

COSTUME HOUSES PAST & PRESENT



A costume house supplies garments and accessories to film, TV and theatre productions.

From small companies specialising in designer suits, to warehouses that can clothe an army, London's costume houses provide the garments and accessories needed to create character on screen.

Costumiers pull costumes from their rails or make to order. It's a circular economy: after filming, the rented costumes return to stock to be used on other productions.

Costume houses also support the industry in less visible ways: they are training grounds for designers, tailors, dressmakers, milliners and jewellers. They are research archives that inform and inspire designers. And they are important hubs and meeting places.

These maps of London costume houses reveal some hidden heroes of the entertainment industries, past and present.

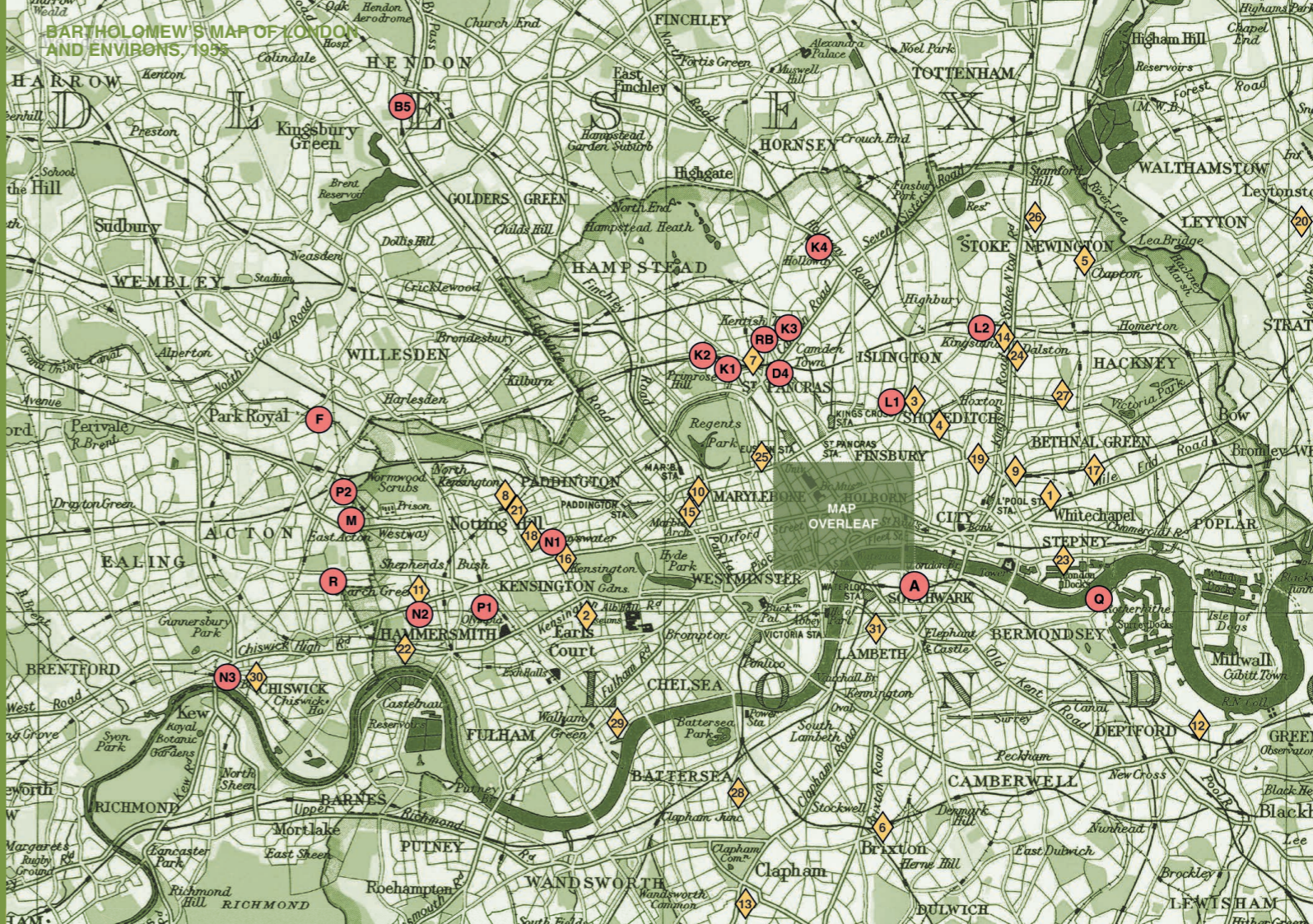
"There's no way any costume designer could live without costume rental. It's a complete lifesaver."

