



**THOMAS MASON®**

FOUNDED 1756  
NELSON, LANCASHIRE, ENGLAND

THE REFLECTIONS OF A BESPOKE SHIRT MAKER  
MR PAUL CUSS



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“THE PEACOCK OF JERMYN STREET”

Customers sometimes ask me

“Why bother with all that British heritage stuff?

Isn't it too old-fashioned for a forward thinking company like Albini?”

I reply, that by looking back, I am able to understand better the past, the present, and the future: in short it always inspires my designing.

Take our brand David & John Anderson - 190 years old, and Thomas Mason - 216 years old, whose most longstanding English customer is one of the most famous shirt makers in the world: Turnbull & Asser Limited (established 1885) and known as “The Peacock of Jermyn Street” for their typical colourful striped and checked shirts.

Our good friend Mr Paul Cuss, for many years “The Royal Shirt Maker” at T&A kindly shared with Silvio Albini some reflections of DJA, Thomas Mason, of Jermyn Street, Hollywood, and bespoke shirt making in general.

I hope you will be inspired as I was, with the fascinating imagery of time, place, and people, dating back to the 1950's and even earlier...

Feel the real history that helps unlock the “DNA” of our British heritage!

FABIO ALBINI  




*Mr Paul Cuss, For 40 years, since 1959, the head shirt-maker at Turnbull & Asser Ltd at 71-72 Jermyn Street London, founded 1885, the most prestigious shirt-maker on the most famous street for shirts in the world.*

*Thank you very much for sharing with us some of your knowledge and reminiscences.*

*Dr Silvio Albini, President of Cotonificio Albini, founded 1876, and in the 5th family generation ownership of the firm supplying top level shirt fabrics to the best shirt makers in the world.*





DR SILVIO ALBINI Cottonificio Albini is 136 years old, 9 years older than Turnbull & Asser who celebrated their 125th anniversary in 2010. Neither of us was around then but is it fanciful to think our two firms might even have known about each other in the 19th Century?

MR PAUL CUSS Turnbull & Asser is one of the world's greatest shirt makers and Albini is one of the world's finest shirting fabric manufacturers, so perhaps we were always destined to meet, although it took a little more time to get together!



**DR SILVIO ALBINI** In 1991 I heard that the English brands of Thomas Mason (founded 1796) and David & John Anderson (founded 1822) were to cease production in Lancashire. I and my family immediately resolved to see if we could save these famous old shirt brands from extinction. These firms had been fabric suppliers to Turnbull & Asser since after the Second World War, and possibly earlier.

What was the reaction at Turnbull & Asser to an Italian company suddenly acquiring your English fabric supplier and offering to take over your exclusive production mid-season?

**MR PAUL CUSS** My first memories of Silvio Albini were possibly as a salvation for Turnbull & Asser because you had done your homework and offered us a continuation of the exclusive designs, which were so important to our business. Not only that, but with your modern equipment and better quality control you assured us that you would copy the exactly same method as David & John Anderson.

Our relationship grew very quickly over the next couple of years, fabric deliveries were always on time and to very excellent quality with less flaws, which made making our bespoke and ready-made shirts much quicker.

With Cotonificio Albini making 100% of our cotton fabrics, with complete confidentiality, both our businesses grew stronger and stronger, with Albini and also Thomas Mason adding so many more ranges and fabric qualities.



FOUNDED 1822

DAVID & JOHN  
ANDERSON



DR SILVIO ALBINI You always wrote your fabric orders out to “David & John Anderson”. Do you remember anything about the enterprising D&J Anderson family from Scotland?

MR PAUL CUSS DJA was a small Scottish company that wove fine shirtings, with many fancy designs including their famous Tartan range. They were happy to make exclusive designs for T&A at 800 yard minimums, and in fact were very different from most small firms at the time in also offering a full design service and not just commission weaving.

Since the 1950’s we started selling extensively in the USA and so 800 yards per colour way wasn’t any problem. We did “trunk shows” all over the USA with very great regularity and built up a great following which remains, although we now have our own stores and not just suitcases to sell from!

Robert Mackenzie, the Managing Director of DJA became a very respected and good friend of T&A. The relationship grew through not only buying large quantities but also through social times in the pubs and clubs, which was perfectly normal procedure in those days!

DJA had launched famous fabric names like Zendaline, Turbuline, Zephyr, Royal Oxford and many more, plus the famous poplin range of 2 fold 100’s with Reverse Z Twist, which gave the fabric a unique feel. Also, as we kept the above names, I always wrote the orders out to DJA to keep the continuity of the 100’s year old tradition. At this time we also asked Jane Roxburgh (who designed for DJA) to be Turnbull & Asser’s representative to Silvio Albini.



