

Special Collections and Digital Access: A Textiles Treasure Trove

Nancy Jackson, Lee Jones, and Clare Langman (Birmingham City University)

Introduction

Birmingham City University (BCU), Library and Learning Resources (L&LR) initiated a new programme of digitisation, focusing on Special Collections.

An aim of the digitisation project is to raise the profile of Special Collections items for inspiring teaching, creative study and research whilst easing access to digitised collections.

The pilot digitisation project aimed to create an accurate, easily discoverable and accessible digital representation of pages with printed text and images of Indian textiles within a Special Collections book. The book was selected by a senior academic as inspiration for a newly-created student project.

Materials and methods

BCU L&LR acquired Alma Digital to facilitate access to digitised resources. We acquired Leganto and a new staff member to encourage academics to curate 'resource lists' directing students to a wide range of materials beyond traditional text based resources.

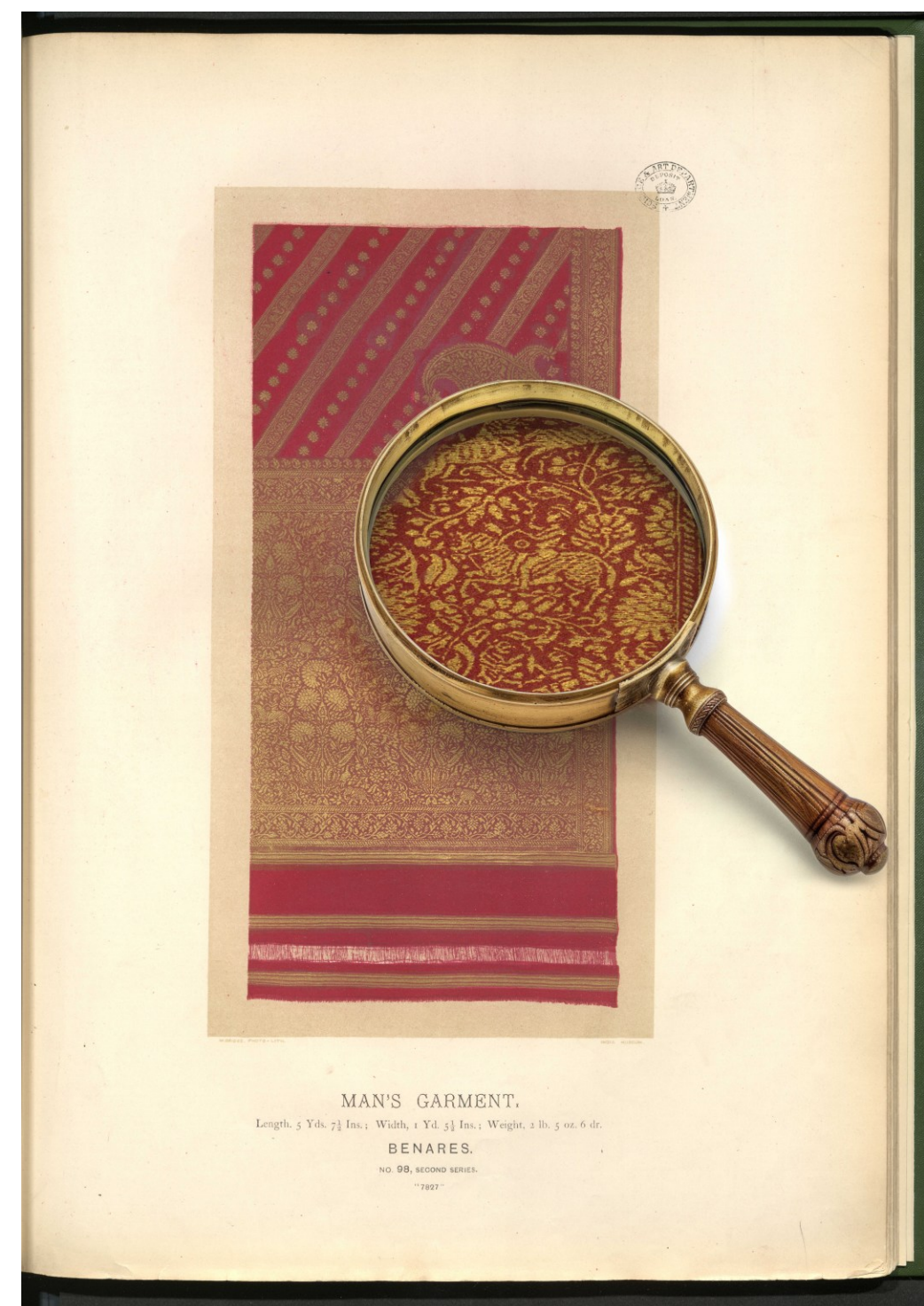
The Special Collections Librarian engaged with academics and promoted Special Collections items for digitisation at events.

L&LR Digitisation staff provided demonstrations of collections in Alma Digital, advised on options for digitisation and digitised and made available digitised images on Alma Digital.