Vin Burnham, costume designer.

COSTUME HOUSE HISTORY

The history of London's costumiers is interwoven with the city's performance traditions. The great names of the Georgian stage rented their costumes from shops around Covent Garden. In the Victorian era, renowned companies L&H Nathan, C&W May and Morris Angel rose with the theatre boom. In the twentieth century, film and TV required huge wardrobes stocked with period dress as well as the latest fashions. Bermans costumiers grew to a million costumes and a hundred staff. In the 1960s and 70s, Cosprop and Sands became known for authentic craftsmanship in period film. In the 1980s, music videos and advertising supported a new generation of costume houses including Academy, Contemporary Wardrobe, Carlo Manzi and Costume Studio. Many businesses have come and gone over the years. But some costumiers still hold on in the twenty-first century, enduring the challenges of London's spiralling rents and the shifting media landscape.

Scan to read longer histories of costume houses on *Layers of London*.



SHOPS AND SPECIALIST SUPPLIERS

Costume houses and makers demanded a whole eco-system of suppliers: fabrics, buttons, braids, leather, feathers, flowers. You name it, London supplied it somewhere. Plus the accessories: hats, crowns, stockings, shoes, gloves and umbrellas – all had their specialists, whose addresses were traded and treasured by costume professionals.

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|---|--|
| 1 Alma Leather (est. 1938) | 16 London Hat House, couture milliner (1993–2010) |
| 2 Anello & Davide, handmade dance shoes (est. 1922) | 17 London Trimmings (1971–2021) |
| 3 Annie Moss's vintage costume and textiles (1975–2014) | 18 Lowther Antiques, jewellery (est. 1980s) |
| 4 Bestim & Co feather factory (c.1910–1994) | 19 Pongees, silk specialists (est. 1931) |
| 5 Brimlake Textiles, furnishing fabrics (est. 2006) | 20 Porter Nicholson, upholstery fabrics (active 1990s) |
| 6 Brixton Market and fabric shops in railways arches (until 2016) | 21 Portobello Road market, vintage clothing and textiles |
| 7 Cloth House, quality and vintage fabrics (est. 1984) | 22 Trade Eighty, silks (est. 1980) |
| 8 Cloth Shop, imported linens (est. Soho 1984) | 23 Walter Reginald, leathers (est. 1948) |
| 9 Crescent Trading, fabric warehouse (1960s–2020) | 24 William Gee, fabric and haberdashery (est. 1906) |
| 10 Gallery of Antique Costume, collectible textiles (until c.2008) | SPECIALIST MAKERS |
| 11 Goldhawk Road fabric shops: Unique Fabrics, UK Textiles, A-One Fabrics | 25 MBA Costumes (1990s) |
| 12 Hobson & Sons, military outfitters (1880s–2023) | 26 Thomas Rowe, bespoke footwear (est. 2013) |
| 13 Hopkins Mercers and Haberdashers, period dress fabrics (est. 1970s) | 27 Costume Workshop Ltd (est. 2003) |
| 14 J T Batchelor, wholesale leather (est. 1970s) | 28 Jane Smith, theatrical hatter (since 1970s) |
| 15 Joel & Son, designer fabrics (est. 1979) | 29 Martin Adams, costume propmaker (since 1976) |
| | 30 Louis Chalmers, The Plumery (est. 1990) |
| | 31 School of Historical Dress (est. 2012) |

Film Costumes in Action is a project recording histories of film costume work in Britain since the 1960s.

Film costumes travel a complex journey from script to screen: through design, making, shooting and exhibition.

Using interviews with practitioners, design archives and production notes, we are mapping this costume journey in different ways.

Scan the QR to visit the project website and learn more.



The Three Musketeers (1973). Costume design by Yvonne Blake. Costumes made by Bermans. Cover image: Shirley Russell at *The Last Picture Show*, Pembridge Road, 1975.



ACADEMY

A UNION STREET ARCHES, BLACKFRIARS

Adrian Gwilym founded Academy in 1984 ambitious to create 'the best workroom in the world'. In 2013 the gentrification of Southwark pushed Academy out of Blackfriars railway arches, and they moved their stock of 20th century costumes south to St Alphege church hall.

