

Lucile, fashion designer: papers, 1890-1933

Introduction and summary description

Creator: Lucile
Reference: AAD/2008/6
Extent: 58 files

Context

Lucy Christiana Sutherland (pseudo. Lucile) (1863-1935), fashion designer, was born in London to civil engineer Douglas Sutherland and his Anglo-French-Canadian wife Elinor Saunders. Following her father's death she was raised in Guelph, Ontario, Canada before moving to Jersey following her mother's remarriage in 1871. Lucile's first experience of fashion was through dressing her dolls and later making clothes for herself and her younger sister – the future romantic novelist Elinor Glyn.

In 1883 she married James Stuart Wallace and a daughter, Esme, was born in 1885. However the marriage ended in separation in 1890 before a divorce was granted in 1893. She started working as a dress maker to support herself and her daughter, naming her company Lucile after herself. Despite being largely self taught her designs were a success and her first premises opened in London's fashionable West End in 1894. As the business expanded a larger shop was needed and a store was opened in Hanover Square in 1897. In 1900 Lucile married Sir Cosmo Duff Gordon but she still kept her business and it became incorporated as 'Lucile Ltd' in 1903. The company continued to expand and grow with shops opening in New York (1911), Paris (1912) and Chicago (1915).

Lucile was one of the most successful business women of her era, employing around 2000 people in Lucile Ltd at the height of its popularity. Apprentices to the firm included the future fashion designers Edward Molyneux and Sir Norman Hartwell. Lucile was most celebrated for her lingerie, tea gowns and evening wear creations. The designs were usually softly draped garments in pastel colours but smart tailored outfits for daywear were also created. Lucile creations were recognisable for their mono bosom, tiny waist and exaggerated behind. Lucile Ltd's clients were wealthy and included aristocracy, royalty and actresses such as Lily Elsie. Lucile also designed the costumes for many theatrical productions both in the West End and on Broadway.

Lucile is often credited as the first fashion designer to use professional models, and she started the tradition of using catwalk shows to show case her work. These would be invitation only tea time presentations, complete with stage lighting, music and programmes. In 1912 Lucile and her husband travelled to New York on the Titanic, and escaped on the first life boat to leave the ship, holding only 12 people when there was space for 40. The Duff Gordon's were accused by the tabloid press of bribing the crew not to go back to pick up people in the sea, but were cleared of the charges in court.

There was no sign that this had a detrimental effect on Lucile's business, but by 1918/1919 restructuring within the company meant she had a less active role in it. By 1922 she was no longer designing for the label as her designs did not fit in with the new flapper style which was emerging and Lucile Ltd gradually dissolved following the departure of its founder.

After her career as a fashion designer ended Lucile worked as a fashion columnist and critic, and in 1932 wrote an autobiography 'Discretions and Indiscretions' which became a best seller. Lucile died in 1935 at the age of 71.

Scope and content

The archive contains sketchbooks (1890 - ca. 1915); drawings: designs for fashion and theatre (ca. 1907 - 1933); prints from drawings (ca. 1912 - ca. 1919); photographs: fashion, theatrical and fancy dress (1904 - 1919); press cuttings, business literature and inspirational material (ca. 1904 - 1928).

Access

This archive is available for consultation in the V&A Archive and Library Study Room, which is located at Blythe House, 23 Blythe Road, Olympia, London, W14 0QX. The Study Room is open Tuesday to Friday between 10.00 am and 4.30 pm, by appointment only. To request an appointment please email archive@vam.ac.uk or telephone 020 7603 7493. Access to some files may be restricted; these are identified individually with the catalogue.

Detailed catalogue

Sketchbooks, 1890-ca.1915

Reference: AAD/2008/6/56 : AAD/2008/6/1 to 2

Extent: 3 files

Reference	Description	Dates
AAD/2008/6/56	Facsimile of sketchbook titled 'An illustrated record of the gowns of Lucy Wallace and Elinor Sutherland from 1892' 1 folder Illustrations by Elinor Glyn (nee Sutherland), sister of Lucile.	1890-1897
AAD/2008/6/1	Sketchbooks 1 folder Two Lucile sketchbooks, one from her stay at the Villa Trianon in Versailles during the summer of 1904, which includes ephemera, pencil and watercolour drawings. The other sketchbook includes pencil drawings of models (ensembles) from 1904 with fabrics, trimmings, and accessories.	1904

AAD/2008/6/2 Sketchbooks

1 folder

ca.1909-
1915

Three sketchbooks, one of which is attributed to Edward Molyneux, include pencil drawings, painted daubs of colour, and drawings of coats, and dresses. Some drawings identify the clients as Lily Elsie and Gertie Millar.

