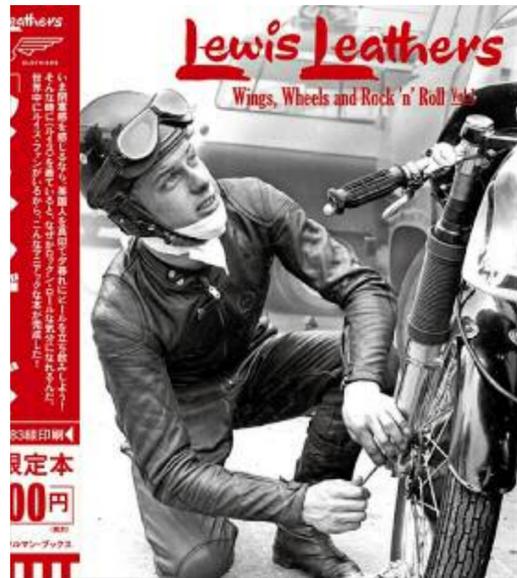


The legends and the leathers



The new history of the business, available in the shop some time in March.



Flying pioneer Amy Johnson was a customer. (National Portrait Gallery)

Iconic bikers' shop celebrated

By HELENE PARRY

Lewis Leathers is more than a shop in Fitzrovia - it's home to a British fashion icon. Few clothing brands have played such a large role in youth culture. The Beatles, The Sex Pistols, Lemmy, The Libertines - all have worn Lewis Leathers over the years.

The story began in 1892, when David Lewis Isaacs set up a tailor's shop at 124 Great Portland Street, trading under the name D Lewis. This choice of location proved momentous, as by 1918 the street had become "Motor Row", something of a showroom for the automobile industry, with Benz Motors, Vauxhall, and Jaguar among the manufacturers displaying their vehicles along the street. D Lewis accordingly began to specialise in coats, gloves, and headgear for the then "gentlemen's sports" of motoring and flying. By the 1930s the company had trademarked the brand name Aviakit for its range of flying kit. Amy Johnson (1903-41) who set many long distance flying records, including England to Australia, was a regular customer. During World War Two the company supplied the RAF with much-needed kit.

In the mid-1950s the growth of motorcycle culture opened a new chapter. John Surtees (born 1934), the only person to be world champion at both motorcycle and car racing, first became speedway champion in 1955, and was another regular customer. In fact a blood stained crash helmet, which had saved his life, was displayed in the shop's window.

In 1960 the D. Lewis company registered the name by which it became known, Lewis Leathers. As Mods and Rockers clashed at British seaside resorts, Lewis Leathers clothing could be seen on members of both warring tribes. When punk rock burst on to the scene in the mid-1970s, Sid Vicious of the Sex Pistols, Joe Strummer of the Clash and the Ramones were among the leading figures of the new subculture pictured wearing Lewis Leathers. The company's clothing has appeared in music videos and modelled in fashion shoots for magazines such as Vogue.

Throughout changing musical trends, the brand has worn well and is still popular with today's hitmakers, such as Pharrell Williams, seen performing on US TV's The Voice rocking a Lewis Leathers jacket. And



Speedway ace John Surtees was another customer (Getty Images)

the BBC America science fiction detective series Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency has made a star of the Super Sportsman Jacket worn by leading actor Samuel Barnett, who played Dirk on screen.

After occupying various premises over the years, today the Lewis Leathers shop is at 3-5 Whitfield Street, not far from its original location. Its present owner, Derek Harris, bought the business in 2003 and brought it back to Fitzrovia.

"We're in Fitzrovia to be as close as possible to Great Portland Street, where it all started," explains shop manager James, when I visit. Looking around at this veritable museum of motorcycling history, I can see there's much more to the business than leather jackets. The range includes jeans, T-shirts, gloves, scarves, belts and other accessories.

"We don't just attract bikers," explains James. "Our customers are fashion fans, punk

fans. Japan is a big market too. And we do sell ladies' clothing as well as men's!"

The shop's most popular item, according to James, is The Lightning, a leather jacket famously worn by Iggy Pop. As one happy customer says of the jacket: "The mere act of putting on this work of art makes me feel good."

Lewis Leathers also offers a made-to-measure service. "People can choose colours, different coloured sleeves, all sorts of options are available to them." One jacket is made by one machinist, a process that can take up to 20 weeks, but the company is not willing to compromise on quality for the sake of a quick sale.

Now a new book has been published, covering the first 60 years of Lewis Leathers. Wings, Wheels & Rock 'n' Roll Vol. 1, by photographer and writer Rin Tanaka and Derek Harris. It covers the legends, the leathers and the legacy in 240 pages featuring 1,600 photos of vintage flying, motoring and motorcycle clothing from the 1920s onwards. Copies of the book will be available in the Whitfield Street shop in November, or online, price £60.

"We never really advertise!" notes James. "Fashion stylists come to us!" Judging from the brand's enduring popularity, so do many other deeply satisfied customers.

Lewis Leathers, 3-5 Whitfield Street, Fitzrovia, London W1T 2SA. Tel: 020 7636 4314. Regular opening hours are 11am to 6pm, Monday to Saturday.

Website: <https://www.lewisleathers.com>
E-mail: webshop@lewisleathers.com
Twitter: @LewisLeathers



The present premises at 3-5 Whitfield Street.



Proprietor Derek Harris outside the shop with regular customer Ronnie Wood's portrait in the window.

Clothing for misfits

By MIKE PENTELOW

'Clothing for misfits' was advertised by the original D Lewis shop which dealt in second hand clothes in Victorian times.

"But that describes us now," laughed Derek Harris, the man who rescued Lewis Leathers and brought it back to Fitzrovia.

The phrase originally referred to clothes that had not been made to measure. But in more recent times it could refer more to the customers: misfits such as Sid Vicious of the Sex Pistols, and Ronnie Wood of the Rolling Stones, the latter still being a regular visitor who is pictured in the shop window.

Others have included Steve McQueen, who wore their jacket and trousers, in the 1961 film, The Great Escape, and Dudley Sutton, who wore their bomber jacket in the 1964 film about rockers, The Leather Boys.

"There were a lot of romantic images and we have tried to bring it back," concluded Derek. "We all need a bit of romance."

Explaining how he had rescued the shop he told *Fitzrovia News*: "I had worked for the shop on a voluntary basis in my teens. I had particularly helped it marketing in Japan in 1991-2. Then from 1993 the retail shop was closed and operated wholesale only.

"So when the owner Richard Lyon talked about selling the company it intrigued me

and I bought it at a good price.

"Even though we were a wholesaler we had a show room in Paddington where retail customers kept turning up, especially on Saturdays.

"This gave me the confidence to open a shop again as close as possible to our original shop in Great Portland Street. Whitfield Street was within our budget and when we moved there in 2009 it was the best thing we could have done.

"When people saw pictures of the shop on the internet it became more and more popular. We now sell to customers in the US, Japan, Europe, Taiwan, Korea, China and everywhere.

"But we consider ourselves very much part of the Fitzrovia scene."

There is one other Fitzrovia connection. In the 1920s a rival motorcyclist shop run by Sydney Lewis (no relation) was at 19a and then 27 Carburton Street. It was bought out by D Lewis in 1959 when Sydney died, and run as a shop until 1967, then as mail order premises until the early 1970s.

It was then occupied in 1979 by squatters who turned it into a cafe and cabaret club. They found old goggles which they wore in night clubs.

Among them was yet another misfit - Boy George of Culture Club.



The original premises at 124 Great Portland Street (English Heritage)

Opening and closing

Closed

HSBC bank 117 Great Portland Street
Bianco Caffe 31b Goodge Street
Cafe le Midi 23 Warren Street
Go Go Lenanese restaurant
80 Cleveland Street
Da Beppe Italian restaurant
72 Cleveland Street
College of Naturopathic Medicine
41 Riding House Street
Ladbroke 116 Tottenham Court Road
Ladbroke 22 Great Portland Street
Love die late bar 114 Great Portland Street

Opened



Fabrique Swedish bakery 53 Goodge Street
Henna Beauty eyebrow threading specialists
50 Goodge Street
Boots chemists 140 Great Portland Street
Amarino ice cream 21 Goodge Street
Lokhandwala Indian tapas
93 Charlotte Street
Mere eatery 74 Charlotte Street
Firedog Aegean restaurant
92-94 Newman Street
GBK burgers 3 Berners Street
Betfred 116 Tottenham Court Road
Betfred 22 Great Portland Street
Caffe Napoli 31b Goodge Street
Tosta & Co eatery 22 Hanway Street
Shoop soup shop 27 Tottenham Street
Atherton Cox hair salon 45 Newman Street
Joshua Kane fashion 68 Great Portland St



Rasa Express Indian eatery 327 Euston Road
Chocoun coffee bar 161 Great Portland Street
Millimetre hairstylists 83 Mortimer Street
Dindin Persian takeaway 47 Margaret Street
Chris Dedman estate agents 156 New Cavendish Street
Chez Mammie brasserie 22 Hanway Street



Labassa Woolfe tailoring and antiques
6 Percy Street

Opening soon Kibele Turkish restaurant 175-177 Great Portland Street

American Dream

the London Pop Up

at Fitzrovia Neighbourhood Association

20th February - 27th March, 1.00 - 3.00pm

A free arts and crafts class



Join us to create an exciting collaborative art work inspired by The American Dream exhibition now on at the British Museum.

The exhibition looks at pop art in the 1960s and includes works by some of the most celebrated American artists. Taking these art works as a starting point, the project will explore themes of consumerism, urban environment and food, through a variety of techniques including Textiles, iPad and Digital Imagery, Collage, Printmaking, Applique.

Your art work will be part of the final piece, in collaboration with other community groups, and will be exhibited in the Great Court of the British Museum in June 2017.

For more info contact Samina at Fitzrovia Neighbourhood Association
Address: 49 Tottenham St, London, W11 4RY
Phone: 020 7580 4576

