

THE FAB FOUR WAGS CLUB

IT WAS AT THE BEGINNING OF 1966 THAT GEORGE HARRISON MARRIED PATTIE BOYD, BECOMING THE THIRD BEATLE TO TIE THE KNOT. STEVE O'BRIEN LOOKS AT THE INFLUENCE OF THE WIVES AND GIRLFRIENDS OF THE FAB

Watch any documentary on The Beatles and its pictures are always chock with swooning girls and fainting fans. Female adoration was the fuel on which much of Beatlemania thrived and those ear-shattering screams virtually soundtracked those early years. But away from the screeching and the wailing, behind the scenes, it was the wives and the girlfriends of the four Beatles that shaped their personal lives, and, in many cases, inspired some of their greatest songs.

Of course, at the beginning, their fans knew nothing of all this. Brian Epstein was keen for his boys' love lives to be kept out of the public eye, reasoning that, if the fans suspected that their favourite Beatle wasn't, in fact, single that somehow they'd stop screaming. How would the fanbase have reacted in 1963, for instance, had they known that one Beatle was not only married, but had a kid? The power of those lyrics – "I wanna hold your hand", "baby, it's you", "I wanna be your man" –

was in fans believing those songs could be about them, not that The Beatles could have written those words with a specific girl in mind. It only came out later, for instance, how many songs – *Things We Said Today*, *And I Love Her*, *You Won't See Me*, *We Can Work It Out* and *Here, There And Everywhere* among them – that Paul McCartney wrote about his relationship with then-girlfriend Jane Asher. To the general public, in those early years, The Beatles were young, single and free.

There are many women who figured in the lives of The Beatles during their lifetime. Some are main players, the ones that the four members either married, became engaged to or simply enjoyed long-lasting relationships with, while others are walk-on extras, the wham-bam-thank-you-mam groupies, the one-night stands and strings-free affairs.

It was John Lennon who was, somewhat surprisingly given his wilder reputation, the first to tie the knot. Cynthia Powell was 17 when she enrolled at the Liverpool College Of Art, first setting eyes on Lennon when he joined a year later. At first, he would make ▶



Paul McCartney and Ringo Starr with partners Jane Asher and Maureen Starkey



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When Cynthia told John Lennon that she was pregnant, he simply said, "There's only one thing for it Cyn, we'll have to get married"

fun of her comparative straightness, referring to her as 'Miss Prim' or 'Miss Hoylake', but eventually the faintly mismatched couple began dating. It would prove a tempestuous relationship. His jealousy could result in volcanic eruptions, as when he slapped her across the face (causing her head to hit a wall), after watching her dance with Stuart Sutcliffe. She left him for a short time after that, only returning after Lennon offered her a profuse apology.

"I used to be cruel to my woman, and physically – any woman," Lennon reflected in an interview with *Playboy* in 1980. "I was a hitter. I couldn't express myself and I hit. I fought men and I hit women... I am a violent man who has learned not to be violent and regrets his violence. I will have to be a lot older before I can face in public how I treated women as a youngster."

John and Cynthia married, in a low-key ceremony, at Mount Pleasant registry office in Liverpool on 23 August 1962 with George Harrison and Paul McCartney in attendance and Brian Epstein serving as best man. It was as far from a ritzy, tabloid-friendly showbiz wedding as it's possible to imagine – there were no photographers present and the registrar was continually drowned out by the sound of a pneumatic drill coming from outside the building.

The marriage produced a son – Julian – but Lennon's persistent womanising, plus his rapidly escalating drug use and an affair with conceptual artist Yoko Ono, whom he'd met in 1966 at the Indica Gallery in London, led to a messy divorce in November 1968.

Ono was seven years older than Lennon and first entered the Beatles story when she'd visited Paul McCartney at his London home, in the hope of obtaining a Lennon-McCartney song manuscript for a book her

John and Yoko with John's son Julian, whom he'd fathered with ex-wife Cynthia



JOHN AND YOKO'S BED-INS

It was in 1969, in protest at the war that was raging in Vietnam at the time, that John Lennon and Yoko Ono held two week-long Bed-Ins For Peace, as they termed them, first at the Hilton Hotel in Amsterdam and then in the Queen Elizabeth Hotel in Montreal.

The first Bed-In took place in the week after the couple's 20 March wedding. Setting up home in the presidential suite (Room 702) at the Amsterdam Hilton, the Lennons invited the world's media to observe their promotion of world peace.