Drawings: designs for fashion and theatre , ca.1907- 1933

Reference: AAD/2008/6/3 to 20 : AAD/2008/6/47 : AAD/2008/6/57 :
AAD/2008/6/59

Extent: 21 files

This series contains Lucile designs and drawings for fashion and theatre. Many of the sketches of Lucile ensembles were intended to be reproduced and sent out to clients. The drawings would not have all been by Lucile herself, but by artists and designers employed by her. The series also includes designs produced by students taught by Lucile, and later designs produced under the name of Lucy Duff Gordon.

Copies of drawings for clients are held in the the series 'Prints from drawings'.

Arranged in chronological order.

Reference	Description	Dates
AAD/2008/6/3	Pencil fashion drawings 72 pencil fashion drawings annotated with numbers 2-89; some have other information pertaining to the design such as colour, fabric and trim.	ca.1907-1910
AAD/2008/6/4	Lily Elsie theatre designs 1 folder 7 pencil sketches of Lily Elsie designs, possibly for Hood and Ross's operetta, The Count of Luxembourg, which opened in 1911 at Daly's Theatre. The drawings feature handwritten annotations specifying the colour and fabric used in the gowns.	Mar 1910
AAD/2008/6/5	Lucile original ink drawings 1 folder 23 original ink drawings of accessorised ensembles. Hand-written annotations identify fabric, colour, and trimmings, as well as the number of copies to be made and of what size, indicating that they were used reproduced for clients and press.	ca.1910-1912
AAD/2008/6/6	Pencil fashion drawings 1 folder 21 pencil drawings of day and evening fashions with accessories. Some drawings have fabric samples attached, and hand-written annotations specifying colour, fabric, client name and/or model number.	ca.1910-1913
AAD/2008/6/7	Lucile lingerie and nightwear designs 1 folder 43 pencil, colour and ink drawings of petticoats, tea gowns, nightcaps, nightwear, and a coverlet/bedcover/eiderdown design, all signed Lucile. Some drawings have fabric samples attached, and hand-written annotations describing colour, fabric, cut, model number, measurements and client name.	ca. 1910-1920

AAD/2008/6/8	Watercolour designs, mainly for theatre with some fashion 1 folder 44 watercolour drawings that feature full ensembles with accessories. Some drawings have hand-written annotations on them as well as the client's name. Three magazine cuttings of Molyneux fashion plates. Many designs believed to be by Edward Molyneux.	ca. 1911-1916
AAD/2008/6/9	Fashion pencil drawings 1 folder 25 fashion pencil drawings, with some hand written annotations on the back stating fabric, colour, price, and model number.	ca.1912
AAD/2008/6/10	Sketches for fashion and theatre 1 folder 19 sketches for fashion and theatre designs executed in watercolour and pencil. Some sketches have hand-written annotations on them with customer information, model or number, or references to a play.	ca. 1912-1913
AAD/2008/6/11	Theatre watercolours and fashion sketches 1 folder 23 theatre watercolour designs and fashion sketches, including some Edward Molyneux designs. A few of the drawings have hand-written annotations stating the clients name (among them Gertie Millar and Miss Levy).	ca.1912-1915
AAD/2008/6/47	Fashion pencil drawings 1 folder Includes designs for tea gowns, skirts, cloaks, skirts and blouses. Some drawings are by Edward Molyneaux.	ca.1913
AAD/2008/6/12	Fashion and theatre pencil drawings 1 folder 81 pencil drawings, which feature designs for dresses, skirts, and hats, signed Lucile. Some drawings have fabric samples attached, and hand-written annotations specifying colour, fabric, and accessories, and the number of copies of the drawings that were to be produced. Theatre drawings identify the act in which ensembles were worn, and by whom.	ca.1913-1915
AAD/2008/6/13	Theatrical drawings 1 folder 10 oversized theatrical drawings stamped 'Lucy Duff Gordon'. They include hand written annotations in pencil.	ca. 1920s
AAD/2008/6/14	Pen and colour wash drawings 1 folder 11 drawings stamped 'Lucy Duff Gordon', some with clients names on them, fabric samples attached, and hand-written annotations in pencil on the reverse.	ca. 1920s
AAD/2008/6/59	Pencil, ink and watercolour designs 1 folder 4 coloured fashion drawings.	ca. 1920s
AAD/2008/6/15	Models 1-109 Series 2 folders 125 watercolour drawings with fabric samples.	ca. 1925-1926

