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Project Proposal: The Tale of Twynnoy and the Tiger

My Project Proposal explores the story of Hannah Twynnoy, the first person in England to be killed by a tiger, whilst also exploring how pattern and textiles have travelled and been assimilated into Western culture. I will explore the architecture of the town where Twynnoy was from and the imagery surrounding the circus, as this is what the menagerie housing the tiger eventually became. I intend to design a luxurious wallpaper and interior fabric collection for Autumn-Winter 2026-2027. I chose the theme of Hannah Twynnoy's story as I am from the same town so this story is something I've grown up hearing. I have always had a fascination with the unusual, almost forgotten and slightly dark parts of history, and was drawn to the rich imagery evoked by this story.

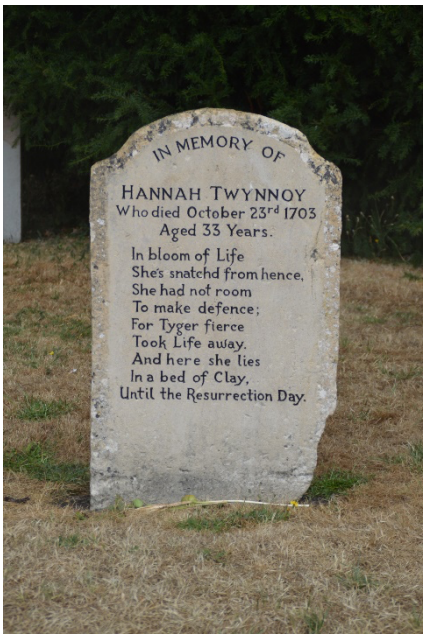


Figure 1

Hannah Twynnoy was a barmaid at the White Lion Inn, Malmesbury, Wiltshire, during the late 1600s (letter reference). It is said that, in the menagerie at the inn, "a very fierce" tiger was housed, and whilst working there, Twynnoy would taunt the tiger repeatedly despite being warned by the innkeeper, as stated in the letter at the Athelstan Museum. However, she ignored this warning, until one day went so far as "to open her breasts to the enraged animal". This teasing did not end well as the tiger broke free of the chain that secured him to the wall and "sprang upon her and tore her to pieces" (letter reference). After this dreadful event, Hannah Twynnoy was buried in the churchyard of Malmesbury Abbey, where the following epitaph was inscribed on her gravestone: In the bloom of Life // She's snatchd from hence, // She had not room //

To make defence; // For Tyger fierce // Took Life away. // And here she lies // In a bed of Clay, // Until the Resurrection Day (Athelstan Museum, 2024).


Figure 2

Malmesbury town, where the 12th century abbey is situated, is thought to be the first capital of England and the home of King Athelstan the Glorious, the first king of England; his tomb is located within the abbey along with a 15th century illuminated bible, the crest of Henry VII and a Norman porch (Malmesbury Abbey, 2025). The idea of an illuminated bible, being in a place so significant to the story, evokes the use of foils and metallic binders within my collection bringing elegance and luxury, as well as a nod to the use of precious metals within the abbey. Despite Twynnoy's life being cut short at the age of 33, her memory lives on as she is deemed the first person in England to be killed by a tiger (Athelstan Museum, 2024). Within my designs, I want to use the architectural structures to represent the town where Twynnoy was from and where she now lies, specifically wanting to use the clean arcing shapes of the abbey's roof and its ornate windows to contrast against the flowing nature of the travelling circus. I also like the idea of playing with the contrast of the abbey and the circus big top, as both are structures that hold significant space and power though in two very different ways; with power to attract and draw people inside through religion and performance.



Figure 3

There have been many theories as to the origins of the tiger found in a menagerie in this rural town and it wasn't as uncommon as it sounds with the growth of "animal houses" across England. The interest in animal houses was first sparked after the Lion Tower was opened at the Tower of London in the 12th century (Historic Royal Palaces, n.d.). The possession of these exotic animals was a symbol of the "monarchy and naturalised aristocracy", with animals often being given as gifts to royals, in particular lions, elephants and tigers (David, 2024). Given the increase in owning these exotic animals, it was not surprising that a public house housed a tiger in its menagerie to draw in customers.


Figure 4

The phrase "animal house" evokes images of a large green house, like the Palm House at Kew Gardens, bursting at the seams with nature and a jungle of animals. Throughout my collection I feel it is important to capture this abundance of life both in the hubbub of the circus and the bustling town. Cole & Son, a luxury wallpaper and fabric company established in 1875, explore the frantic nature of 18th century performance with their wallpaper Cabaret, alongside Teatro (Cole & Son (Wallpapers) Ltd, 2021). Although my designs wouldn't be focused on the spectators of the performances, I can take inspiration from how they use the circus atmosphere to create a striking scene as well as how I can manipulate a scene to flow seamlessly into each other without losing the story.


Figure 5



Figure 6

These menageries, both travelling and permanent, became the foundations of the modern-day circus. Phillip Astley is the man credited with creating the circus and founded Astley's Riding School, where he would teach others to perform equestrian tricks and put on shows for paying spectators; one of his wife's most well-known tricks featured her riding at high speeds around the ring with "swarms of bees covering her hands and arms" (Victoria and Albert Museum, 2019). This description of her performance creates an image of her being one with the animals she is performing with, and I see this being translated onto a wallpaper with her galloping across the print with the bees surrounding her making swirls and patterns. Large travelling circuses would parade through the streets to attract crowds to their shows (Victoria and Albert Museum, 2019). One of the most well-known circuses, Barnum and Bailey's Circus, would parade down the street showing off their military band, menagerie, 70 horses and their collection of "living human curiosities" (Victoria and Albert Museum, 2019). Lord George Sanger, an eccentric millionaire who became "the most successful circus entrepreneur of the 19th century", would have his wife parade through the towns sitting atop a carriage dressed as Brittania with a lamb and the circus' lion, Nero, sat at her feet (Victoria and Albert Museum, 2019). Sanger also coined the iconic image of today's "ringmaster" with his "instantly recognisable [...] shiny top hat and diamond tie pin" (Victoria and Albert Museum, 2019).



Figure 7

During the summer, I visited Gifford Circus, a vintage-inspired circus that travels to several locations in my area annually. I have been able to photograph and take inspiration from the costumes, acts and the staging as well as the big top, caravans and the signs around the event. I was also able to purchase a programme from one of their previous performances which was inspired by an 1800s French circus. I also conducted research at the Victoria and Albert Museum where I was able to view several of the posters and costumes within their collection. I will take inspiration from the performers, including the hair hanging duo, the ring of fire, the many aerial acts and the acts involving the horses and dog. I will refer to the big top, travelling trailers and the circus ring and I will use this trip to Gifford Circus to inspire a rich and vibrant colour palette, a distinct feature of the circus industry.



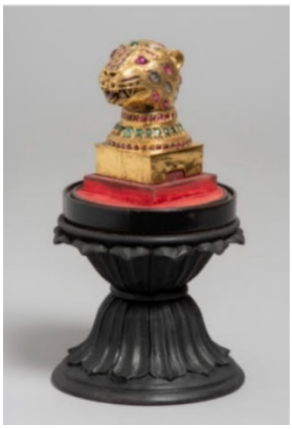
Figure 8

I have also researched several other sources of inspiration in modern culture and other contexts, sharing the opulence I want to achieve within my collection. These include the movie Moulin Rouge, Dior's Christmas 2025 advert, and Dior's Haute Couture SS 2019 catwalk. I found that Moulin Rouge has been inspirational in relation to how darker themes are explored in theatre whilst still conveying a sense of extravagance and beauty to the viewer, through the colours and details used. I have also researched how other companies have used the theme of the circus within their designs, such as Mind The Gap, with their designs El Circo and Nirvana that explore performing animals and



Figure 9

Indian influences. I have been particularly inspired by Mind The Gap's wallpapers The Great Show and The Acrobats as they depict the control and elegance I want to experiment with within my designs and the distinctly vintage feel they exude.

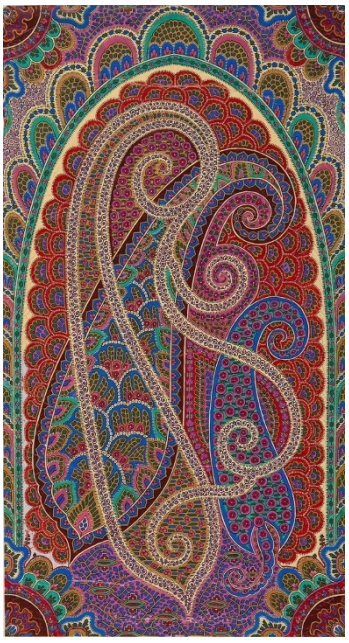

Figure 10

The tiger trade harks back to the rule of the Mughal Empire, who ruled in the 16th and 17th century over most of India and Pakistan (BBC, 2009). Their prowess in hunting tigers is what initially rooted that connection between India and the tiger (Teodorescu, 2014). This connection was reinforced by Tipu Sultan, "the Tiger of Mysore", in the late 18th century (Teodorescu, 2014). Tipu became synonymous with the tiger as he would adorn his throne, soldiers' uniforms, coins, war banners and book bindings with tiger print and motifs (Teodorescu, 2014). In wanting to show the rest of the world its power, Britain began to hunt and ship back the tigers found in India to Britain whether they were dead or alive; these tigers would be turned into rugs for stately homes or pets for the aristocracy to show off (Teodorescu, 2014). Much on the imagery of the time that depicted tigers would use it in a way to show the public that India and its people were "inferior" and something to be afraid of; however John William Godward, a Neo-Classical English painter from the late 19th century, would paint tiger skins with elegant Greco-Roman women atop them to evoke "exoticism and luxury" (Teodorescu, 2014; Sothebys, 2025).


