
Opening Extract from...

Man on the Run

Paul McCartney in the 1970s

Written by Tom Doyle

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TOM DOYLE

Polygon

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To Thomas Corrigan Doyle, for fixing the plug onto
that first record-player and setting me on my way

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Introduction

The first time I met and interviewed Paul McCartney, unsettlingly, he kept on stealing distracted glances at his watch.

It's tough enough to consider the fact that you're interviewing the most famous musician on the planet, someone who was being interrogated by other writers before you were even born, but it's more disconcerting to realise that you're failing to engage a former Beatle and, as the old song goes, stop his mind from wandering.

The date was Monday, 15 May 2006, and the location was a photographer's studio in Kentish Town, north London, where McCartney was having his picture taken by his similarly moon-eyed daughter Mary for one of a series of *Q* covers to mark the magazine's twentieth anniversary. I was there to talk to him about his experiences of the twenty years gone, their events and innovations.

During our half-hour-long conversation, I managed to keep him on-subject long enough to discuss everything from his eyewitness account of the immediate aftermath of 9/11 (parked on the tarmac at JFK Airport in a commercial jet that was suddenly going nowhere) to the fact that he couldn't really get with the iPod since headphones reminded him of work and being in the studio. He then revealed the surprising holes in his knowledge of Beatles history.

'I'm the world's worst analyst of me,' he reasoned brightly. 'Beatles fans can tell you exactly what was going on in the 1960s, and I kinda go, Oh yeah, that's right. I know *Sgt. Pepper* was 1967. I know that much.'

In many ways, he proved as affable, laidback and hey-whatever as I'd imagined he might be. When I'd arrived, he'd instantly seemed to

warm to the fact that his interviewer for the day was Scottish (having of course enjoyed a decades-long relationship with the country and its people), had hung around the studio's buffet table urging me, with typical bonhomie, to try the caramelised vegetables. Yet his head was clearly elsewhere and a heavy air of *something* hung over him.

Only when he briefly mentioned his second wife, Heather Mills, saying her first name almost under his breath, in admitting that she hadn't quite taken to his penchant for the odd spliff ('She's violently against it'), did I get an inkling that the rumours might be true that the pair's marriage was in deep trouble. The previous day, one of the tabloids had run papped shots of Paul mooching around alone on a break in France. Two days after our conversation, his publicist made the announcement that the pair were to split.

Having done a fair bit of this interviewing thing, I hadn't taken his semi-detached state that day as some kind of failure on my part, and it was now clear what had been weighing on his mind. But it made me determined to try to hold his full attention, to ask and say the things that other writers might not dare, if and when we should meet again. Printed encounters with Paul McCartney in recent years had tended to be fairly stiff affairs, with many journalists – entirely reasonably, since I'd suffered from a touch of nerves myself – too intimidated to ask him much beyond the ho-hum or draw him into a spot of lively banter, or even just try to have a good old laugh with him.

Next time, I thought.

The next time arrived sixteen months later, when I was given the opportunity to meet him in his lair, two floors above the reception of 1 Soho Square, at the offices of MPL, McCartney Productions Limited. This is Paul's comfort zone, the room where he most often chooses to be interviewed – the dark, wood-panelled Art Deco den having been the centre of his operation since 1975. In this environment he instantly seemed more relaxed, more focused, very much in

control and virtually unflappable, even when it came to broaching some of the more difficult times in his life.

Outside his office door there was an air of brisk business being done by his staff, of meetings being arranged and schedules being plotted. It is no coincidence, you felt, that this man is a multi-millionaire.

Inside, McCartney, settling on a sofa, was surrounded by Willem de Kooning originals and backlit by his neon-piped Wurlitzer jukebox, which contained the old rock'n'roll 45s that were his sacred texts as a teenager. As we talked, he made his way through a cheese and pickle sandwich, a spare triangle of which he repeatedly offered to me during the interview. He seemed to be disappointed that I wasn't really keen on it. 'Go on,' he urged me, for the third time. I gave in and took a bite.

'So this'll be vegetarian cheese, then?' I wondered aloud.

'It's just cheese,' shrugged the famed animal-rights campaigner, missing the point that I was surprised he wasn't plumping for the rennet-free variety.

Up close, McCartney had worn pretty well, given the sheer intensity of his past. Only a wrinkling around the lips and his slightly sunken cheeks gave away his age, with his hair more expertly dyed now than the plum shades of his fifties when – being nothing if not a homemade guy – you suspected he was doing it himself. His hazel eyes flashed with a greenish tinge when caught in a certain light. He appeared trim but moaned that he had a bit of a gut on him.

'You haven't got a belly on you,' I said.