ANGELS

B5 1 GARRICK ROAD, HENDON (2002–PRESENT)

SEE ADDITIONAL LOCATIONS OVERLEAF London's biggest and oldest costume house. Founded in 1840, Angels has passed through seven generations of the family: it's a self-described 'world class family business'. In 2002 Angels moved to new premises in Hendon, with 8 miles of rails for millions of costumes. Their unparalleled collection is both a repository of British film history and an essential resource for new projects.

BERMANS & NATHANS

D4 40 CAMDEN STREET (1973–92)

SEE ADDITIONAL LOCATIONS OVERLEAF Bermans & Nathans' move to Camden in 1973 brought all their costumes under one roof with an armoury in the basement and 175 staff. Monty Berman described it as 'one big supermarket' for costume. From Camden, B&N supplied the costumes for blockbusters including *Star Wars* (1977), the Superman franchise and iconic James Bond movies. Angels bought Bermans & Nathans in 1992 and added their own stock and staff to the Camden HQ.



Superman (1978). Costumes designed by Yvonne Blake, made + supplied by Bermans & Nathans

CARLO MANZI

F ROYAL LONDON IND. ESTATE, ACTON

Stylist and designer Carlo Manzi started his hire company in 1982, specialising in post-WW2 menswear. In Manzi's archive of 100,000 items, costume designers can find original vintage clothing that adds depth to characters, and at the same time benefit from Manzi's encyclopaedic knowledge of fashion history.

COSPROP

- K1** GLOUCESTER AVENUE (1965–75)
- K2** KING HENRYS RD (1975–80)
- K3** ROCHESTER MEWS (1980–2005)

K4 469–475 HOLLOWAY RD (2005–)

Founded in 1965 by John Bright, Cosprop is known for historically accurate designs based on real garments and fabrics. Over 40 specialist craftspeople create and maintain their million costumes. Cosprop has shaped the reputation of British film and TV costume design, from Merchant-Ivory period films and Jane Austen adaptations to the lavish fantasy of *Game of Thrones*.

COSTUME STUDIO

- L1** WHITE LION STREET (1987–96)
- L2** 159–161 BALLS POND ROAD, DALSTON (1996–PRESENT)

Purchased by brothers Richard and Peter Dudley in 1987. Costume Studio thrives on small fast-paced jobs including ad campaigns, London TV and Bollywood films. Based in Dalston for 30 years, their location attracts East London creatives.

FOXTROT

M 3B BRASSIE AVE, EAST ACTON

Foxtrot Costumes was established in 1992 as a hire company for military costumes and armour. They have become specialists in uniform and workwear – for whenever a film needs a pilot, a police officer, a traffic warden, a scout leader or a SWAT team.

LAST PICTURE FROCK

- N1** 49 PEMBRIDGE ROAD (1974–77)
- N2** 179 DALLING ROAD (1977–80S)
- N3** 46 STRAND-ON-THE-GREEN (1980S–90)

Established in 1974 near Portobello Road by costume designers Shirley Russell and

Linda Burtenshaw to hire out costumes from their film projects, including *Tommy* (1975) and *Valentino* (1977). LPF specialised in original clothing from the late Victorian era to the 1950s, foraged from all over the country.

PROPS GALORE

P1 62 BLYTH ROAD (1971–1980S)

P2 BRUNEL ROAD (1980S–PRESENT)

Established by Sheila Cook in 1971. Props Galore supply the essential finishing touches for authentic and realistic period costumes: stockings and stoles, gloves and umbrellas. Sold in the late 1980s to Farley, who continue to hire the costume accessories.

SANDS FILMS

Q 82 SAINT MARYCHURCH ST, ROTHERHITHE

Founded in 1975 by director and costume designer Christine Edzard and producer Richard Goodwin, Sands is an independent film studio and international costumier. Edzard's *Little Dorrit* (1987) established their reputation for creating beautiful quality costumes and cutting authentic shapes for period dramas. Since the 1990s Sands have made and rented costume and provided historically-inspired embroidery and buttonholing.

STUDIO FOUR

R 4 WARPLE MEWS, ACTON (EST. 1991)

Established by Linda Burtenshaw after the closure of The Last Picture Frock, Studio Four Costumes supplied childrenswear for films set in the 19th and 20th centuries.

MORRIS ANGEL & SON

- B1** 46 WYCH STREET (1840)
- B2** 44 DUDLEY STREET (1840S)
- B3** 117 SHAFTESBURY AVENUE (1850S–2020)
- B4** 119 SHAFTESBURY AVENUE (1920S–2020)

SEE ADDITIONAL LOCATIONS OVERLEAF

In the 1840s Morris Angel expanded his father's second-hand clothes shop on Wych St into a tailors and costume hire company, soon taking premises on the grand new Shaftesbury Avenue. Over the next 185 years, Angels dressed thousands of theatre, film and television productions, and in 2016 the company received a BAFTA for Outstanding British Contribution to Cinema. In 2020, Angels closed their famous Shaftesbury Ave shop due to rising rents, but continue their business from huge premises in Hendon.