Figure 11

I want to use tiger imagery as a prominent feature, reflecting a key element of the Hannah Twynnoy story. I want to experiment with tiger print alongside drawings of the abbey and the circus as well as paintings of the tiger as a whole. This is to give the impression of the viewer being stalked through the designs as well as to paint the picture of the tiger being teased by the circus performers. I will use animal print from tigers as well as other menagerie animals or animals that have historically been used in circuses, such as elephants, lions and giraffes. Much like Godward's use of animal print, I will use a variety of animal prints to conjure a sense of luxury and opulence, the extravagance of the circus, in contrast to the neutral tones of the abbey and Cotswold scenery.

Through my research I have identified a parallel between the cultural appropriation of possessions from other cultures relates, with aspects of textiles culture. Many fabrics that are understood as "typically English", such as paisley, chintz, and damask, actually originated in India (Lal, 2015).


Figure 12

Paisley is "a distinctive intricate pattern of curved feather-shaped figures based on an Indian pine-cone design" and is known for its vibrant use of colours and intricate pattern (Adamley, 2021). The Persian boteh or buta is said to represent a cypress tree with its floral spray and symbolises fertility, life and eternity within the Hindu culture (Baker, 2017). The boom in production of the paisley design in the 18th century originated from shawls; the introduction of cashmere shawls from India to the British population turned this ordinary commodity into a fashion accessory (Victoria and Albert Museum Dundee, 2025). Once these imports started



Figure 13

flooding in from India, British textiles factories began producing their own imitations, despite them being said to be “devoid of any artistic talent” (Victoria and Albert Museum Dundee, 2025). These imitations were being made across Britain, but particularly in the Scottish town of Paisley, Renfrewshire; the Paisley factory created many of these shawls that they then became known as paisley shawls, stripping the pattern of its roots in the Middle East and Asia (Baker, 2017).

Chintz originated from the Hindu word chint or chitta, which means “spotted or variegated” and was created using mordant and resist dyeing in India for the European market (Lal, 2015). Whilst chintz was originally designed for upholstery, it later began to be used in both men’s and women’s fashion (Lal, 2015). The chintz design became so desirable that in both England and France bans were put in place to stop the importation of this fabric from India as it was having a detrimental effect of their textiles mills (Theinside.com, 2025). Similar to the paisley, as the chintz designs grew in popularity, and due to the industrial revolution, so did the imitations in the British market, though due to the dyes used they were never able to capture the vibrancy of the original patterns (Theinside.com, 2025).



Figure 14

Another fabric which has been heavily westernised is damask, with its name originating from the city of Damascus on the Silk Road (MasterClass, 2020).

Damask is a woven fabric, distinctive with its reversible jacquard pattern known for being very versatile across many decorative textiles surfaces, originating from China before moving into development in the Middle East (MasterClass, 2020). After the damask pattern reached the European market in the 14th century, the development of western damask patterns began to be created on Italian draw looms (MasterClass, 2020).

For many years Britain explored and conquered so many parts of the world, and with the expansion of global importation they brought back intricate and artistic gifts whether that be art or animals from these cultures, where they were then turned into exotic commodities that have been eventually westernised and tamed. Not only have the patterns been taken from its Asia heritage and turned into a trend of both fashion and interiors for the wealthy, but the language to describe the patterns has been anglicised for the Western market. Despite many of these artifacts being viewed with an air of fascination at the time, there is always more than meets the eye regarding how Britain assimilated these items.

Throughout my research I have found there is an underlying theme of control; whether that be the control Hannah Twynnoy thought she had over the tiger or the control the ringmaster has over his performer and animals, and especially the control Britain had over India ultimately bringing exotic animals and design influences to England. I want to play around with the concept of control within my design process.