'I'm sucking it in, 'cause there's a journalist here,' he grinned. His cheeks swelled when he laughed, and the years fell from his face, returning the impish Beatle of old.

Most people, from the Beatles films and his countless TV interviews, have some idea of how Paul McCartney talks. Face to face, however, his tone is more earthy, more Scouse, his speech peppered with lovingly delivered swear-words.

But interviewing McCartney is a bit like panning for gold. He can be as slippery as a politician, expertly ducking a question and sometimes making you return to it three times before he tackles it head-on. At other points, he begins to drift into old anecdotes that you've heard or read him relate dozens of times. In these moments, you're forced to interject to try to steer him gently back towards less familiar terrain.

Sometimes, particularly when he digresses, you feel as if he's growing a bit bored, either by the question or his response to it, and he says 'anyway', quite definitely, urging you to move on. Other times, you suspect this is a handy defence mechanism when he is finding the line of questioning too intrusive.

Being a seasoned interviewee, he is well practised in the art of talking a lot while giving very little away. John Lennon once sniffily complimented his former bandmate on being 'a good PR man . . . about the best in the world'. There remains a fair amount of truth in this, and, ultimately, it forces you to push McCartney harder to get beneath his usual surface spiel. You know you're getting somewhere when he emits an almost exasperated sigh and says, 'Look, to be *honest*.'

At the same time, perhaps because he is surrounded by reverence most of the time, he seems to relish repartee, to enjoy measured mickey-taking. He is, of course, a man few ever dare to say no to, never mind lightly take the piss out of. But it's clear that he loves getting back in touch with the rougher, former working-class Macca, who is never too far away.

On this occasion, with a second meeting scheduled for six days later and in the same location, we were due to talk about the 1970s, an often tumultuous and uncertain time for McCartney. During our chat he began to open up more and more, offering a carefully controlled honesty about his trials during the period: the emotional crash he'd suffered after the collapse of The Beatles; the brutal public bickering that went on between himself and Lennon; the vilification of Linda by press and fans alike; the troubled benign dictatorship of Wings, a band

which seemed to suffer from a messy, revolving-door membership policy.

'You could never force musicians to do stuff,' he stressed, 'but you'd *suggest* strongly.'

'I imagine you can be quite . . . *persuasive* in your arguments,' I said.

'There were some arguments,' he conceded. 'But there were arguments in The Beatles too. It's unpleasant. But it's actually quite a good thing.'

'Was it tough finding musicians who weren't overawed to be working with "Paul McCartney, ex-Beatle?"' I wondered.

'I don't blame 'em,' he replied, deadpan. '*I'm* overawed by me, Tom. It's true, man. I'm not kidding!' There was a long pause. 'No, no, no, I am kidding,' he smiled.

At one point I broached the numerous dope busts he'd suffered as an enthusiastic user of marijuana. Did he feel victimised by the police in any way?

'A bit, yeah,' he admitted.

'It must have been like the coppers were sitting around thinking, We've got a slack day, boys, let's bust Macca,' I said.

'Well, there was a lot of that,' he laughed.

'They found plants at your farmhouse in Scotland, they had you in LA with a joint on the floor of your car,' I went on.

'That's right, yeah,' he nodded. 'That was planted. The LA thing was planted. What it was, by mistake, I ran a red light 'cause I thought, You can do that in America. Which you can. Often you can turn right on a red light. But this had a sign – No Right Turn – that I'd missed.'

'Because you were stoned?' I ventured.

He hesitated, before his face spread into a wide grin.

'I might have been.'

By the end, I realised he hadn't looked at his watch once.

*

Close to a week on, we met up again. McCartney invited me into his office with a beckoning head gesture, as he stood just inside the doorway, messing around on an upright bass. 'Check out my new bass, man,' he said, his fingers easily strolling up and down its neck. He looked tired, the years showing on his face. It was the end of a long day.

We parked ourselves on his office sofa again, in the same positions we'd assumed the week before. He'd obviously given our previous conversation some thought and seemed keen to play down the soft-drug angle, mainly because he figured it would be seized upon by the papers and twisted out of context.

'This is gonna get picked up by the tabloids,' he said. 'Macca Exposé. I don't wanna go on about it too much.'

I pointed out that Paul McCartney In Weed-Puffing Shock was hardly revelatory stuff.

'It's all a bit stronger these days, so I don't want to be the one who advocates it,' he argued. 'You don't want to give some kids the idea, "Well, great, man, let's go do it."'

'The Beatles got me into dope actually,' I confessed.

'See, that's it,' he said. 'But there are people these days who can't handle it, and I don't wanna be responsible for any of that.'

Firmly, and for the record, he claimed to have completely given up smoking weed himself, partly as a result of his advancing years. 'It's a bit befuddling,' he laughed. 'It's actually more important at my stage of the game to be unfuddled.'

He said his friends had noticed how his vocabulary had improved after he'd quit marijuana. 'They'd say, "Wow, your choice of words has really gone up." Before I'd go, "It's like . . . y'know . . . it's like . . . y'know . . . *good*." Whereas now, it's like, "It's kinda *exceptional*." You're actually choosing words that fit better, that I know, but I could never remember.'

If the public perception of Paul McCartney is pretty much frozen in stone, he sometimes seems to be entirely at odds with it. At one

1

On the Run

He knew he was in trouble the morning he couldn't lift his head off the pillow. He awoke, face down, his skull feeling like a useless dead weight. A dark thought flashed through his mind: if he couldn't make the effort to pull himself up, he'd suffocate right there and then.

Somehow, as if it was the hardest thing he'd ever done, he summoned the energy to move. He flipped over on to his back and thought, Jesus . . . that was a bit near.

Day by day, week by week, his condition had been steadily worsening. His often sleepless nights were spent shaking with anxiety, while his days, which he was finding harder and harder to face, were characterised by heavy drinking and self-sedation with marijuana. He found himself chain-smoking his untipped, lung-blackening Senior Service cigarettes one after another after another.

Later, he would look back on this period and tell everyone that he'd almost had a nervous breakdown. From the outside, there appeared to be no 'almost' about it.

For the first time in his life, he felt utterly worthless. Everything he had been since the age of fifteen had been wrapped up in the band. Now, even though he couldn't tell the world, that period of his life was almost certainly over.

It was as if he'd suddenly and unexpectedly lost his job, been made entirely redundant. He was 27 and of no use to anyone any more. Even the money he'd earned up to this point was no comfort, made no real difference. This was an identity crisis *in extremis*: who exactly was he if he wasn't Beatle Paul McCartney?

On the mornings when he forced himself to rise, he'd sit on the edge of his bed for a while before defeatedly crawling back under the covers. When he did get up and out of bed he'd reach straight for the whisky, his drinking creeping earlier and earlier into the day. By three in the afternoon, he was usually out of it.

'I hit the bottle,' he admits. 'I hit the substances.'

He was eaten up with anger – at himself, at the outside world. He could only describe it as a barrelling, empty feeling rolling across his soul.

Out of work and with nothing to distract him, the ghosts from his past would rise up, whispering in his head, telling him, in spite of everything he'd achieved, that they knew he'd never really amount to anything. That he should have got a proper job in the first place, just as they'd always said.

He realised that up until this point he'd been a 'cocky sod'. And now there was this: the first serious blow to his confidence he'd ever experienced. Even when he was fourteen and the mastectomy couldn't save his mother's life, he had known that that horrific event had been outwith his control. Somehow, now, in the depths of his muddied thinking, he was starting to believe that everything that was happening was nobody's fault but his own.

His wife of less than a year felt the situation was 'frightening beyond belief'. Within a matter of months, her new partner had gone from being a sparky, driven, world-famous rock star to a broken man who didn't want to set foot out of their bedroom. But even if Linda was scared, she knew she couldn't give up on Paul. She recognised that her husband was sinking into emotional quicksand, and she knew that it was down to her alone to pull him out before he went under for good.

'Linda saved me,' he says. 'And it was all done in a sort of domestic setting.'

It had been two years since they'd first met at the Bag O' Nails nightclub in Soho, four days later being seen deep in conversation at

the press launch for *Sgt. Pepper*. It was only a year since they'd managed to float unnoticed together through the streets of New York (where, in Chinatown, he had comically tried to pull her into a temple offering Buddhist weddings), before flying from coast to coast, landing in Los Angeles and disappearing for days into a bungalow at the Beverly Hills Hotel. It was still only six months since they'd giggled their way through their wedding ceremony at Marylebone registry office in London, amid a fog of seething female jealousy that seemed to spread across the world.

He had been the last single Beatle, the one seen about town, haunting the clubs and hanging with the artsy crowd. She was the American single-mother divorcee who had earned some renown as a rock photographer and who had apparently had flings with Mick Jagger and Jim Morrison. To Paul, Linda appeared deeper than the frothy, starry-eyed girls who tended to flock around him, less buttoned-up than his then paramour, actress Jane Asher.

Linda would take Paul out on long drives, saying 'Let's get lost' in her drawly, stoney way, showing him a new kind of freedom. She had surprised him by telling him, 'I could make you a nice home.'

Now it was autumn 1969, and the McCartneys were in Scotland, 'hiding away in the mists' as Paul puts it. They had escaped here, far from London and the heavy weather of intra-Beatle feuding that refused to lift.

But High Park Farm was no rock-star country pile. Paul had bought the run-down farmhouse, set on a hill overlooking Skeroblin Loch in 183 acres of rough Scottish landscape, back in June 1966, the year he became a millionaire. His accountant had suggested that McCartney invest in property to wrestle some of his earnings away from the clutches of Harold Wilson and his Labour government's painful 95 per cent super-taxing of high earners.

The ever frugal Paul, of course, leaped at such an opportunity, picking High Park Farm out of the reams of property documents his accountant sent him. The asking price was a not insubstantial

£35,000, more than ten times the cost of the average family home in the mid-1960s. It was, says Paul, 'wee', consisting of only three rooms: a bedroom at either end separated by its kitchen-cum-living area. The hole in the roof of the farmhouse was included in the deal.

But it was another eighteen months after the purchase, in December 1967, before Paul, with Jane Asher in tow, made the trip north to check out his new investment. High Park was set more than a mile up a bumpy single track, and visitors unprepared for the terrain would moan that the drive would virtually wreck their offroad-unworthy vehicles.

The sorely neglected property was in a wild and windswept location, fourteen miles from the southern tip of the remote Kintyre peninsula. Three miles west from the hill lay the six-mile sweep of beach at Machrihanish Bay. A five-mile drive south-east down the A83 sat the small fishing port of Campbeltown and the closest amenities.

When Paul first came here at the tail-end of 1967 – equally the Beatles' annus mirabilis and annus horribilis (the marvel of *Sgt. Pepper*, the paralysing shock of Brian Epstein's death, the trials of *Magical Mystery Tour* and the sense that nothing would ever be the same again) – he'd tried to make High Park habitable on a characteristically thrifty level.

He'd dispatched Beatles gofer Alistair Taylor into Campbeltown, from where he'd returned with a second-hand Formica table and chairs, an electric stove and a couple of beds. The pair fashioned a sofa out of a pile of Sharpe's Express wooden potato boxes, with an old mattress found in the barn folded over the makeshift frame.

After his split from Asher, Paul first went back there with Linda in November 1968. The eldest daughter of the moneyed New York Eastman family had immediately fallen in love with the place and the idea of roughing it in this remoteness – no hot water, mice and rats in the walls and all – but had suggested to Paul that they do the place up a bit. It was a notion that hadn't even occurred to the airy McCartney.

She encouraged him to pour a cement floor in the kitchen, replacing the wooden planks laid over the bare earth. He began making a table to replace the flimsy Formica one. He scaled a ladder and climbed on to the roof to fix its hole, Linda soundtracking his handiwork by spinning the newly released *Tighten Up* reggae compilation LPs.

If you had walked through the door of the farmhouse in the latter months of 1969, according to Paul, you'd have seen 'nappies, bottles, musical instruments, me and Lin, like a couple of hippies . . . it wasn't sort of dirty, but it wasn't clean.'

High Park wasn't entirely cut off from civilisation, though it certainly had that feel. Linda in particular romanticised this notion, imagining that the McCartneys were living in another era, as if they were pioneers in this isolated place. She loved the fact that they were, as she fancifully saw it, 'at the end of nowhere'.

As the months passed, Paul and Linda grew into their rural personas. At Christmas, he bought her twelve pheasants; she bought him a tractor, which he used to plough a vegetable patch where they grew parsnips, turnips, potatoes, green beans, runner beans and spinach.

Their acreage was home to around 150 to 200 sheep, which Paul learned to clip using hand-shears before the fleeces were sold to the Wool Marketing Board. Already leaning towards vegetarianism, they would baulk at the notion of killing their lambs, although they were forced to send some off to market if the numbers grew too high. They tried to separate the ewes from the rams, but sometimes one of the male sheep would enthusiastically spring over the fence. In time, they had six horses, including their retired racer Drake's Drum, bought for Paul's father Jim and a former winner at Aintree, alongside Honor (Paul's), Cinnamon (Linda's) and three ponies, Sugarfoot, Cookie and Coconut.

Revving up a generator, Paul put together an ad hoc four-track recording facility in High Park's rickety lean-to, which he named Rude Studio. It was in here, gently encouraged by Linda, that his

songwriting slowly began to return to him, as he effectively used music as therapy to alleviate his depression. 'She eased me out of it,' he remembers, 'and just said, "Hey, y'know, you don't want to get too crazy."'

Paul would shy away from admitting that there was a strong autobiographical element to some of these new compositions, but his protestations rang hollow. The lyric of 'Man We Was Lonely' spoke of how his and Linda's self-imposed exile was not as idyllic as it outwardly seemed, that their spirits had been low, but how, under the comfort blanket of domesticity, their positivity was returning.

'Every Night', a song he'd first begun messing around with during the *Let It Be* sessions, was more confessional still – its singer painting a grim picture of a routine involving getting wasted and struggling to drag himself out of bed. The chorus, as was increasingly becoming a McCartney trait, pledged his devotion to Linda. As a song, it was a deceptively breezy affair. While elsewhere Lennon was screaming his pain, it was typical of McCartney to mask his with melody. Only if you listened closely would you really be able to detect the songwriter's anguish.

As Paul seemed to stabilise, the McCartneys settled into a daily routine, riding their horses across the land or taking sheepdog Martha for long walks. They drove into Campbeltown in their Land Rover, which they'd nicknamed Helen Wheels, the Beatle becoming a regular sight wandering around in his wellies and sheepskin-lined brown leather jacket. In the evening, he would light the fire while Linda cooked, before stepping into Rude to work on songs. At night, they would cuddle up, get stoned and watch TV. 'We were not cut off from the world,' said Linda. 'We were never hermits.'

Aside from anything, to playfully distract Paul from his troubles, there were the children to look after: the newborn Mary, and Linda's child from her first marriage, shy Heather, only six. For the kids, High Park was a cross between a playground and a junkyard. As soon as she began to walk Mary was free to toddle outside through

its abandoned gypsy-encampment-like clutter of scrap wood, sheets of corrugated iron and teetering log piles (noting incredulously as an adult that she'd effectively been brought up in a 'lumber yard').

It was a messy scene but, for McCartney, one filled with increasingly frequent spells of happiness. Nevertheless, in a corner of his mind, knowing that there was a Beatles-shaped storm brewing back down in London, Paul was still filled with unease.

It didn't help that everyone was arguing about whether or not he was dead.

The rumour had first circulated amongst the bloodshot-eyed student populace of Drake University in Iowa, around the same time as McCartney had first holed up in Scotland. The signs were all there if you cared to dig 'deep' enough, to stop just rolling joints on the covers of Beatles albums and decipher the hidden messages in the artwork and between the grooves. They listened to Lennon's daft murmur of 'cranberry sauce' in the fade-out of 'Strawberry Fields Forever' and imagined it to be 'I buried Paul'. They would spin *The White Album* backwards with an index finger and convince themselves that a voice could be heard saying, 'Turn me on, dead man'.

In many ways, The Beatles had brought this upon themselves. In their touring absence and with their increasingly cryptic music, they had laid playful clues and red herrings – with the opening lines of 'Rain' played backwards at the end of the song; with the garbled, wonked-out voices locked in the play-out groove of side two of *Sgt. Pepper*; with Lennon's head-game assertion in 'Glass Onion' that the walrus was Paul.

'We'd done them for fun, just for something to do,' says Paul, in admitting the Beatles' surprise that their penchant for japery was taken so seriously. 'Then everyone analysed them and we thought, *Ah*. We were completely oblivious to all those other "hidden" messages.'

That was until the clue-heads began to air their tangential theories. The sixteenth of September 1969 saw the first piece, in the Drake University student paper, under the tantalising headline 'Is Paul McCartney Dead?' A week later, the *Northern Star*, the campus inky of the University of Illinois, went one better: 'Clues Hint At Possible Beatle Death'.

A student identifying himself only as Tom called Detroit DJ Russ Gibb to inform him of the rumours. Listening in, a college writer named Fred LaBour decided to turn prankster, taking it upon himself to 'kill' McCartney, adding arm upon leg to the growing myth. Two days later, the *Michigan Daily* printed his fabricated revelations under the more contentious banner: 'McCartney Dead: New Evidence Brought To Light'. Then the rumour spread countrywide when Roby Yonge, on his networked show from WABC in New York, discussed the theories on air in the small hours, when the stoned were at their most receptive.

It all made sense to the herbally enhanced mind, of course, and somehow an elaborate back-story began to emerge. Instead of, as the real tale went, having suffered a chipped tooth and badly cut lip in a moped accident in Liverpool in December 1965 (Paul had been 'looking at the moon', hit a rock and gone flying over the handlebars), McCartney had in fact stormed off from a Beatles session at Abbey Road on 9 November 1966 in a huff, following an argument with the other Beatles, and crashed his Aston Martin, decapitating himself. The panicked band had subsequently replaced him with a doppelgänger, the winner of a secret Paul McCartney lookalike competition, a Scotsman named William Campbell, who was then given plastic surgery to render him identical.

