

## PROFILE

## Leslie Cavendish

BY SIMON YAFFE

**H**AIRDRESSER Leslie Cavendish was at the heart of the music, fashion and arts scenes in the 1960s.

For the Jewish boy from north London ended up in The Beatles' inner circle — which he has written about in *The Cutting Edge* (Alma Books, £14.99).

Born in the East End, Leslie was raised in Burnt Oak by parents Betty and Alan.

The family surname was originally Caminash.

Leslie's crimping career began at 15 when he started an apprenticeship at Vidal Sassoon in Bond Street, London.

Hairdressing icon Sassoon, who died in 2012, was also Jewish.

Leslie became Sassoon's junior for three months before he was promoted to junior hairstylist at his Grosvenor House Hotel salon in Park Lane.

"I remember coming out of the Tube station at Bond Street and being blinded by the gold and glitter from the shops," he said.

"The first thing I saw when I walked into Sassoons was a big bouquet of white lilies and a mezzanine of ladies having their manicures and pedicures. It was buzzing and exciting.

"Watching Vidal, who was a lovely man, at work was like watching a ballerina on the stage.

"He tiptoed around the chair, doing all these facial manoeuvres. It was as if he was a sculptor."

The 70-year-old's life changed forever in the autumn of 1966.

The actress Jane Asher, Paul McCartney's then-girlfriend, was a client at the salon. Her regular

## Vidal Sassoon was like a sculptor

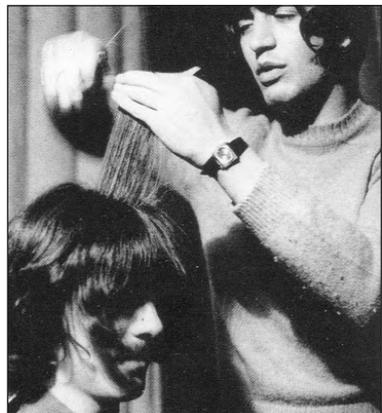
stylist, Roger Thompson, was unavailable so the receptionist suggested Leslie.

"We were chatting and she asked me what I was doing that afternoon as she wanted to know if I had time to cut her boyfriend's hair," Leslie explained.

"Whenever Jane came in, we were never to ask how Paul was or about The Beatles, as the emphasis had to be on her."

"I had to work out what time I could get to St John's Wood, where Jane and Paul lived, from Shepherd's Bush, as I was going to watch QPR in the afternoon.

"I suggested 6pm and I asked for the address — which, weirdly, was 7



**HAIRDRESSER TO THE STARS: Leslie cuts George Harrison's hair**

# How The Beatles gave hairdresser Leslie head start



**MAGICAL MYSTERY TOUR: Leslie, third right, waits to board the bus. Paul McCartney is sitting on the pavement behind him**

Cavendish Avenue.

"We beat Swindon Town 3-1 that day and I shot back to north London afterwards.

"I was sitting in my car outside Jane and Paul's home and was really nervous, but took a deep breath and knocked on the door.

"Paul answered it. He was just a normal guy and asked if I would like to have a cup of tea.

"It was surreal because this guy was an icon and I had pictures of The Beatles on my wall."

The Beatles had decided to stop touring earlier in 1966 and Leslie felt it was a good time to meet McCartney.

"I washed and cut his hair in his bathroom and thought it would be a one-hit wonder, so to speak," Leslie explained.

"A few weeks later I received a phone call asking if I would cut his hair again. He told me that Jane was working on a film, but he couldn't visit her on set because all the focus would be on him.

"I suggested he go in disguise and that I cut all his hair off. He agreed, so there I was cutting off this world famous Beatles mop.

"Paul and Jane later went to Kenya and the papers found out I had cut all his hair off. One of the headlines was 'The Barber Who Made Paul a Skinhead'. I guess it was good publicity for everyone."

Gradually, Leslie — the grandson of Russian and Polish Jewish immigrants — became part of The Beatles' inner circle.

He would regularly visit the band's record label Apple's head office, where he also cut the hair of their personal assistant Neil Aspinall and press officer Derek Taylor, who was known as the fifth Beatle.

"I did James Taylor once at the office, too," Leslie recalled. "Paul lived in London and John (Lennon) lived in Virginia Water.

"One time, John pointed to me and said, 'Who's he?'. He was told that I was the guy who cut Paul's

hair and he said, 'Tell him to come over and cut mine'."

The Beatles soon invested in London fashion boutique Dandie Fashions, in the fashionable King's Road, Chelsea, and renamed it Apple Tailoring.

Leslie was asked if he would like to have his own salon in the basement, an opportunity at which he jumped.

He added: "George Harrison would pop in. Ringo Starr came in on a less regular basis because his wife Maureen was also a hairdresser. I did cut Ringo's hair for his role in the film *The Magic Christian*, though."

Leslie's celebrity client list started to expand and other musicians visited him at the salon,

## Cutting off world famous Beatles mop

including The Bee Gees' Barry and Robin Gibb, The Who drummer Keith Moon, actor Tony Curtis and racing driver James Hunt.

In September, 1967, Leslie was also one of about 40 people invited aboard the *Magical Mystery Tour* bus.

McCartney had wanted to create a film based upon The Beatles and their music and came up with the idea of the band travelling with people on a coach.

Leslie had just returned from his first visit to Israel, weeks after the Jewish state's victory in the Six-Day War.

He continued: "I helped out at Kibbutz Mahanayim, in the Galil, as a lot of its members were serving in the army.

"It was a bit surreal coming home and being invited on the *Magical Mystery Tour*.

"We had to wait opposite

Madame Tussaud's at 8.15am and I remember turning up and seeing Paul sitting on the pavement.

"People were walking past and saying, 'Is that Paul McCartney?'. There were dwarves on the bus and actors all dressed up. It was lunacy and I was in the middle of it all, but it was good fun."

He also witnessed the beginning of the end of The Beatles, which some blamed on Lennon's love interest, Yoko Ono.

Leslie said: "The guys had an unwritten rule that there were to be no ladies during recordings.

"I was invited to recording sessions at Abbey Road and Trident Studios and one time at Trident, John brought Yoko in and they were sitting in the corner, with her stroking his hair.

"They were all becoming a bit frustrated, especially George because he wanted them to record some of his songs as it was always Lennon and McCartney.

"Gradually, I think each of their individualities were coming out."

The Beatles broke up in 1969 and the inner circle began to dissipate.

Leslie worked as a freelance hairdresser, but later joined the family's shoe shop business.

He moved to Spain in 2001 with wife Charlotte and children Oliver and Aidan, but returned a few years later after the couple divorced.

Oliver is a student at the University of Malaga, while Aidan served in the British army and now works as a landscape gardener in Australia.

Leslie's girlfriend is Susan Kaye.

"Charlotte was not Jewish and I remember my mother saying, 'You are never going to meet a nice Jewish girl'," Leslie recalled. "I never had a Jewish girlfriend until Susan."

He never experienced any anti-Semitism when part of The Beatles' inner circle.

"The boys and their whole entourage had come to London and the only thing they knew about Jews was Brian Epstein," Leslie explained. "I am very proud to be Jewish and I never heard any comments off any of The Beatles.

"The only time I did hear something was when someone from their entourage said, 'What is this London boy doing here?'. I knew what they were alluding to."

He decided to write *The Cutting*

*Edge* as 2017 was the 50th anniversary of both the *Magical Mystery Tour* and the release of *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*.

"I was turning 70 and began to think back," Leslie continued. "The 1960s were a time of such change, not just in music because of The Beatles, but also the culture of this country.

"I worked with a lot of gay people and being gay was illegal until 1967, which was ridiculous.

"I worked with The Beatles, who changed music, and Sassoon, who changed fashion. These were iconic people.

"My dad used to say that London was grey, with grey people and grey skies, but my time in the 1960s was a colourful period."

Leslie also runs VIP tours around London, which takes guests around the most important Beatles locations in the capital during the 1960s.

The idea came to him when he was back in the UK to visit his mother, Betty.

## George wanted them to record his songs

"I went on one tour and just felt it was so unemotional and had no feeling to it," Leslie said. "It felt like the guide was reading from a book. I thought I could set up my own tour and tell people what it was really like, giving them more of an insight."

The last time he saw Sir Paul was in 2012 at a VIP screening of *Magical Mystery Tour Revisited* in London.

Leslie said: "After the film, the lights came up and people were saying hello to him.

"I wasn't going to say, 'Hi Paul, do you remember me?', but we caught each other's eyes and he pointed his finger at me and said, 'Leslie?' and put his arm around me and asked how I was doing.

"It was like we were old friends. We walked out of the theatre together and it was one of those really nice moments.

"I spent a lot of time with him when we were both young and he remembered that."

www.beatleshairdresser.com

**BORN:** London, 1947

**FAMILY:** Mother Betty, father Alan, children Oliver and Aidan.

**LIVES:** London.

**CAREER HIGHLIGHTS:** Apprenticeship at Vidal Sassoon, The Beatles' hairdresser, salon at Apple Tailoring.

**BOOK:** *The Cutting Edge*.