**DR SILVIO ALBINI** Going back a bit earlier in your career Turnbull & Asser was well known for dressing the Swinging London Set in the 1960's, with vibrant colours and "modern" designs. What memories do you have of this period and in particular the designs and influences of that time and would you say that colourful eccentric look has typified Turnbull & Asser and Jermyn Street since then?

**MR PAUL CUSS** When I joined Turnbull & Asser in the 1950's we actually mostly made plain shirts in white, light blue and maybe pink, with various choices of collars and cuffs, but certainly not many lively designs. We had gone through two world wars and the mood was much more sombre in those days. The 1960's were to change all that and Turnbull & Asser was a forerunner of high classic fashion. The bold T&A block stripe, became our synonymous look and so much so that it is now a part of British history and on permanent display in the famous Victoria and Albert Museum in London. Our shop became a showcase of colour and was nicknamed "The Peacock of Jermyn Street".



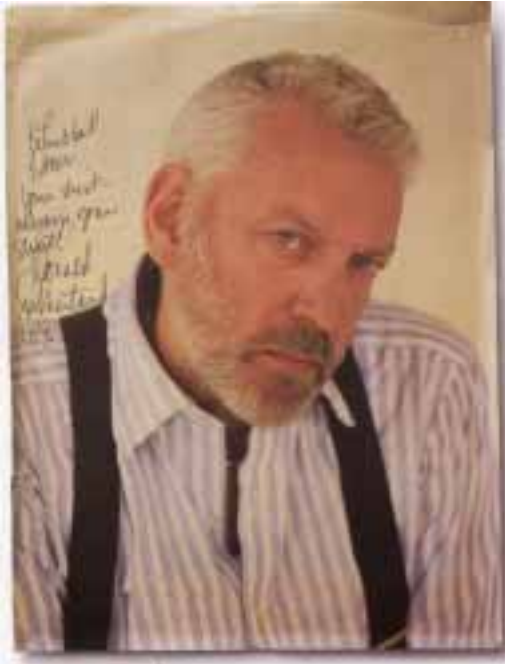


**DR SILVIO ALBINI** The links to celebrity culture are very interesting. I enjoyed the 1974 movie “The Great Gatsby” especially the famous scene in the film where Daisy Buchanan collapses in tears after seeing Jay Gatsby’s huge and wonderful collection of Turnbull & Asser boxed shirts. You must have fitted so many famous people over the years? Any “name dropping” or colourful tales you could share or must a bespoke shirt maker be too discreet to ever mention his customers?

**MR PAUL CUSS** Yes we have always made our shirts in our own workrooms in England which has meant quick turnaround, perfect for film and theatre companies who need a fashion wardrobe for major stars at short notice. This has included the famous Great Gatsby and all the James Bond films, starting with Sir Sean Connery up to the present day Daniel Craig.

With many stars from Charlie Chaplin, Marlon Brando, Richard Burton, Frank Sinatra, Michael Caine, plus our existing regular customers Lord Lawrence Olivier, Sir Alec Guinness, Sir John Gielgud, Sir Ralph Richardson, Albert Finney, David Niven, to mention just a few. We even made for the artist Picasso, and The Beatles - all the shirts worn in “Yellow Submarine”.

Not forgetting the leading ladies, Catherine Hepburn, Elizabeth Taylor, Shirley Maclean, Catherine Deneuve, Bianca Jagger, and Sophia Loren - whose pyjamas we made for her role in the iconic 1960 film The Millionairess - “Well Goodness Gracious Me!”.



DONALD SUTHERLAND



MEL BROOKS



AL PACINO



ALBERT FINNEY



MICHAEL CAINE



RICHARD ATTENBOROUGH

**THOMAS MASON®**  
FOUNDED 1700  
SHEPHERD WALK LONDON ENGLAND



SEAN CONNERY

As a bespoke shirt maker, you obviously must be absolutely discreet, although when our clients are already in the public view they usually don't mind identifying themselves, and in fact sometimes send signed photos and thank-you notes, many which are seen on the walls of our Jermyn Street store.



We also would visit customers, near and far, in homes and palaces. Like Winston Churchill who I made shirts for throughout his life and this included a famous velvet siren suit.



On one occasion I flew to The White House to measure President Reagan and the fabrics were mostly chosen by his wife Nancy (whilst the President and I watched the golf on television!).



**DR SILVIO ALBINI** In 1982 The Queen bestowed on H.R.H. The Prince Of Wales the right to grant Royal Warrants and you were very honoured to become The Royal Shirt-maker with the very first Royal Warrant that Prince Charles signed. Is it true that you once had to make a one-armed shirt when Prince Charles broke his arm playing polo?