There were other clues, apparently. The palm of a hand held above McCartney's head on the cover of *Sgt. Pepper* was a mystical sign of death (it wasn't). Paul was barefoot in the 'funeral procession' zebra-crossing cover shot of *Abbey Road* to indicate that he was a corpse (the duller truth being that it had been a hot August day, he was

wearing sandals and he'd slipped them off). The licence plate of the white Volkswagen Beetle in the background of the image that ended 28IF was symbolically stating the age McCartney would have been had he survived the rumoured accident (in fact, photographer Iain Macmillan had attempted to have the car towed out of shot). The word 'walrus' was Greek for corpse (it isn't). The 'one and one and one is three' that Lennon sang about in 'Come Together' was referring to the surviving Beatles (rather than being just a throwaway line in a surreal, pinballing lyric). Paul is facing away from the camera on the back cover of *Sgt. Pepper* because it is in fact William Campbell, hiding his surgical scars (although that didn't explain why he is shown facing forwards on the front cover). And on and on and on it fantastically went.

By November, the story had made it to the pages of *Rolling Stone*, albeit in a piece with an eyebrow-raised, slightly mocking tone. Nevertheless, Beatles publicist Derek Taylor soon found himself having to fend off calls from reporters the world over. And still the rumour persisted, not least when Dr Henry Truby of Miami University studied three pre- and post-1966 recordings of McCartney singing and rather vaguely stated he couldn't conclude that they were in fact the work of the same person.

But even for its chief propagator, the whole affair was getting out of hand. Fred LaBour was invited to appear on TV in California in a mock trial where he presented evidence to back up his claims. Before the recording, however, he confessed to the show's host, lawyer F. Lee Bailey, that he had made the whole thing up. It was too late, pointed out Bailey. They would have to go with it, to air the legend.

Finally, Paul issued a statement through the Beatles' press office. 'I'm alive and well,' he said. 'But if I were dead I would be the last to know.'

Of course, maddeningly, it was such a ridiculous myth that it was almost impossible to disprove. It hinged on McCartney somehow

managing to prove that he was who he said he was. But even if he underwent and passed a fingerprint test, the naysayers could crow that it was all down to forgery and conspiracy.

Given McCartney's distinctive voice, features and physical demeanour, the Paul Is Dead fiction was of course absurd. In London, even his long-time barber was forced to respond to a New York radio reporter's probing by saying that the last time he'd cut Paul's hair, a flaw in his parting had still been there.

In the end, it came down to one simple, rumour-puncturing poser – if this imposter William Campbell had managed not only to win the McCartney lookalike competition, had gone under the plastic surgeon's knife, had learned to sing like Paul and written songs of the calibre of 'She's Leaving Home' and 'Hey Jude', why would he or any of the other Beatles leave a trail of clues to blow his cover?

More tickled than annoyed, and mindful of Mark Twain's famous quote, after the publication of an erroneous obituary, about the rumours of his death being greatly exaggerated, McCartney was aware that there might be a positive, publicity-friendly angle to all of this. It couldn't do the just-released *Abbey Road* any harm, and in the end the rumpus sent its sales rocketing skywards, making it the biggest-selling Beatles album in the US since *Sgt. Pepper*.

Nevertheless, dying, as McCartney now jokes, 'wasn't easy . . . it took a lot out of me.'

It also drew the unwanted attentions of the press directly to the door of High Park. The first journalist to make the long and difficult journey from London to Scotland and out to the Argyll peninsula was dogged *Daily Express* pop scribe Judith Simons, who in the past had interviewed The Beatles on many occasions.

The trek was clearly more arduous and involved than the writer had expected, since she showed up at night, in the dark, timorously knocking on the door of the farmhouse. Paul, considering Simons 'a

little sweetheart', wasn't particularly irritated by her intrusion, instead being quietly impressed by her tenacity and bravery.

'She was totally scared shitless of being in the middle of this place,' he says. 'I mean, there were no lights on the road.' Still, he remained vague and nonplussed when Simons started firing what he viewed as wholly trivial questions at him. 'She was just asking me about some story. I'm saying, "What can I tell you?"'

In truth, Paul had stopped doing interviews because he still felt far too exposed and emotionally raw. There was one question he dreaded above all others: 'Are you happy?' In his precariously balanced state, it would almost make him burst into tears.

Nevertheless, as time went on, his patience was beginning to fray, resulting in eruptions of other emotions entirely. When a pair from the London offices of the US magazine *Life* – writer Dorothy Bacon and photographer Terence Spencer – flew to Scotland, schlepping all the way to High Park to get a reaction about the death rumours, McCartney's anger boiled over.

It was a Sunday morning in late October and Paul, unsurprisingly, was still in bed. The *Life* duo had cannily assumed that it was a good time to catch the McCartneys at home and that their journey was less likely to be hindered by interfering local farmers. Intrepidly, they hoofed up to High Park from the main road, trudging across the fields for close to an hour.