Their second Bed-In was set for Montreal, where, during their seven-day stay at the Queen Elizabeth Hotel, they welcomed such names as acid guru Timothy Leary, comedians Tommy Smothers and Dick Gregory, DJ Murray The K, cartoonist Al Capp and poet Allen Ginsberg among others.

"We knew whatever we did was going to be in the papers. We decided to utilise the space we would occupy anyway, by getting married, with a commercial for peace," Lennon said later. "We would sell our product, which we call 'peace.' And to sell a product you need a gimmick, and the gimmick we thought was 'bed'. And we thought 'bed' because bed was the easiest way of doing it, because we're lazy."

friend, composer John Cage, was working on.

Of all the Beatles partners, few have proved as divisive as Yoko Ono, for fans and for members of the group itself. Previous to Ono's arrival on the scene, girlfriends were rarely present in the studio while The Beatles recorded, but the pair's intense relationship meant that Lennon was now keen that his new partner be by his side at all times (including, apparently, toilet visits).

"We were both so excited about discovering each other, we didn't stop to think about anyone else's feelings, we just went ahead gung-ho," Ono said. "What we had was more precious than anything else."

Together, they recorded an album, a mostly unlistenable splurge of experimental hooey put down at Lennon's home studio at Kenwood titled *Unfinished Music No. 1: Two Virgins*, an LP that provoked headlines for its controversial tackle-flashing cover art.

JOHN ONO LENNON

John and Yoko were married on 20 March 1969 at the registry office in Gibraltar and spent their honeymoon in Amsterdam, in front of the world's cameras, campaigning with a week-long Bed-In For Peace. A month later, Lennon changed his name by deed poll, switching out Winston for Ono as his middle name.

Ono's continual presence in the studio for much of the recording of 'The White Album' resulted in her contributing backing vocals on *Birthday* and one line of lead vocals on John's *The Continuing Story Of Bungalow Bill*, marking the only occasion a woman sings lead vocal on any Beatles recording. The avant-garde sound collage, *Revolution 9*, although credited to Lennon-McCartney, was very much a Lennon and Ono concoction (with a soupçon of help from Harrison).

Though Ono contributed to various Lennon songs, she inspired surprisingly few (apart, rather obviously, from the 1969 track, *The Ballad Of John And Yoko*), whereas McCartney's primary romantic relationship through the 1960s had continued to inform his songwriting. He'd started dating Jane Asher in 1963, after the then-17-year-old had interviewed The Beatles at the Royal Albert Hall for the *Radio Times*. He was immediately ▶

transfixed with the sophisticated and well-connected teen actress.

The relationship between the porcelain-skinned, middle-class redhead and the working class mop-top would last five bumpy years, until their engagement was sensationally broken off when Asher discovered her fiancé's affair with a 23-year-old American named Francie Schwartz (Asher had discovered the two of them in bed after she returned to London from an acting job in Bristol earlier than expected).

After his split with Asher, McCartney asked Schwartz to move into his Cavendish Avenue home, while also securing her a job at Apple. Later, she spilled the secrets of her affair in an autobiography, *Body Count*. Asher, on the other hand, has rarely spoken publicly of her time with McCartney, and Macca has, in turn, been wary of invoking Asher's name too often in the story of The Beatles: "She's never gone into print about our relationship, whilst everyone on Earth has sold their story," he said in the *Anthology* book. "So I'd feel weird being the one to kiss and tell."

Linda Eastwood was on a photography job in London snapping musicians when she first met McCartney at a Georgie Fame concert at the Bag O'Nails club in Soho on 15 May 1967. She would cross paths with him again just four days later at the launch party for *Sgt Pepper* at Brian Epstein's house in Belgravia, before flying back to New York. They flirted a little, but nothing came of it.

It would be another year before they'd touch base again, in New York this time, where McCartney and John Lennon had flown to inaugurate Apple Records. A few months later, McCartney invited Eastman to London. When she arrived, they went to his home, where they

spent the evening. "He must have been really happy that night," said one of the fans who often loitered outside his house. "He sat on the windowsill with his acoustic guitar and sang *Blackbird* to us from his upstairs room."

McCartney and Eastman wed in a small civil ceremony in Marylebone on 12 March 1969, just a week before Lennon and Ono would tie the knot. The press would prove as hostile to Eastman as they were with Ono, and both have suffered terrible, ill-founded abuse from Beatles fans over the decades for supposedly having contributed to the band's break-up. "She got the same kind of insults, hatred, absolute garbage thrown at her for no reason whatsoever other than she fell in love with Paul McCartney," Lennon would later say.