B J SIMMONS

- C** 7-8 KING STREET (1857–1964)

Founded in 1857. After sixty years as theatre costumiers, dressing pantomime, opera and musicals, B J Simmons started to supply costumes to the early British film studios. From the 1920s to 1960s, they dressed Ealing comedies, Gainsborough melodramas and lavish Gaumont period productions. B J Simmons were renowned for high quality construction and their stock of historic costumes. They were purchased by Charles H Fox in 1941, and ceased trading in the 1960s.

BERMANS

- D1** LISLE STREET (1884–1912)
- D2** 18 GREEN STREET, RENAMED IRVING STREET (1912–1980S)
- D3** CRANBOURNE STREET

SEE ADDITIONAL LOCATIONS OVERLEAF

Founded in 1884 by Morris Berman, then managed by his son Max and grandson Monty, Bermans costumiers become one of the great institutions of British performing arts. In the 1950s and 60s, Bermans occupied at least five buildings around Leicester Square. In their workshops, skilled tailors and seamstresses created fantasies like *Moulin Rouge* (1952), *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953), and *Cleopatra* (1963). Their stockrooms overflowed with historical dress and military uniforms. In 1972, Mr Monty took over L&H Nathan, and the business became Bermans & Nathans, then the world's biggest costume house.



Quadrophenia (1979). Costumes supplied by Roger Burton & Rick Carter of Contemporary Wardrobe.

C&W MAY

- E** 9–11 GARRICK STREET (1890S–1997)

C&W May was a primarily theatrical costumier, who also supplied television and film. The company managed to survive for a hundred years in the business of dressing the professionals and partygoers of London's theatreland, from their premises next to the Garrick private members club in the West End.

CHARLES ALIAS

- G** 114 ST MARTINS LANE (1870S–1921)

Monsieur Charles was a genius designer of fantasy costume, and his wife Sarah was a talented cutter able to realise his inventions. Together they created sparkling fairy wings and dresses for the heyday of Edwardian ballet and pantomime and the early years of film. After Charles died in 1921, their stock went to L&H Nathan.

CHARLES H FOX

- H1** 25 RUSSELL STREET (1878–)
- H2** WELLINGTON STREET, COVENT GARDEN (1892–)
- H3** 184 HIGH HOLBORN (1940S)
- H4** SHELTON STREET (1970S)
- H5** 22 TAVISTOCK STREET, COVENT GARDEN (1982)

Charles H Fox established his theatrical wigmakers and costumiers in 1878. By 1890, Fox employed 60 people making wigs, and marketed greasepaint. Over the following century, the company increased their stock of costume, and acquired B J Simmons as well as armour manufacturers Robert White. After WW2 Fox supplied Gainsborough film studios among others. In the 1970s they pivoted back to selling make-up, and sold off their costumes in the 1980s. The Charles H Fox name was a fixture in London's theatreland until the 2010s.

CONTEMPORARY WARDROBE

- J1** GREET QUEEN STREET (1986–93)
- J2** HORSE HOSPITAL (1993–PRESENT)

Contemporary Wardrobe is an archive of over 20,000 pieces of 'rare and exotic street fashion' from the 1940s to the present day. Founded in 1978 by Roger Burton and Rick Carter after they supplied the costumes for *Quadrophenia* (1979), Contemporary Wardrobe supplies original sub-culture garments for film, television, commercials and fashion editorials.

L&H NATHAN

- O1** 24 TICHBORNE STREET (1790S)
- O2** PANTON STREET (1800S–1963)
- O3** 17 COVENTRY STREET (LATE 1800S–1970S)
- O4** 143 DRURY LANE (1963–1973)

One of the longest-running costume houses in London, L&H Nathan traced their origins to Lewis Nathan, a Tichborne Street tailor in the 1790s. In the twentieth century, Nathans embraced film, and worked with high-profile designers to make costumes for silent, sound and then Technicolor movies. Nathans furnished costumes for stage and screen productions until the 1970s, when they merged with 'friendly rivals' Bermans.

