



Charles Kirk

# History & Heritage

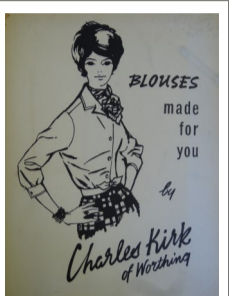


Charles Kirk

Originating in London on November 10th 1939, Charles Kirk began as a ladies blouse manufacturer, designing and manufacturing the latest fashions. Founded by Mr Charles Kirk, he and a gentleman called Robert Goldreich sold garments from firstly, a unit at Bolsover Street Marylebone, and in 1946 from a salesroom at Stratford Place, just off Oxford Street. During the war, many of these would have had the CC41 label for civilian clothing. Laws made it illegal and unpatriotic to spend time embellishing clothing for sale and forbade manufacturers using the CC41 label from incorporating any fancy trimmings, unnecessary buttons, extra stitching, tucks, pleats or pockets that weren't essential to function. In contrast, today, Charles Kirk is a school wear specialist in the manufacturing, supply, embroidery and printing of knitwear, sweatshirts and accessories, based in Worthing, West Sussex. The ability for customers to have garments made to order, choosing from any number of embellishments and adornments is a key part of the business.



CC41 Label



Blouse Advert

One constant throughout the last seventy-five years has been a commitment and investment in manufacturing. After the company's beginnings in London, in 1951, unusually, the manufacturing base was moved, not North, but to the South Coast, where the company began to specialise in knitwear for men and women as well as ladies blouses. However, by 1952, Goldreich made a move that ultimately led to the Horton family's connection with the firm. In a company meeting, Goldreich made the announcement that, in his opinion, "it was no longer possible to produce cheap enough and speedily enough to compete under present market conditions". Mr Kirk did not agree and was determined to continue with the business. It was at this stage he set about persuading former toy manufacturer, Mr Charles Horton, who had left London's East End and retired to the South Coast, to invest in the business.

Mr Horton was persuaded to invest and come out of retirement and along with his son Basil Horton and daughter Gladys Hembley, became a company director. Mr Horton was lauded in the local press for saving the company and the local jobs it provided. In 1953, the company employed 60 people, had an output of 57,600 knitted garments and 48,000 blouses annually and with the growth of the knitwear, was investing in the latest knitting machinery. By the 1960's, Charles Kirk had left the business and sold his interest in the company, the Hortons had full control and the company evolved into primarily a school knitwear and dress manufacturer, a move away from fashion, but with a keen interest in the newest developments in the production of man-made fibres for knitwear.



Worthing Herald March 1953

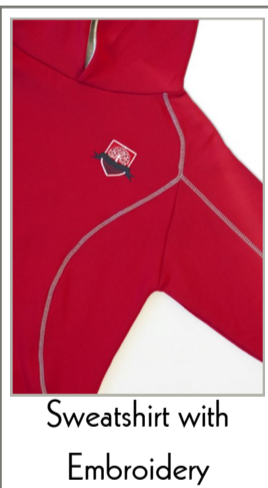


Sample Card

Charles Kirks commitment to manufacturing school wear that is fit for purpose led to use of 100% acrylic yarns which were developed in the sixties to replicate wool but with easier laundering. Charles Kirk was one of the first companies to recognise the benefits of using L.C. Courtelle yarn from Courtauld's Textiles in school knitwear. This yarn had a softer handle than wool, was machine washable and also more durable. This yarn proved perfect for school knitwear and so as the final fibre producer in the UK switched to the more profitable carbon fibre production, Charles Kirk started their search for a yarn to match if not better the L.C. Courtelle. The replacement was Heritage Definition, sourced by Yorkshire firm Paintbox Textiles from a fibre producer in Eastern Europe whose plant was copied from the English manufacturer and has proved an excellent substitute, machine washable, durable and with an even softer handle. Although knitwear has almost always been Charles Kirks most popular range, the company has also continued to develop other school wear products.

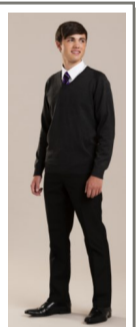


Courtelle Label



Sweatshirt with Embroidery

As the fashions of school uniform and the economic climate have inevitably changed over the years, Charles Kirk has grown and developed their business to continue to meet the needs of their school wear customers. By the 1980's the school dress manufacturing was replaced by sweatshirts and embroidery machines were being used to adorn garments in house. In the last ten years, Charles Kirk has developed not only as a manufacturer, but as a supplier of school wear, first with the sourcing of Charles Kirk's stock sweatshirts from overseas, then the development of the Coolflow Cotton Acrylic knitwear from India, whilst also becoming a Jerzees Schoolgear preferred supplier and stockist of Result Jackets. During the last few years to keep prices competitive and allow for further growth of made to order knitwear in the UK, the Charles Kirk Coolacryl knitwear is being developed also from India. One of the most recent developments has been the introduction of in-house printing facilities using the latest technologies, allowing the company to offer their school wear customers an even greater choice of services. Despite the move of some production overseas, over 200,000 garments a year are still made in Worthing in a wide variety of yarns and fabrics and all tagged with the Charles Kirk Made in GB logo.



Coolflow Pullover



Print Samples

Continuing to manufacture in the UK and particularly Worthing is something that current Managing Director, grandson of Charles Horton, also called Charles, is extremely proud of. Manufacturing in the UK allows for small runs of garments, which enables the company to uniquely offer customers the ability to have school wear made for pupils no matter what shape or size they may be. British made clothing is today seen as synonymous with a high quality and durable product, which is what Charles Kirk offers their customers. This is recognised by those customers who have traded with the company for over forty years, including Lester Bowden of Epsom (est. 1898), Simmonds of Tunbridge Wells (est. 1837) and Monkhouse of Stockport (est.1938). Other notable customers who have recognised the quality of Made in GB garments have been Warner Brothers, through an association with Wren Schoolwear, for pullovers and scarves for the first three Harry Potter films and more recently, the Royal Shakespeare Company for Pullovers for their productions of the stage show Matilda, both in London and New York. The recognition of the quality of the Charles Kirk garments and the desirability of Made in GB garments is not only limited to British school wear retailers. In recent years, Charles Kirk has been working with a top Japanese fashion brand, to manufacture small quantities of fashion knitwear for their Japanese market.



Made in GB Logo

In 2014, Charles Kirk are excited and proud to be celebrating 75 years of a business that has never given up on British manufacturing and never lost sight of its core values, which are now summarised within the companies ethos, Made with Care (care for our customers; care for our suppliers; care for our employees; care for our environment and care for our local community), Made in GB and Made for the Adventure of Learning.