Arriving at the door of the farmhouse, Bacon knocked. Paul, having got up as soon as he realised what was going on outside, jerked the door open, a bucket of slop from the McCartneys' rudimentary kitchen in one hand. He was unshaven, his hair an early Beatle-ish mop-top grown out and gone pineappleishly unkempt. His face was beetroot with fury. Spencer raised his camera to take a shot.

'I threw the bucket at him,' Paul says. 'It was nearly the cover of *Life*.'

The bucket flew past the photographer's head, but Spencer had got the shot and Paul knew it. Enraged, he stepped forward and

punched the snapper on the shoulder. Having covered six wars and experienced nothing in the way of physical violence until faced with a raging Beatle, the startled Spencer turned to Bacon, saying, 'I think we've run out of our hospitality.' The pair turned tail and quickly marched away.

Alone, calming down, Paul reflected on what had just happened. He'd utterly lost his cool, and now the photographer definitely had the shot of him looking furious and demented. Ever the PR man, Paul realised he had to try to mend the situation if the shot wasn't to appear on the cover of *Life* and in the world's papers thereafter, making him look like a lunatic.

Bacon and Spencer, meanwhile, were shaken but happy enough: they had pictorial proof that McCartney was still alive.

As they made their way back down the farm track, the McCartneys' Land Rover, with Paul, Linda and the kids inside, pulled up behind them. Spencer was initially afraid, saying to Bacon, 'For God's sake, be careful, because that man is mad.'

But it was an altogether more amiable and contrite Paul who emerged from the Land Rover, apologising, proffering a handshake and offering, in return for the roll of film containing the offending snap, to give a short interview and, albeit still reluctantly, to have his photograph taken with the family.

'We agreed to pose on the Land Rover,' he remembers. 'But I was definitely not in posing mode.'

A slightly haunted-looking image of the McCartneys made the cover of *Life* dated 7 November 1969, along with the accompanying splash 'The Case Of The "Missing" Beatle: Paul Is Still With Us'. In the shot, one of two that would illustrate the piece, Paul appears bed-headed and morning rough, his left arm curled protectively around a wind-blown Linda, his right cradling baby Mary, as in front of him, Heather, perhaps sensing her parents' hostility towards these unannounced visitors, wields a walking-stick like a club. In the second, the family are arranged on the front bumper of the Land

Rover, Paul trying to appear upbeat, raising his hand in a friendly, open gesture as Linda nuzzles his neck.

In the interview, he addressed the Paul Is Dead rumours. 'It is all bloody stupid,' he said. 'Perhaps the rumour started because I haven't been much in the press lately. I don't have anything to say these days. I am happy to be with my family and I will work when I work. I was switched on for ten years and I never switched off. Now I am switching off whenever I can. I would rather be a little less famous these days.

'The people who are making up these rumours should look to themselves a little more,' he went on. 'They should worry about themselves instead of worrying whether I am dead or not.

'I would rather do what I began doing, which is making music. But the Beatle thing is over. It has been exploded, partly by what we have done, and partly by other people.

'What I have to say is all in the music,' he concluded. 'If I want to say anything, I write a song. Can you spread it around that I am just an ordinary person and want to live in peace? We have to go now. We have two children at home.'

Upon publication, the piece appeared to lay to rest the ghosts of the Paul Is Dead furore, although in some heads the doubts and conspiracies rumble on to this day.

One crucial point was completely missed, however: the fact that Paul had let slip that 'the Beatle thing is over'. *Life* had in fact got the world exclusive that the former Fabs had secretly imploded. But, amid all the fuss, no one even noticed.

In private, The Beatles had fallen out and fallen apart, prompting McCartney's state of panic and depression. As if to spotlight the emotional distance and physical remove of the four former friends, each was filmed separately with their respective partners for the promotional clip for 'Something', Apple MD Neil Aspinall having travelled to High Park to shoot the jokey, smoochy segments featuring Paul and Linda.

The critical episode in what Lennon called the 'slow death' of The Beatles had come at a meeting at Apple on 20 September 1969. Three of the band members, minus George Harrison (whose mother had just been diagnosed with cancer), had convened at the office to ink their names on a new deal with Capitol Records, their label in the US and most other international territories. The deal had been hammered out by Allen Klein, a hate figure to Paul, who represented the others, while McCartney had divisively chosen to be looked after by his new in-laws, father-and-son lawyer team Lee and John Eastman. A touch gallingly for Paul, the contract Klein had brokered carved out an impressive 25 per cent royalty cut for The Beatles, the highest of any recording artists in the world.

