

VERSATILITY OF PAPER

There is no digital without physical materials, whether silicon, rare earth or PVC plastic. Technological innovation throughout human history has relied on transforming materials into resources. iPhones are often cited as innovative, which they are. However, only considering the phone in hand can obscure the advances within the individual parts – how screens react when touched, batteries and connectors invisible to the human eye.

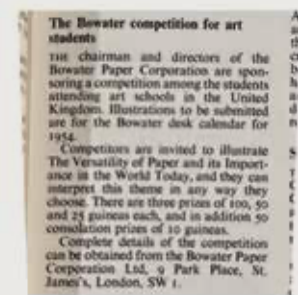
How we view, use and understand materials will be at the forefront of change over the coming decades. New materials will emerge from breakthroughs in laboratories, however, most material innovation will come through people re-imagining how a material can be applied or adapted.

Paper, the subject of this publication, has been around for millennia. With the slow demise of daily newspapers and the rise of digital books, it could

be easy to believe that paper is disappearing, yet paper production is on the rise (Statista Research Department, 20/09/2023). The loss of newspaper papermaking has been more than offset by the need for packaging, which is a direct result of the growing digital home delivery market. Innovation is as much about repurposing or developing new markets as it is about invention.

The Versatility of Paper gallery that follows this page demonstrates the ingenuity humans have to take a single piece of paper and create a hugely diverse range of responses. Similar rethinking will happen with all materials, except on a global scale, leading to new methods, processes and inventions. AI will only assist in this process, not replace it.

www.fourthportal.com/versatility-of-paper



THE CALL-OUT

Fourth Portal print artist-in-residence, Dawn Cole, spotted the Bowwater call-out in an old magazine from 1953. This led to an interesting discussion that inspired the Versatility of Paper project.

With 170 requests to provide vintage paper, 65 responses were returned by the 31 August 2023 deadline. An exhibition of the artworks was displayed during autumn at the Fourth Portal in Gravesend.

We would like to thank every artist who responded to the call-out and submitted work.



SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES — MILL OWNERS WAISTCOAT | BETH HARRISON

Having received the Green and Sons paper, the strength and feel of it reminded me of the tapa I had come across in the Pacific islands and how so many cultures in the world have developed their own methods and materials in papermaking.

Tapa is made from mulberry bark. It is stripped, soaked in water and beaten with mallets to develop a paper 'cloth' in huge sheets, dried on the ground and then decorated with traditional designs in natural paint and dyes. The tapa is often used for ceremonial outfits.

I decided to make a waistcoat, out of the two types of paper and to see how they compared for an item of clothing.

The tapa is from Tonga and the cotton paper from India - made with a process similar to that used by Green and Sons at Hayle Mill until they closed in 1987.

Both were able to be stitched and turned out, although the tapa held it's own a little better than the cotton paper.

The waistcoat is made to an early nineteenth century design which John Green, the first Mill owner, may have worn in 1815, so I included Hayle Mill watermark designs on the lining to complement the traditional Tongan designs on the outer part.

The quotation in the pockets is from M. Scott Peck, who wrote 'The Road less travelled' "Share our Similarities, Celebrate our Differences"