, and prospective users are all online, involvement in the Look-Here! project and with VADS highlighted that waiting for a 'perfect' scenario to commence digitisation is a lost opportunity. The challenge has been to commence digitisation of the vast collections on a small scale, maximising limited resources, and using outputs to make an immediate impact on awareness, funding opportunities, and to support and enhance learning, teaching, and research. Work with two groups of students has enabled the Archive to explore the benefits of digitisation and will assist in shaping the project's future direction.

### Approach

#### 1. Collections Research and Metadata Production

A key approach has been to minimise costs and engage former students to support development, and this has been made successful through the support of Bradford College's Alumni & Friends Association. The knowledge and experience of a number of industry retirees willing to assist with expert guidance will shortly be drawn on to compile the detailed metadata for some aspects of the collection, although until the position of archivist is filled, the exact needs in this area are unclear. Various offers of alumni voluntary assistance when the archive re-opens have also been received.



Details of textiles from the Bradford College Textile Archive.

### 2. Digital Photography

A recent graduate from the College's BA (Hons) Photography degree programme was employed on a short-term freelance basis to photograph an initial selection of the nineteenth century French and Indian fabrics and approximately six hundred images were taken during autumn 2010. These collections were chosen to avoid complications with copyright, and the photographs were immediately utilised to promote the Archive and its use in learning and teaching. For example, they were featured in two brochures gaining international exposure; the first was for a major collaborative event with the British Council in India in October 2010, and the second was for the Sri Lanka Design Festival in 2010, where Bradford College's Director for Learning Development & Research presented a conference seminar on learning technology for fashion students and on the Bradford College Textile Archive, using a selection of the digitised images.

### 3. Use in Learning and Teaching

During November 2010 a selection of the images were also used for a project working with two distinct student groups who would not typically be interested in seeing the original textiles. This included a group of associate students based abroad, and a group of students based in non-textiles or non-fashion related subjects, in order to investigate the potential of the archive as a source of design inspiration far beyond its appeal to those interested in textiles and textile history. Feedback from these users at the early stages of the project would also be useful supporting evidence for funders and donors and could also help to shape the long-term development of the digitisation project. Both groups were shown a selection of bound volumes of fabric samples before viewing the digitised images.

### 4. Creative Group

The first group comprised final year BA (Hons) Graphic Design, Illustration and Digital Media students at Bradford College who were given a selection of the images and set a brief to respond to them to inspire a contemporary piece of illustration, graphics, or animation. Rather than selecting from more obvious areas of the College's programmes which were likely to produce predictable approval

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and interest in the textiles, it was decided to work with students who wouldn't have any inclination to visit the Archive, in order to gain a better understanding of the wider benefits which might be offered to non-textiles or non-fashion related subject areas.

The course tutor felt that the words 'archive' and 'textile' would be off-putting to the group, whose interests were focussed on new media. Their initial reservations were countered by asking a distinguished College alumnus, Dudley Edwards, an artist whose work has ranged from pop art to bespoke design, to critique their final work. Due to the vibrancy of the colours and bold patterns on many of Dudley's fabrics, they had the option of taking his work in the 1960s as an additional inspiration.

Preparing accurate metadata is one of the key tasks of digitisation and this information will be important for conventional users of the Archive, who would regard the images alone as incomplete. However, for this particular student group who were deterred by the books housing the fabrics, it appeared that viewing the images without this context liberated them from preconceptions and they found their enthusiasm grew from actually working with the digitised images. Students produced a range of very individual responses to the digital material. Some of this work not only utilised but expressed their vision of the Archive. Prior to the 'crit' session, Dudley Edwards and his wife, the textile artist Madeleine Edwards, with whom he collaborates to create bespoke rugs and wall hangings, gave a comprehensive lecture about their careers and work, to students and staff drawn from courses across the School of Arts & Media.



Artists Dudley and Madeleine Edwards with Bradford College students.

One of the students became totally immersed in the material and devoted three weeks to developing a 1960s inspired animated fantasy and composed his own accompanying music (see the screenshots on page 6 and see the animation online at: <http://www.vads.ac.uk/lookhere/bradford-animation.html>).

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Dudley said he loved the variation and pace of the animation, not just its imagination and imagery but the use of textures. Madeleine said this had taken what were 'dry pages in a book and given them new life.'



Screenshots from animation by Tom Hinchliffe, student, Bradford College.

Another student produced a series of bird images using his own bird illustrations overlaid with layers of the digitised textile images (see page 7). Dudley loved the quality of his work and suggested that he could work productively together with the student who had produced the animation, perhaps in partnership following graduation, to develop their use of characters. The student was keen to pursue this along with Madeleine's idea of experimenting with fabric prints of his work.



Work by Matt Lamont, student, Bradford College.

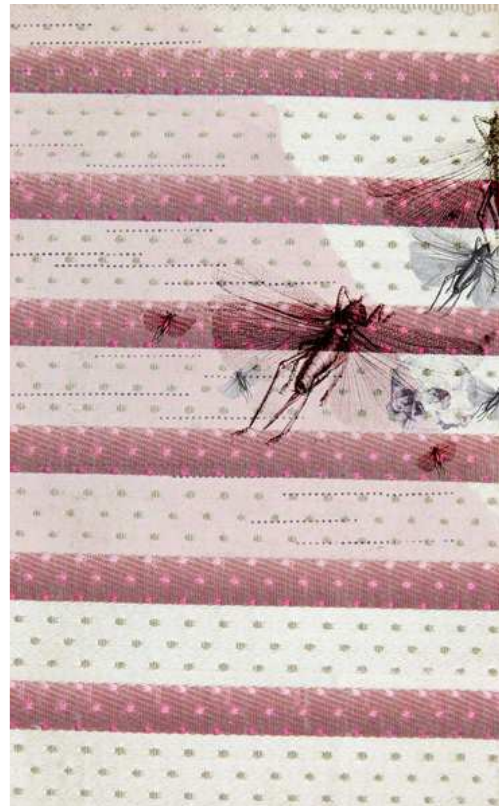
Letter press, embossing, and lots of handmade elements were used by another student in combination with the digital images to produce delicate digital collages (see page 8). Dudley and Madeleine loved the washed out nostalgic look that the student had achieved which they felt was perfect for numerous interior design applications.

Another student built a series of striking images using drawings and multiple layers in Photoshop (see page 9). Dudley and Madeleine encouraged her to extend her work by making her designs up in 3D, using the digital textile printer, or by cutting up charity shop garments.

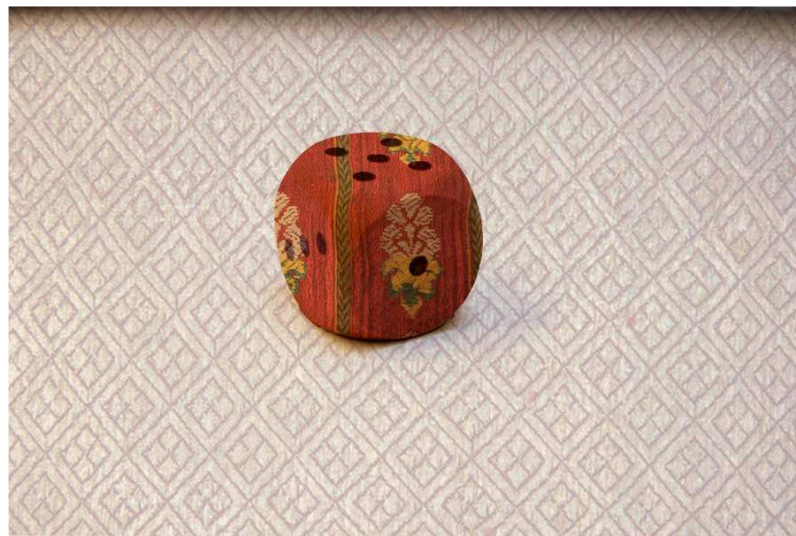
A student also produced work by digitally drawing over the digital images with a pen tool and filling in with black, then digitally printing on to acetate before screenprinting to produce a series of screenprints (see page 10). Dudley particularly admired her experiments with a rich mix of colours and repeats and Madeleine was keen to see them printed on fabric. This student also used the digitised images with photographs that they had taken of flowers which were simplified to compose flower patterns (see page 10).

A selection of the student work will be shown at the Look-Here! project conference in February 2011 and will be used for promotion both within the College and externally. Dudley was impressed that the students had all adapted the material to suit their own strengths and by the variety of approaches adopted and the creativity and imagination shown. Madeleine couldn't wait to see more of the Archive and felt that there would be huge professional interest in gaining access to a digitised collection, particularly among interior designers, as well as great educational value. Regarding the collection of digitised images of nineteenth century French fabrics, Madeleine commented, 'This is so contemporary in appeal but then good design is timeless. Exposing students to this will really help their work and I am very excited about this being made available.' Following the critique, the student group were all brimming with enthusiasm about future use of the digitised archive and certain that they would refer to it as a source of inspiration.

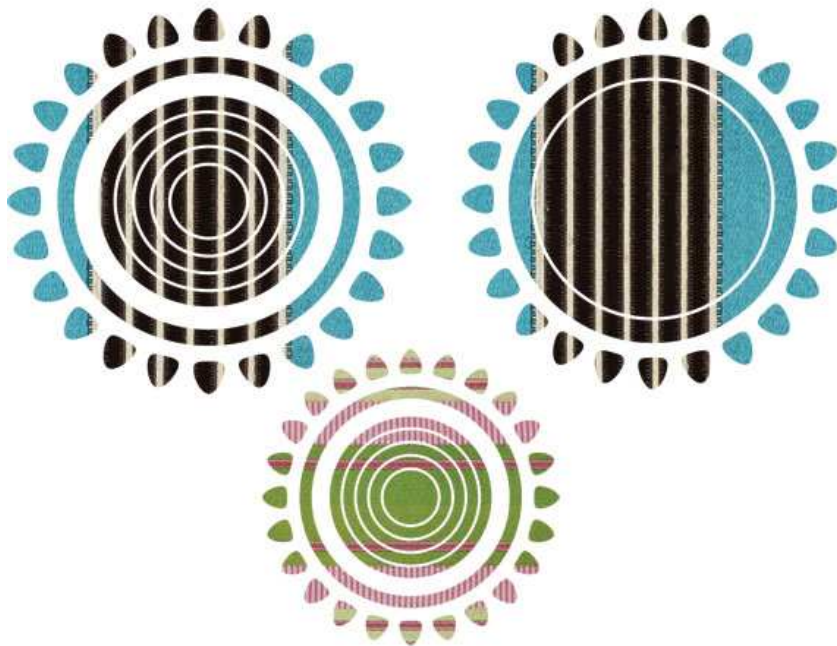
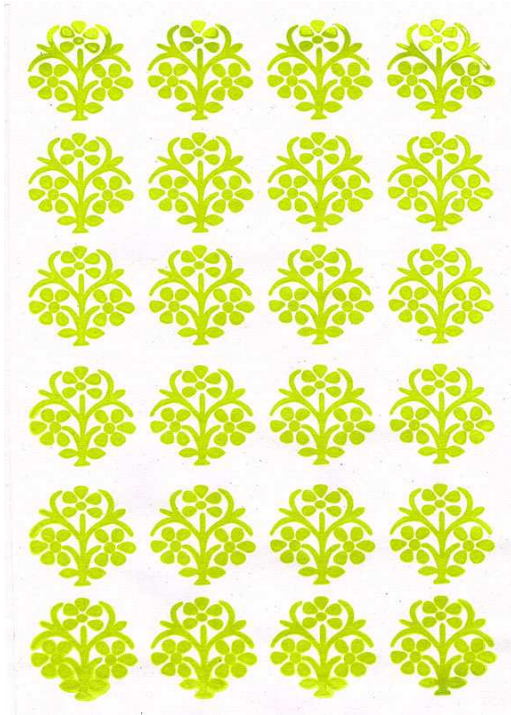
Look-Here! Project Case Studies



Work by Lucy Wileman, student, Bradford College.