**MR PAUL CUSS** Yes Turnbull & Asser were granted the Royal Warrant in 1982, which gave us the honour to use the royal emblem of “The Feathers” on all T&A products. When His Royal Highness, The Prince of Wales broke his right elbow playing polo, the next day we were asked to make matching slings in his shirt fabrics. The following day, when asked to make another, coincidentally, the lovely lady machinist had also fallen and broken her wrist. When H.R.H. heard this he took the time to write a touching letter of sympathy, amazingly from start to finish with his left hand, and in the P.S. he apologised for his bad handwriting!

**DR SILVIO ALBINI** Could it really be true that H.R.H. Diana, Princess of Wales once came to a board meeting at Jermyn Street?

**MR PAUL CUSS** True. And noted in the minutes.



DR SILVIO ALBINI Moving away from Royalty, obviously the majority of customers who come to you for a bespoke shirt are neither famous nor aristocratic. On the contrary they are ordinary people who understand that wearing a bespoke shirt is a pleasure that can be experienced every day.



MR PAUL CUSS When I first joined T&A, small shirt makers were closing one a month mostly due to making their bespoke shirts in old fashioned and dingy London “sweat shops” and young people weren’t interested in coming into the trade. The older machinists were retiring and their skills were rapidly dying out. We have always believed in the demand for bespoke production, and many years ago opened two modern bright clean workrooms side by side in the glorious Gloucestershire countryside, where we train up young people ourselves in the traditional skills. T&A still maintain “Made in England” and this is something that our customers appreciate and that is why they keep coming back again and again.



DR SILVIO ALBINI When my family bought Thomas Mason & DJA in 1992 our main fabric supply to you was 2/100s poplin which had been the traditional top end shirting poplin fabric for decades. You retired in 1999 after 40 years in the business. Would you be surprised to know that we can now offer a 3/330's count fabric?

MR PAUL CUSS One of the exceptional things I have always appreciated about Albini is that you continue to "push out the boundaries" of what is achievable. It is great to see how Albini has kept interest in cotton and high-count production alive. Not only by finding the best cotton producers in the world to supply you, but actually now starting to cultivate your own cotton plantations in Egypt.

I would compare your work to the production of the world's greatest wine "Chateau Lafite" (am I allowed to say this to an Italian?) All of the grapes are grown and harvested entirely by hand with the greatest possible care at every stage, in the same way as you grow and harvest your cotton by hand. There are very few that can afford these luxurious things, but for those that can they find something incredibly special.



DR SILVIO ALBINI You Mr Paul Cuss used to be able to cut straight along a single thread of 2/100s fabric with a pair of shears nearly one metre long and weighing 5 kilograms!

Please share the secret of this astonishing trick or is maybe it has only been passed to your son-in-law Steve Quin who succeeded you as 'The Royal Shirt Maker at the Millennium?'

MR PAUL CUSS Laughing... You exaggerate! The shears were only 2 feet or 60cms long but otherwise it is all true. Few people knew this but my father was a tailor's cutter and my mother a tailoress. Both worked for Hawes and Curtis of Jermyn Street in the early 1930's, where they met and married, so possibly I do have "rag trade" genes.

At the time H.R.H. Prince of Wales, Edward VIII was a very fashionable customer and this is where the Windsor Tie Knot and Prince of Wales Plaid (suiting) originated, so when T&A purchased Hawes & Curtis in the late 1950's indirectly we made his shirts as well. We later sold the H&C brand on.



DR SILVIO ALBINI Some shirts shops with very low prices enabled by Asian imports have opened in London and even also in Jermyn Street in the last two decades. Inevitably this must cause the consumer some quality confusion?  
How can a high quality Made in England shirt maker like T&A and a Made in Italy fabric supplier like ALBINI/TM/DJA continue to prosper and move forward with these traditional values in the 21st Century?

MR PAUL CUSS Yes, it is difficult, but you have to maintain belief in what you do, and above all in high quality. The customer cannot be mocked and it is so important to give them the best products and service. When they realise that you are offering them the very best then they will come back time and time again, and at Turnbull & Asser our long history has proved the truth of that. We believe that at Albini you share these same core values with us, and that is why we keep coming back to you for our fabric, in order to continue to give the best to our customers. Long may it continue!





DR SILVIO ALBINI We both have worked in the textile business for a long time and I maintain that it would not have been possible to continue for so long without having an absolute passion for shirts, for fabric and for cotton?

MR PAUL CUSS Yes although now it's time for other people to carry on where I left off. I also have a passion for Italy and your great history and artistic culture - "Made in Italy" is just one of very many things that you have to be proud of!

