

BOOKS

Leslie Cavendish was The Beatles' hairdresser in their rattle heyday



AUTHOR

At the cutting edge

Hairdresser Leslie Cavendish takes a walk down Penny Lane as he recalls his time helping The Beatles mop up the charts

My story starts with a 15-year-old Leslie marching down Bond Street in 1962 with a home-crafted wooden bowl in a plastic bag. I was on my way to interview for Vidal Sassoon, the cutting edge of fashion. The bowl in question was to be my trump card: I had shaped my wobbly bowl, so I could style the hair of the most fashionable women in London! I got the job.

One of those fashionable women was the actress Jane Asher, who said, one Saturday morning after I had finished her hair: "Do you do home visits?" She was asking for her boyfriend – and my idol – Paul McCartney.

After I had got to know the 'boyfriend' and cut his hair a few times, I asked: "You're not touring any more – are you going on holiday?"

"I would like to," he sighed, "but I get recognised everywhere, so that makes it difficult."

I suddenly had an idea. "Why don't I cut your hair really short?" This to a man known for his long, rebellious locks.

After giving it a few seconds' thought, he said: "Go on – do it!" So I did it – I cut a

Beatle's hair short. The newspapers screamed: "THE BARBER THAT MADE PAUL A SKINHEAD" – but Jane and Paul had a lovely holiday in Kenya.

A few years later, I had a better idea of the dangers of being recognised: George Harrison was in hospital, having trouble with his tonsils, and I was asked to go and see to his hair. I was warned that the press would be out in force.

"Don't say anything," I'd been told by the Apple Records press office. After I finished with George's hair, I walked out of the main door of the hospital, and microphones were everywhere. "How's George? Will he be able to sing again?" They asked. "No comment! Sorry, no comment!" I shouted

– something I'd always wanted to say.

With Beatle John's hair, on the other hand, there was controversy with the press.

A regular client of mine – a journalist for a music paper – asked if she could talk to me about The Beatles and their hair – nothing wrong with that, I thought.

"Can you tell me who has the thickest hair?" she asked.

"George has very thick hair – and so have Ringo and Paul," I said.

"What about John?"

"Oh, his hair is OK as well."

"OK. Hmm. Does that mean that when The Beatles grow older John will be the first to lose his hair?"

"Well, as his hair isn't as thick as the others', I suppose in many years to come, maybe, yes."

"JOHN LENNON LIKELY TO GO BALD SAYS BEATLES HAIRDRESSER LESLIE CAVENDISH," screamed the article.

"It was taken out of context!" I gabbled over and over to John when he called the next morning.

He listened, and then said: "Am I really going bald?"

"No, John! Of course not! They just twisted my words." I was frantic – was this to be the end of 'The Beatles' hairdresser'?

"You don't have to explain to me how journalists work," he said, laughing. "Remember when I said we were more popular than Jesus? The whole of America wanted my fucking head on a plate. But you'd better come over to Apple quickly and sort my hair out before it falls out!"

Of course, everyone wanted a bit of the Beatles' time, so I was very excited to learn of Paul's upcoming plans for a secret coach tour of England.

"Would you like to come on the Magical Mystery Tour?" he asked me one day. I didn't have to think for too long. One day after filming, Paul and Ringo, a few friends and I sidled into a local pub. The regulars were flabbergasted: in we came – led by Paul who ordered a pint, plonked it down on top of the piano, and, backed by Ringo on a one-string mandolin, proceeded to play 'Knees Up Mother Brown'. The tour didn't stay a secret for long.

Eventually, like all good things, everything came to an end – including The Beatles. I was as gutted as everyone else – more so because their split signified the end of an era for me: never again would I be the

"Beatles' hairdresser". Their final release held a parting message for us all: *Let It Be*.

The Cutting Edge: The Story of the Beatles' Hairdresser Who Defined an Era by Leslie Cavendish (Alma, £25) is out now



George Harrison having his hair cut by Leslie Cavendish