MAUREEN AND PATTIE

All told, the wives and girlfriends of George Harrison and Ringo Starr avoided much of the attention given to the partners of the band's main songwriters. Nobody blamed Maureen Starkey for the disintegration of The Beatles, and few but the hardcore would have even been aware of the existence, in George Harrison's life, of the model Pattie Boyd.

Then again, every Beatles fan would at least clocked her at one point, even if they didn't know that she would one day inspire not just four Beatles tracks (*I Need You*, *If I Needed Someone*, *Something* and *For You Blue*), but two of the most famous songs in rock (specifically Eric Clapton's *Layla* and *Wonderful Tonight*). Boyd first encountered The Beatles when, then 19, she was cast as a starstruck schoolgirl in their 1964 flick, *A Hard Day's Night*. Harrison was instantly smitten with the cherubic-faced blonde, who had already modelled for many

Paul McCartney's girlfriend between 1963 and 1968, Jane Asher was a major influence on his lifestyle and songwriting

Paul and Linda were married in a small civil ceremony on 12 March 1969

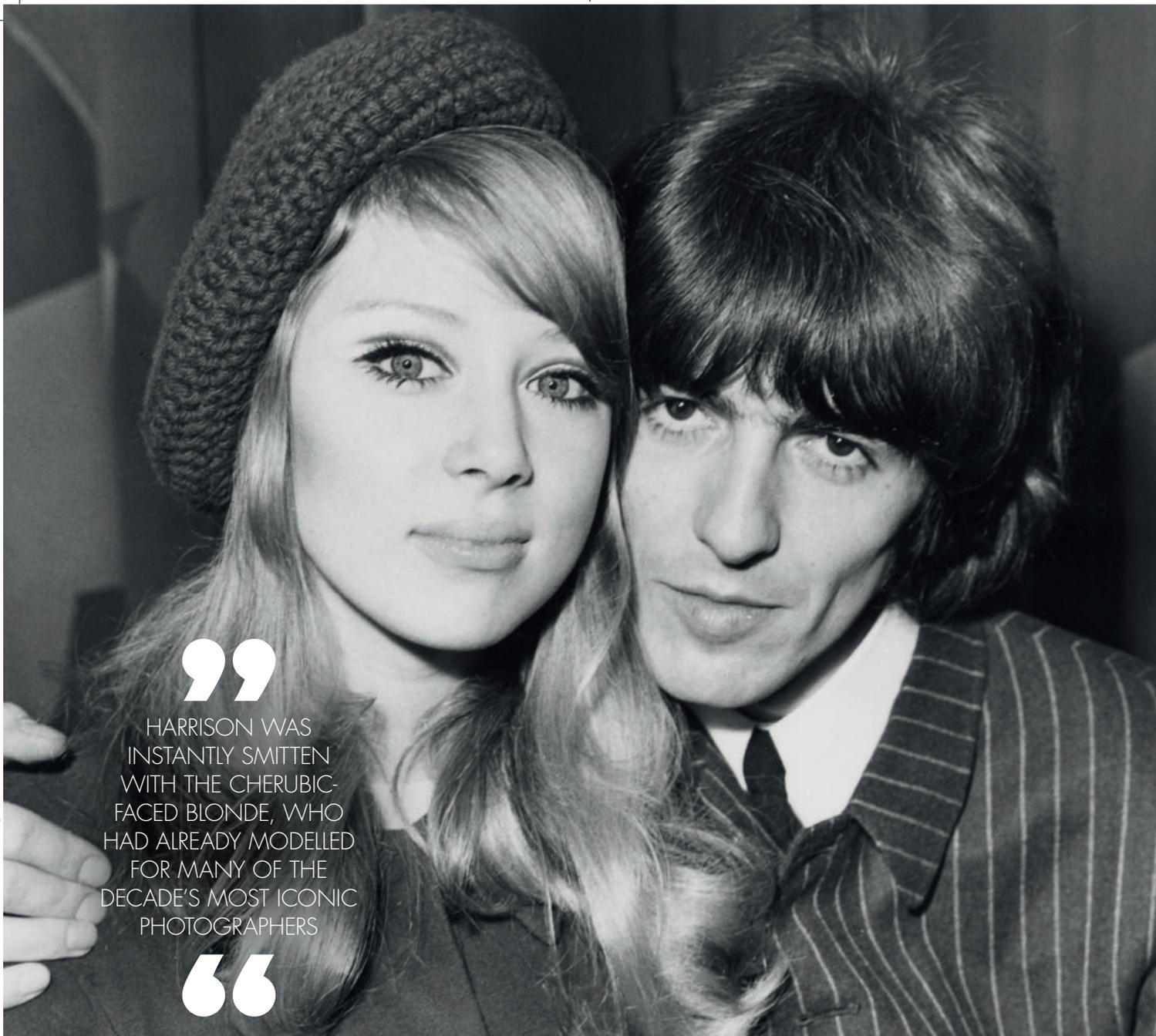




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ALL YOU NEED IS SELF-LOVE

The Beatles have always been known as a tight unit, but few guessed quite how intimate some the members were with each other until McCartney divulged to Barry Miles for the *Many Years From Now* book the fact that he and John Lennon once masturbated together.

“What it was,” he elaborated to *GO* last year, “was over at John’s house, and it was just a group of us. And instead of just getting roaring drunk and partying, we were all just in these chairs, and the lights were out, and somebody started masturbating, so we all did.”

As he explained, as each closed their eyes to concentrate, other members of the group (said to be John’s friends from art college) would be encouraged to shout out a name to... inspire the others.

“We were just, ‘Brigitte Bardot!’ ‘Whoa!’” McCartney continued, “and then everyone would thrash a bit more. I think it was John sort of said, ‘Winston Churchill!’”

It was, apparently, a one-off, however. “It wasn’t a big thing,” McCartney told the magazine. “But, you know, it was just the kind of thing you didn’t think much of. Yeah, it’s quite raunchy when you think about it. There’s so many things like that from when you’re a kid that you look back on and you’re, ‘Did we do that?’ But it was good harmless fun. It didn’t hurt anyone. Not even Brigitte Bardot.”

of the decade’s most iconic photographers, such as David Bailey, Terence Donovan and Brian Duffy.

They married at Epsom registry office on 21 January 1966, with McCartney as best man, but the marriage would be blighted by Harrison’s repeated infidelities (McCartney later said of Harrison, “I don’t want to say much, because he was a pal, but he liked the things that men like. He was red-blooded.”) and they finally separated in 1974.

One of the various affairs Harrison had during their blustery marriage was with his bandmate’s wife, Maureen Starkey. Ringo had begun stepping out with Liverpool hairdresser and Cavern Club regular Maureen Cox in 1963, marrying just two years later when she became pregnant with their first child. While Cox sometimes holidayed with Cynthia Lennon and Pattie Harrison, she was less at ease with the celebrity aspect of her husband’s life than perhaps any of the other Beatle partners. “She was the least worldly of the Beatles womenfolk in the 60s,” said Beatles’ press officer Tony Barrow, describing her as “chirpy” with an “irreverent sense of humour” who “suited Ringo down to the ground.”

George and Pattie Boyd. She would eventually leave him for Eric Clapton

Still, Ringo was no angel, and his womanising was as much a factor in their eventual divorce as his bandmate's affair. According to super-groupie Chris O'Dell (who had a fling with Ringo), Harrison admitted he had been sleeping with Maureen at the drummer's kitchen table, confessing, "You know, Ringo, I'm in love with your wife." Starr shrugged and replied, "Better you than someone we don't know."

Ringo and Maureen would divorce in 1975. Both he and Harrison would eventually wed again after the collapse of their first marriages, successfully this time, Ringo with future Bond girl and actress Barbara Bach and George with A&M Records secretary Olivia Arias. McCartney's marriage to Linda ended only with her death from cancer in 1998 (Macca would claim that the couple had spent only 10 days apart, when he was arrested and jailed in Tokyo under marijuana charges). A subsequent marriage to model Heather Mills produced a daughter, Beatrice, but ended acrimonious after just six years. He married American Nancy Shevell in 2011,

after being introduced by Shevell's cousin, the veteran broadcaster Barbara Walters.

Lennon had one well-documented wobble during his marriage to Yoko Ono, when he left her, on Ono's suggestion it seems, for her assistant May Pang. Within 18, mostly sozzled months, however, it was over and he went back to Ono, with whom he'd spend his last years.

Lennon and Harrison's widows are now the representatives of their late husbands on the world stage, regularly appearing alongside Paul and Ringo at Beatles-inspired events such as the premiere of Martin Scorsese's George Harrison documentary or the launch of the Beatles *Rock Band* video game.

Pattie Boyd once told Beatles biographer Hunter Davies that the four Beatles had a bond that neither she nor any other wife could penetrate. Maybe, but those women provided a bedrock for the band, a safe haven from the head-swirling madness of Beatlemania and the oppressive intimacy of the band dynamic. They were, in many ways, the heart behind the songs we love. ●

Mr and Mrs Ringo Starr. Maureen Starkey would eventually marry Isaac Tigrett, co-founder of the Hard Rock Cafe

