

The story of John Horsfall's top-tier textiles spanning 160 years

This is a special feature from *PAX International's* [September 2023 IFSA EXPO](#) issue on [page 36](#).



John Horsfall produced fine lambswool blankets for British Airways Concorde, until the aircraft retired from flight in 2003

In 1863, the story of [John Horsfall](#) spun into motion when the founder John Horsfall took a leap of faith and entered the weaving world of Yorkshire and Lancashire. What started as a partnership centred around a textile company with his brother-in-law, James Clay, rapidly transformed into a legacy that now spans six generations.

160 years after its start, the family-run business is today celebrating many milestones. From its origins in weaving domestic bed blankets to a significant contribution of blankets during World War II, John Horsfall has since evolved its focus to the creation of airline blankets.

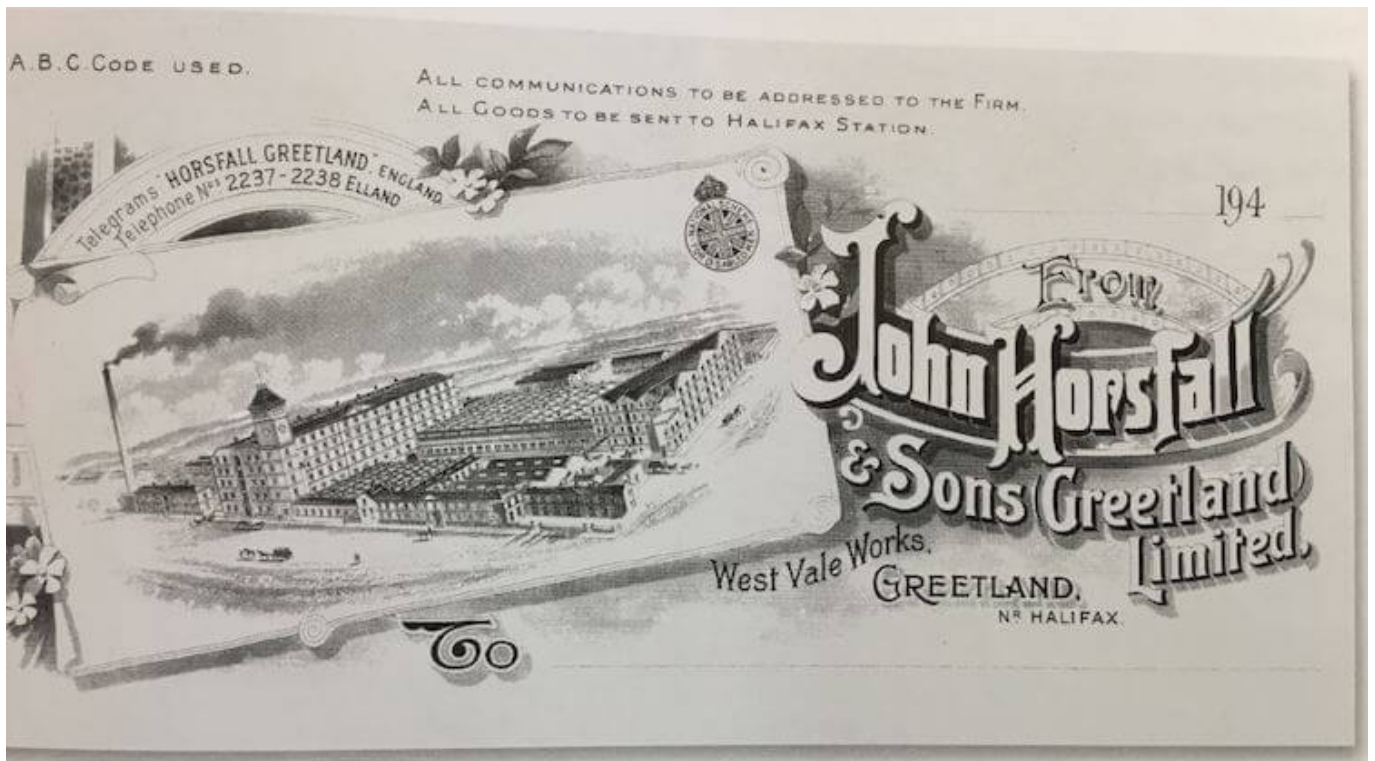
At its core, though, the company's principles and values have always remained the same. John Horsfall's dedication to being socially responsible has gone hand-in-hand with delivering high-quality and innovative products. Every item within the company's portfolio is meticulously designed and developed in-house under one roof at their West Yorkshire Head Office, employing a collaborative approach that seamlessly weaves an airline's branding and visionary fabric into all stages of the product development process.