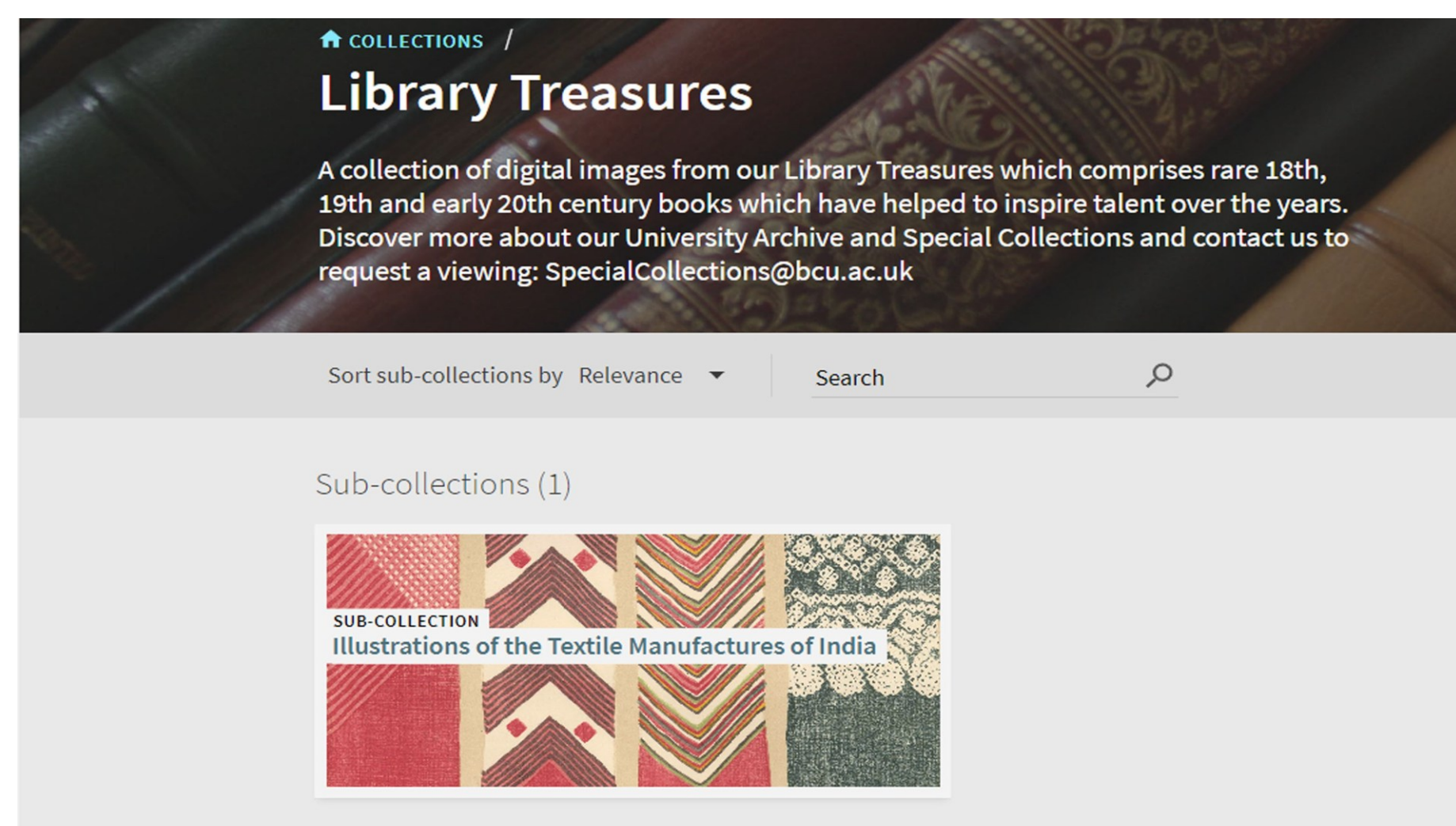
The Lead L&LR Cataloguer advised and worked on metadata while the Copyright Officer determined and provided appropriate copyright statements for use alongside the digitised content.

Results

All prints in the selected book were digitised, faithfully capturing the vibrant colours and tones of the printed textiles. True 600 dpi scans highlight ornate design detail with clarity, even at multiple magnification levels.



The digitised images were presented and made accessible as a sub-collection in Alma Digital. This was done after the sandbox mock-up and sample images received approval from the senior academic who had requested digitisation.



Links to the digitised items have been added to the academic's Leganto resource lists for the related modules. Students on the modules can link through to the digitised images.

We are now coming to the end of our pilot project and will be able to gather stakeholder feedback to incorporate in a review which will shape future policy and procedures.

We now have an example to promote to other academics of how L&LR staff can provide access to high quality, digitised versions of inspiring items in Special Collections for embedded teaching.



Conclusions

Collaboration, across different L&LR staff teams, was a success in providing engaging events promoting the digitisation of Special Collections to academics.

There is demand from academics for the digitisation of Special Collections; L&LR staff need to utilise key academic contacts to tap into this enthusiasm and demonstrate what we can deliver.

The L&LR has an effective and appealing suite of resources – Alma, Alma Digital and Leganto – for making digitised Special Collections resources discoverable and accessible with options for curating.

The Leganto implementation project has provided an excellent opportunity to highlight and signpost the diverse range of non-text based materials available to support learning and teaching.

Digitisation staff can create high quality, digitised versions of Special Collections items which provide academics and students with the desired teaching and learning experience. We now need to complete a pilot project review and consider whether our digitised items are suitable for wider access, beyond BCU.

Further information

Scan the QR code for contact details and information on BCU L&LR University Archive and Special Collections:

