

Wippell will soon close after two centuries of catering to clergy, churches, and academics

by [Episcopal News Service Staff](#)

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The J. Wippell & Co. display at the Episcopal Church general convention in 2018. (Courtesy photo)

J. Wippell & Co., a British manufacturer of clerical clothing and church furnishings as well as academic gowns, plans to close the 234-year-old business by the end of the year.

Wippell & Co. began in Devon, England, in 1789, as a grocer and tea dealer, but the business eventually expanded to funeral services, selling fabrics and tailoring. A century later, Wipple started selling into “the groundswell of restoration and building in the Church of England,” according to a company [history](#). The business went on to become an academic and clerical outfitter, and a supplier of church furnishings.

Its customers include universities in the United Kingdom and overseas, the Anglican Church and the Church of Scotland, as well as the United Reform Church, and Episcopal, Methodist and Baptist churches in the United States and in numerous other countries from Australia to Sweden, according to a company press release.

The company said in the press release that the decision to close “comes after two difficult years (of) trading during the pandemic, with the company losing hundreds of thousands of pounds as university graduation ceremonies and other face-to-face events stopped.”

“It’s an incredibly sad day and I want to pay tribute to all my colleagues. We will be supporting everyone through this difficult period,” Wippell chairman and director Robin Richardson said in the release.

Richardson said Wippell would provide [“fair redundancy packages”](#) to all employees. “Most people, including incredibly skilled embroiderers, seamstresses and cutters, have worked here for decades, with many approaching retirement age,” he said. “I want to personally acknowledge everyone’s dedication and craftsmanship.”

Forty-four employees will be affected at the company’s locations in Exeter, Westminster in London and in New Jersey.

Wippell will continue to sell items and take orders for the coming months, according to the release.

One of the oldest manufacturers in England, Wippell was the first business in Exeter to set up and use a telephone line, and the first to convert from gas to electric lightning. Today it still has the address Exeter P.O. Box 1. Its first London shop opened in 1897 and the business became a limited company in 1902, opening its Branchville, New Jersey, sales office in 1950, according to the release.

During both world wars, the company switched to making and supplying military clothing and equipment, parachutes, signal devices, and equipment including torpedo mechanisms for the British armed forces. On April 17, 2020, the company tweeted that it had shifted to producing scrubs and face masks for National Health Service workers.

Wippell has also worked with production companies such as HBO for historical dramas and made clerical costumes on long-running British television shows like *Coronation Street* and *Emmerdale*. The company has also created costumes for

Madame Tussauds and theater shows including the long-running musical *Sister Act*.