“From design and sales to order processing, logistics and customer service, our airline clients know that when they’re working with us they are in safe hands,” says Business Development Manager Ellie Parkes, who has been with John Horsfall since 2013, playing an integral role in shaping the company’s interactions with international airline clients.

Foremost, Parkes says John Horsfall’s primary mission is to imbue passengers in the sky with a sense of home as they travel around the world, curating an immersive “journey for the senses.” At the core of this endeavour lies John Horsfall’s at-seat textiles, including blankets, bedding, and table linens, which are carefully designed to create personalized environments for travellers.

“Our team has been instrumental in designing and developing some of the world’s most iconic onboard experiences, including [British Airways](#) Concorde and First; [Qantas](#) and David Caon’s 787 Dreamliner and [Finnair](#) and [Marimekko](#)’s innovative Airlounge,” Parkes says.

Bedding and linens inspired by traditional British tailoring have been supplied to British Airways by John Horsfall for over 40 years. At Finnair, passengers will recognize the undeniably Nordic cabin interiors, created in collaboration with Marimekko, one of Finland’s leading design-houses. The collection includes printed & woven textiles blankets and bedding for Premium Economy, as well as the whole sleep experience in Business Class.



John Horsfall’s 1940s letterhead provides a glimpse into the company’s vital blanket contribution during WWII

Recently, John Horsfall achieved 22 consecutive years of ISO9001 accreditation — an auditable standard that sets out the criteria for a quality management system. Parkes said the company has maintained this certification for over 20 years by taking its quality management system to new heights.

“We use ISO protocols to govern our processes and procedures and to inform continuous improvement in all aspects of business, from customer service, design development and quality control, right through to delivery performance, staff retention and annual turnover,” Parkes says.

“This individual, sensual reaction to the onboard textiles will affect the way passengers feel, physically and emotionally, and that’s incredibly powerful,” Parkes tells *PAX International*. The tactile nature of these textiles allows passengers to interact with the airline’s brand in a tangible and memorable way — significantly impacting their overall experience.

The company partnered with Virgin Atlantic creating its award-winning mattress developed for its latest generation Upper Class cabin in the A330neo. In collaboration, John Horsfall meticulously designed the mattress to perfectly fit the contours of the new Upper Class seat, ensuring the airline’s passengers an exceptional long-haul experience. Crafted with lightweight, sustainable materials, the mattress’s durability aligns with the A330neo’s eco-conscious profile. Horizontal quilting lines, mirroring the seat’s leather upholstery, facilitate easy folding around the seat’s recline levels.

The Re-Thread® Program

Weaving sustainability principles into every thread of its business, John Horsfall launched its Re-Thread® program in 2021. Made with a variety of more sustainable materials, the program allows airlines to choose well made, considerately sourced and long-lasting products.

The most recent of these has been developed in collaboration with specialist manufacturers in India, the company has developed plant-based fabrics made from reclaimed and recycled cotton, transforming waste materials into super-soft, environmentally friendly textiles. The range of regenerated and plant-based fibres and fabrics are made for use in onboard comfort items.

“The Re-Thread® program helps airlines take a holistic approach to sustainability, taking into account all aspects of the product life cycle; from raw materials to logistics, packaging, longevity, laundry and end-of-life disposal,” Parkes says.

The collection includes blankets, expertly woven from post-consumer-waste fibres and fillings, where pillows, duvets, and mattresses are now skillfully crafted using 100 percent recycled fibre filling.