AAD/2008/6/16	Drawings by Dave Cox and other artists 1 folder 13 oversized coloured drawings including the work of two other artists, and several designs stamped 'Lucy Duff Gordon'.	ca.1927
AAD/2008/6/17	Student drawings 3 boxes Lucile taught fashion design classes at Cooper Union and the Traphagen School of Fashion, both located in New York City. There are 180 drawings in the collection, with students' names and descriptions of the drawings, as well as Lucile's hand-written comments on a number of the designs.	1927- 1928
AAD/2008/6/18	Album of Lucile designs with colour fabric snippets 1 folder 46 coloured fashion drawings with fabric samples attached, some of which are annotated.	1928
AAD/2008/6/19	Lucile designs 1 folder 9 coloured drawings of designs, six of which are drawn on 6 Rossetti Gardens Mansions SW3' letter paper, showing the outline of the body.	ca.1930- 33
AAD/2008/6/20	Outsize designs 1 folder Includes three Edward Molyneux drawings in pencil and ink, two miscellaneous fashion drawings, two designs (possibly for theatre), one Henri Manuel photograph of a mannequin modelling a Lucile ensemble, and a design for the cover of the Programme of Models, autumn 1914.	undated
AAD/2008/6/57	Facsimiles of fashion designs 1 folder	undated

Prints from drawings: copies of designs to be sent to clients, ca. 1912-1919

Reference: AAD/2008/6/21 to 26

Extent: 6 files

This series comprises reproductions of sketches of Lucile ensembles, intended to be sent to clients.

Arranged chronologically.

Reference	Description	Dates
AAD/2008/6/21	Fashion prints from drawings 1 folder 81 prints from drawings, signed 'Lucile', of model numbers 1-97. Some drawings have hand-written annotations on the face or reverse providing date and description of garment.	ca. 1912

AAD/2008/6/22	Fashion prints from drawings including some ink originals 1 folder 157 prints (including some ink originals) from drawings featuring model numbers 1 to 124 for the Spring/ Summer season, signed 'Lucile'. Some prints have hand-written annotations in pencil or ink describing colour, material, name of ensemble and fabric samples.	1912
AAD/2008/6/23	Prints from drawings 1 folder 54 prints from drawings of designs to be sent to clients, including some original ink originals signed 'Lucile'. Hand-written annotations on the prints variously note the number of copies to be made, model number, date, description and dress name.	ca. 1912-1913
AAD/2008/6/24	Prints from drawings, no. 4-93A 1 folder 53 prints from drawings of designs to be sent to clients featuring model numbers 4-93a, all signed or stamped 'Lucile Ltd'. Some hand-written annotations feature on the reverse of the prints, which include model number, fabric and colour description and name of design.	ca. 1912-1913
AAD/2008/6/25	Fashion prints from drawings, no. 1-59 1 folder 126 prints from drawings for clients, all signed 'Lucile' and embossed. Many include names of the designs and model numbers. Some have hand-written pencil annotations with fabric and colour description as well as fabric samples.	ca.1914
AAD/2008/6/26	Fashion prints from drawings 1 folder 111 prints from drawings for clients and house use, signed 'Lucile'. Some prints include the model number and name of the ensemble, either on the front of the print or back. (Items in this folder relate to fashion photographs from 1917).	ca. 1915-1919

Photographs: fashion, theatrical and fancy dress, 1904-1919

Reference: AAD/2008/6/27 to 28 : AAD/2008/6/30 to 42 : AAD/2008/6/48 to 55 : AAD/2008/6/58

This series has been divided into three sub-series: Loose photographs; Photograph albums; and Facsimile photographs.

Loose photographs,

Reference: AAD/2008/6/27 : AAD/2008/6/30 to 33 : AAD/2008/6/37 : AAD/2008/6/39 : AAD/2008/6/58

Extent: 8 files

Reference	Description	Dates
AAD/2008/6/27	Photographs and coloured drawings 1 folder 5 coloured fashion drawings and 6 black and white photographs.	1904-1905

AAD/2008/6/30 Henri Manuel photographs 1 folder	ca. 1911- 1915
10 photographs of Lucile's mannequins modelling designs and accessories, taken by Henri Manuel inside Lucile Ltd, Paris and outside in the garden.	
AAD/2008/6/31 Fashion photographs, Paris 1 folder	1912
21 black and white photographs of Lucile models taken in the garden of Lucile Ltd, Paris. Some of the photographs featured in Good Housekeeping and others are from the same photographic shoot.	
AAD/2008/6/32 Fashion photographs, London and Paris 1 folder	ca. 1912- 1915
39 black and white and sepia-tone photographs of mannequins taken inside and outside the Paris house, in the gardens of the London and Paris establishments, and some studio shots (including hats and shoes).	
AAD/2008/6/33 Photographs of Lucile designs for Irene Castle 1 folder	ca. 1914- 1917
15 black and white photographs of Irene Castle ensembles designed by Lucile.	
AAD/2008/6/58 Fashion photographs 1 folder	ca. 1915
4 photographs. Includes a photograph of a Russian wedding group, and a dress made for Florence Walton.	
AAD/2008/6/37 Fashion photographs 2 folders	1917
191 black and white photographs of Lucile mannequins, including Phyllis and Dolores, modelling fashions from 1917 in a studio. Some photographs include names of ensembles and model numbers. These photographs would have probably been mounted in an album, which has not survived.	
AAD/2008/6/39 Lucile designs for Ziegfeld Follies 1 folder	1917
75 black and white photographs featuring designs for Ziegfeld Follies scenes entitled 'Flower', 'Chiffon', 'Arabian', and 'Chinese', which are all stamped 'Lucile Ltd' and modelled by Lucile mannequins. Men's 'exotic' fancy dress is also included. These photographs would have probably been mounted in an album, which has not survived.	

Photograph albums,

Reference: AAD/2008/6/28 : AAD/2008/6/34 to 36 : AAD/2008/6/38 :
AAD/2008/6/40 to 42

Extent: 8 files

Arranged chronologically.

Reference	Description	Dates
AAD/2008/6/28	Album Memento: photograph album 1 volume 61 black and white photographs in the album featuring mannequins posed in the garden of Lucile Ltd, Paris, taken by Henri Manuel. Other photographs are of a mannequin parade in the Paris house, various Paris interior images, customers being fitted, Lucile styling a mannequin, and a New York house interior. Three photographs are mannequins in designs for Lillie Elsie.	ca. 1910- 1916
AAD/2008/6/34	Photographs of models, Autumn 1915, and gowns for Florence Walton 1 volume 244 black and white photographs by Burke Atwell, as well as reproductions of the photographs. The photographs depict the collection of 1915 as well as items for dancer Florence Walton, which are labelled accordingly and taken by Ira L. Hills Studio. Information about the ensembles is written with ink and provides the name of the gown, model number and a description.	1915
AAD/2008/6/35	Tableaux Vivants I (in Aid of War Orphans of France), and fancy dress 1 volume The album contains material about the Orphelinat Des Armees and Lucile's involvement with the charity for orphans, as well as the poem 'Lilies of France' by 'H.M.K.S'. The rest of the album contains 60 black and white photographs of mannequins dressed in Lucile designs with an oriental theme, as well as fancy dress ensembles.	ca. 1916- 1918
AAD/2008/6/36	Tableaux Vivants II, fancy dress and Miss Tompson's Wedding 1 volume The album contains 57 black and white photographs for fancy dress designs and a bridal order for Miss Tompson. The fancy dress images are mainly duplicates from the first Tableaux Vivants album, whilst Lucile mannequin Phyllis models Miss Tompson's wedding trousseau and going-away clothes.	ca. 1916- 1919
AAD/2008/6/38	Lady Duff Gordon's vaudeville act album 1 volume Large format album with 18 black and white photographs mounted on paper featuring Lady Duff Gordon's Vaudeville Act "Fleurette's Dream at Peronne" to benefit the Secours Franco-Americain pour la France Devastee. The act was performed in New York at the Booth Theatre on 18 and 19 October. All photographs are signed 'Lady Duff Gordon, New York'.	1917
AAD/2008/6/40	Photographs of models, autumn 1917, New York 1 volume The album contains 160 black and white photographs of the Autumn 1917 collection for New York, modelled by Lucile's famous mannequins Phyllis, Dolores and Arjamand. Model numbers are written on the top right-hand side of the photographs and include hand-written annotations in black ink.	1917
AAD/2008/6/41	Photographs of models, spring 1918, New York 1 volume	1918