TWENTIETH CENTURY COSTUMES

- S1** GREAT SUTTON STREET (1978–88)
- S2** DALLINGTON STREET (1988–90)

Twentieth Century Costumes (sometimes styled XXCC) was a vintage costume rental company established by Laurie Hollande. They supplied costumes to designers for film, television and music videos through the media boom years of the 1980s.

CHICHESTER'S PICTURE MAP OF LONDON 1955



"Those designs came floating down from heaven. You never met a designer. You didn't know the story behind it, how any of that worked. They just arrived on the desk of the cutter..."

We were like a cell in a machine with no sense of what the body looked like, and the only connection you had was the runners, who were like the nerve messages going around and about. They would tell you funny anecdotes about something they'd seen, or they'd tell you about some great fabric that was in down at Berwick Street."

Madeline Jude, seamstress at Bermans & Nathans in 1972.

SHOPS AND SPECIALIST SUPPLIERS

Costume workers pound the pavements of London looking for necessary supplies: antique silk ribbon, four hundred matching buttons, or the perfect blouse for a leading lady. Even in the era of online shopping, the best buyers know exactly where to go for the most obscure and specific items.

"In the early days, people's address books were like gold. Knowing where to get stuff was half your job."

Martin Adams, costume propmaker

Many shops on this map started as family businesses around the West End, manufacturing or importing at small scale. Along with personal service came the bonus of expert advice. Around Savile Row and Regent Street, some venerable names in military tailoring have lasted for generations.

- 1** A E Ward & Son, gemstone wholesaler (est. 1942, Clerkenwell)
- 2** Alec Tiranti, sculpting supplies (est. 1895)
- 3** Alexandra Overalls, workwear supplier (est. 1850, Bristol)
- 4** Anello & Davide, handmade shoes (est. 1922)
- 5** Barnett Lawson, wholesale trimmings (est. 1988)
- 6** Bead Shop, one of many around Seven Dials (1967–2010s)
- 7** Berwick Street was packed with fabric shops, including:
 - The Berwick Street Cloth Shop (est. 1993)
 - The Silk Society (until 2021)
 - Textile King (1971–2010)
 - Soho Silks (est. 1977)
 - Borovicks (est. 1931)
 - Misan (est. 1983)
 - Broadwick Silks (est. 1990)
- 8** Brioni, bespoke Italian tailor (est. 1945, Rome)
- 9** Brodie & Middleton, art supplies and pigments (est. 1840)
- 10** C&A, fashion clothing shop (1922–2001)
- 11** City Gold Plating, jewellery and prop plating (est. 1973)
- 12** Clarkson's Wigs, famous costumier and perrier (1904–1934)
- 13** D M Buttons, custom covered buttons and holes (est. 1940s)
- 14** Ells and Farrier, beads and trimmings (est. 1920)
- 15** Freed of London, dance shoes (est. 1929)
- 16** Gieves & Hawkes, military and royal tailors (est. 1700s)
- 17** Halicombe Trimmings, wholesale haberdasher (1988–2014)
- 18** Hand & Lock, custom and military embroidery (est. 1767)
- 19** H V Caldicott, wholesale fabric and trimmings (1908–c.2010)
- 20** John Lewis, department store and haberdashery (est. 1864)
- 21** MacCulloch & Wallis, fabric, trims and haberdashery (est. 1902)
- 22** Miss Ruhl, supplier and dyer of feathers (active 1960s–90s)
- 23** Ostrich Feather Manufacturing Co, feather suppliers (est. 1920s)
- 24** Percy Dennys, anglo-french workwear outfitter (1899–1997)
- 25** Samuel Brothers, tailors and military outfitters (est. 1830)
- 26** Sarees Centre, Indian fabric and garments (est. before 1970)
- 27** Savile Row, historic street of bespoke tailors since 1800s. Incl: Hardy Amies, Nutters, and Ozwald Boateng.
- 28** Tailors Buttons, hand-covered fabric buttons (est. 1920s)
- 29** Topshop / Topman, fashion retailer (est. 1974)
- 30** W Bill Wool, tweeds and wool fabrics (est. 1846 Wales, est. 1892 London)
- 31** Wallace & McMurray, specialist costume makers (active 1976–1990s, then moved out of London)
- 32** H Wolfen & Son, theatrical fabrics (est. 1900, Old Street)



Bermans made quality costumes for high-budget productions, which could then be hired by other films. The 'Carry On' films were notorious for re-using whole wardrobes from prestige period dramas, creatively re-styled for comedy. Left: *Anne of the Thousand Days* (1969), costume design by Margaret Furse. Right: *Carry On Henry* (1971), costume design by Courtenay Elliot.