Work by Lauren Ford, student, Bradford College.



Work by Poeyen Chan, student, Bradford College.

## 5. International Group

This group provided an international dimension and commented on the value of the digitised resources for providing design inspiration at a distance. This group comprised recent alumni from Whistling Woods International, Asia's major film, television, animation, and media arts institute, based in Mumbai. The group had recently collaborated with Bradford College photography students to produce a stop motion animation film premiered at Bradford Animation Festival in

November 2010. As they were all currently employed in the Bollywood film industry, following their postgraduate Diploma in Animation, they were able to provide a professional as well as a student perspective.

Their location meant that this group would normally only have access to the Archive through digitisation, but advantage was taken of their visit to Bradford in order to show them the original sample books. This was met with limited interest, especially the Indian fabrics. However, the high resolution images were received enthusiastically and provoked lively exchange about their usage.

They were all surprised that once viewed outside the confines of a dusty volume, many of the French patterns appeared new and exciting and agreed that the images could be viewed for general inspiration. Members of the group felt that high resolution images showing stitching and pattern in close detail would be very useful, especially to make important characters in a story appear realistic. The group suggested that College alumni and alumni of partner institutions should have preferential access to the higher resolution images via a secure login.

They were also keen to use Web 2.0 technology to extend the usual search options that are commonly available, by criteria such as colour or historical period, and to become involved in tagging images with their subjective impressions of how the images might be applied, for instance, terms such as 'rainforest', 'beaches' and 'urban'. They also visualised an online community where users might suggest a theme, which others could help curate from the Archive. They wanted to exchange ideas and expertise and have discussions within a membership and invite professional comments and input. They were also eager to produce work in response to a set of images posted regularly, which would contribute to an online portfolio of work based on the Archive, which the public could view and comment on. They envisaged this as way to develop their work and profile while developing or advancing international links and relationships.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Discovering VADS and becoming unfunded partners in the Look Here! project has been invaluable. The training, support, and opportunity to learn from expert speakers and partners at different stages of the journey have proved most beneficial in developing both the knowledge and confidence to start digitising.

The Archive is almost ready to place the initial deposit with VADS and the digital images have already been used in a variety of ways to promote the Archive. The potential for learning and teaching is clear from the enthusiasm from both the international group and the work produced by the student group at Bradford College.

Digitised images undoubtedly have the potential to attract use of textile collections to inspire exciting design, both locally and internationally, by those who would never consider visiting an archive. This work was conducted at short notice but much more could be done with longer term planning and by involving groups across the Arts & Media curriculum. The course tutor also plans to incorporate interaction with the Textile Archive in subsequent course planning for all three years of the degree and the project has also introduced teaching staff to VADS, which will be recommended to all their students as a valuable resource.

Bradford has made significant progress with very restricted resources and as budget cuts and austerity measures are enforced in the coming years, others within the wider Further and Higher Education community may need to adopt a similar approach. Whatever the setbacks or limits, given the considerable benefits, now is the time to start digitising and sharing collections as widely as possible. This can be built on incrementally as the initial phase is used to raise interest, support, and inspire creativity.

### Key Points

- If you are planning to digitise, get in touch with VADS - it is a world of knowledge, support and connections as well as a brilliant place to share your collections.
- Don't delay using digital images until all the metadata is in place. Use your photography to promote what you are doing or to support learning and research. Create a buzz!
- Engage alumni and friends for support - and this is easier when you have more to show them.
- Don't hesitate to dip a toe into digitisation. Come on in, the water's lovely!

### References

Dudley and Madeleine Edwards  
<http://www.amazedltd.com>  
<http://alumni.bradfordcollege.ac.uk/node/38>

The focus group from Whistling Woods International  
<http://www.bradfordcollege.ac.uk/culture-and-arts/baf-2010>

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