The album includes 221 black and white photographs of 1918 New York collection, with front, back and side views of some ensembles. The model number is written on the top right-hand side of the photographs. Most photographs are annotated.

AAD/2008/6/42 Ziegfeld Frolic, 1919. Jewel Dresses D.E.A.R.E.S.T 1919
 1 volume
 15 black and white photographs of costumes. Each costume has two photographs showing with different aspects. Some photographs have han-written annotations in pencil at the top on the card.

Fascimile photographs, 1915-1918

Reference: AAD/2008/6/48 to 55

Extent: 8 files

Reference	Description	Dates
AAD/2008/6/48	Lucile Limited (USA). Album of facsimiles of photographs in AAD/2008/6/34 1 volume	1915-1916
AAD/2008/6/49	Lucile Limited (USA). Album of facsimiles of photographs in AAD/2008/6/34 1 volume	1915-1916
AAD/2008/6/50	Lucile Limited (USA). Album of facsimiles of photographs in AAD/2008/6/34 1 volume Includes photographs of designs for Florence Walton. Album includes some images of photographs not included in AAD/2008/6/34.	1915-1916
AAD/2008/6/51	Lucile Limited (USA). Album of facsimiles of photographs in AAD/2008/6/40 1 volume Spine of volume stamped '1915-1916', but images are facsimiles of photographs in AAD/2008/6/40, dated 1917.	1917
AAD/2008/6/52	Lucile Limited (USA). Album of facsimiles of photographs in AAD/2008/6/41 1 volume	1918
AAD/2008/6/53	Negative facsimiles of designs for Florence Walton, Autumn 1915 1 folder Negatives of images in AAD/2008/6/50.	1915
AAD/2008/6/54	Negative facsimiles of photographs 1 folder Negative facsimiles of images in AAD/2008/6/51	1917
AAD/2008/6/55	Negative facsimiles of photographs 1 folder Negative facsimiles of images in AAD/2008/6/52.	1918

Press cuttings, business literature, and inspirational material, ca.1904-1928

Reference: AAD/2008/6/43 to 46

Extent: 4 files

Reference	Description	Dates
AAD/2008/6/43	Lucile Ltd business literature and mannequin parade programmes 1 folder Lucile business literature, which includes mannequin parade programmes, theatre orders, and sketches from wand sketches from women who applied for the position of a fashion artist in 1912, as well as Lucile stationery.	ca.1904-1918
AAD/2008/6/44	Press cuttings 1 folder Various press cuttings from newspapers and magazines such as Hearth and Home, Daily Express, Ladies' Pictorial, Vogue and the New York American Examiner.	ca. 1909-1928
AAD/2008/6/45	Inspirational documents and miscellaneous photographs, including photographs at the races 1 folder 20 items, which include eight unknown black and white photographs, ten black and white photographs taken at the races in England, one drawing and one print.	undated
AAD/2008/6/46	Photographs of actresses 1 folder 4 black and white photographs of actresses preserved for inspiration.	ca.1900-1910