I aim to create a high-end luxury interiors collection. I intend to use fabrics that give the atmosphere of being in a luxury traditional-inspired theatre by using a variety of silks, velvets and satins, while also pairing these with organic textures and slubs such as linens and cottons to show the theme's roots in Cotswold country life. I want to use wallpapers



Figure 15

that have the same essence as my fabrics; I will use grass cloth and linen weave paper as well as others with a matte luxury finish. I intend to design my own version of the "Cotswold Check" that was made famous by the wool factories of the area in the 18th century (Martin, 2025). I will utilise toile de Jouy, a French style known for its ornate scenes usually printed onto linen and cotton, to show the stories within my theme as well as the strong traditional countryside elements within that (McCaughan-Hawes, 2017). To bring in elements of the circus I want to explore the use of the harlequin pattern, traditionally worn by the performers of the Italian theatrical performance, commedia dell'arte, as this is a pattern that is synonymous with the theatrical industry (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2019). I will use a variety of animal prints as this explores the sense of status and luxury as well as having roots in interiors referencing animal skin rugs that the 18th century aristocracy adorned their houses with, symbolising colonialism, power and money. To take this feeling of luxury further, I would like to experiment with beading as through my research, beading has many roots within the Indian textiles culture.



Figure 16

De Gournay, who specialise in hand painted wallpapers, fabrics and wallcoverings have been a rich source of materiality inspiration (De Gournay, n.d.). De Gournay wallpapers give their stories a huge amount of presence and gravitas when situated within a room; part of this is due to the scale they create their patterns at as well as the materials they



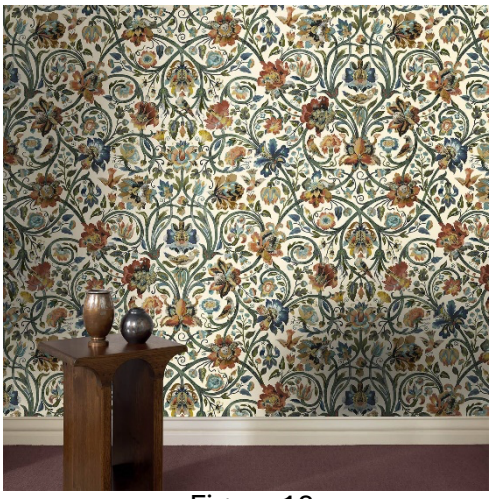
Figure 17

use. The wallpaper grounds they use are dyed silk, metallic silk, slub silk and tobacco as well as India tea paper, Williamsburg and gilded grounds (De Gournay, n.d.). As well as working on luxury grounds, they often bead and embroider their wallpapers using pure silk embroidery threads that have been colour matched to the chosen wallpaper (De Gournay, n.d.). This process of embroidering and beading lengths of wallpaper, in my eyes, sets apart the high-end wallpapers from the luxury. I think this process would be a great way to add even more surface interest to my collection, as well as clearly defining it within the luxury interiors industry.

I want to continue developing skills in fabric dyeing and colour matching along with skills in screen separation designs and digital printing to create a visually striking collection. To push myself further, I have also considered using clay. I have been inspired by the lines on Hannah Twynnoy's grave saying "And here she lies // In a bed of Clay"; the use of the word "clay" to me really evokes a connection to the natural world, the power it holds and how one day we will all go back to it. I would like to experiment with the natural dyeing of fabrics using clay soil from the Cotswolds. I could also use the clay soil to bring in natural tones to my colour palette to contrast against the rich jewel tones inspired by the circus. I will explore the use of typography as this has been a recurring theme throughout my research, in church documents, on the gravestone and in the letter describing the events as well as in the signs and posters at the circus.

In the future, I see myself as an interiors pattern designer who creates bold and visually striking designs. My style is inspired by many traditional textiles fabrics and wallpapers,

historical sources of inspiration, and how I can put a modern twist on them through my illustrations and use of colour. I use these inspirations to create collections of patterns using fine liners, watercolour paints and inks alongside digital drawings.


Figure 18

In the future I can see myself taking these skills to a high-end interior company, the kind of places that embrace traditional roots, maximalist illustrations and bold colour palettes. Currently I see my work sitting well with interiors companies like Mind The Gap, Laura Ashley and House of Hackney along with Liberty London, Sanderson and Osbourne & Little. Mind The Gap is a company I am constantly inspired by as no matter what project or inspiration I am searching for they will most likely have played with elements of that theme; this is one of the reasons why I aspire to work for them as I would be able to learn so much about how to tackle such a wide variety of themes but still stay true to their visual identity of the brand, through their use of bold, saturated and eclectic colour palettes and their use of balanced visual chaos. I also love how they play around with the scale that their wallpaper is printed at as I am someone who loves to work with maximalist prints and I find they do this effectively.

This collection will heavily aid me in achieving my long-term career goals. Not only will it show the diversity in what I can design in my portfolio, but it will show potential employers how I can work with growing future trends in combination with traditional textiles influences to articulate a story through my designs. It will also allow me to showcase my

work through exhibitions and social media exposure, and display how my skills have developed over the last three years, as I am now ready to enter the design industry.

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