On the day, in the preamble to signing the deal, a self-consciously babbling Paul had attempted to rah-rah-rah his downbeat colleagues into trying to recapture their fire. He suggested they could perhaps do this by way of a tour of small clubs where the band – who had last performed for a paying audience more than three years before – could turn up unannounced or billed under a pseudonym (he proposed Rikki and The Redstreaks). He argued that this might prop up their sagging confidence in their live abilities and help them get back in touch with who they were.

'I think you're daft,' a scowling Lennon abruptly informed McCartney, before announcing, 'I'm leaving the group. I want a divorce.'

Following this jaw-dropping declaration, the three signed the contract (which would in any case ensure that they earned far more from their future record sales, whether or not they stuck together) 'in a bit of a daze', according to Paul. All involved would look back on this as being the moment when the illness that had been affecting The Beatles finally became terminal.

As he would later attest when the press and fans cast him as the pantomime baddie in the drama of the Beatles' separation, Paul was actually the only member who up until that point hadn't previously

walked out on the band. Ringo, feeling like an outsider and, worse, a musician of dwindling talent, had announced during the sessions for *The White Album* in summer 1968, that he was quitting. On his return from a cooling-off-period holiday in Sardinia, he walked into Abbey Road to find the studio festooned with flowers to celebrate his return.

George, meanwhile, had stormed out of the rehearsals for *Let It Be* in the cold environs of Twickenham Film Studios during the Beatles' winter of discontent in January 1969. Harrison, who would later gripe that McCartney had treated him with a 'superior attitude' for some years, had bitterly argued with Paul over the guitar part for 'I've Got A Feeling', as seen in the final cut of the painfully candid documentary. On the day he walked, however, he had been battling with Lennon over a matter long since forgotten, though serious enough to enrage both sufficiently that they ended up trading blows.

After Harrison's departure, The Beatles spent the rest of the day rehearsing without him. That afternoon, with a significance that can't have escaped anyone, Yoko Ono took over George's position and began wailing into his microphone. The others reacted – Lennon with enthusiasm, McCartney and Starr in frustration – by erupting into an accompanying barrage of feedback and thunderous drumming.

George, of course, returned to the band a week later, though the schism between him and Paul was now even wider, if papered over for the purposes of band morale.

In the aftermath of the ultimate Beatles split, of course, the wives would take the blame. But it was Allen Klein, rather than Yoko Ono or Linda McCartney, who broke up The Beatles.

Klein walked into the Beatles' world like something from a bad cartoon, a squat, cigar-sucking caricature of a Jewish showbiz manager. The New Yorker divided and conquered John, Paul, George and Ringo when they were lost and insecure and lacking in impetus and direction. He was also a master of casual intimidation; in one

meeting in the Apple boardroom, he smirked at Lennon while nonchalantly brandishing a hammer.

He had served his apprenticeship as an accountant at an entertainments firm before moving into management, initially handling 1950s crooner Bobby Darin. But Klein's special skills soon became apparent: meticulously auditing accounts and sniffing out discrepancies, and, later, prising enormous advances from record companies. He had pulled off something of a coup by securing $1 million for American soul singer Sam Cooke. More significantly, however, in 1965, The Rolling Stones had appointed Klein as their business manager and he'd renegotiated their contract with Decca, resulting in a record-breaking $1.25 million advance that wouldn't have escaped the attention of The Beatles.

It was Lennon who first became captivated by Klein, before convincing Starr and Harrison that this mouthy character could plug the holes in their business affairs. McCartney was not so sure. He'd already put forward Lee Eastman as a possible candidate for, if not exactly Beatles manager, then at least some form of financial controller for Apple. 'But they said, "Nah, nah, he'd be just too biased for you and against us,"' Paul says. 'Which I could see.'

Significantly, Eastman had informed McCartney about the shady flipside of Klein's reputation in America. At the point when Klein first approached The Beatles, he had just been investigated for both insider trading (he was in fact cleared, though he immediately changed his company name from Cameo-Parkway to ABKCO) and tax evasion.

Then Paul received a letter from Mick Jagger, pointedly warning him, through his own bitter experience – the New Yorker having managed to con the Stones into signing over their hits up to that point to his company – about getting involved with Klein. Paul, feeling that at last he had someone to add weight to his serious misgivings about the manager, invited Jagger to Apple to meet the others and explain his feelings about Klein. McCartney remembers the Stones' singer backing down when faced with all four Beatles:

'He said, "Well, he's alright if you like that kind of thing." He didn't say, "He's a robber."'

The bad feelings festering among The Beatles came to a head one night when George, John and Ringo turned up at Olympic Studios during the *Abbey Road* sessions with Klein in tow. The three informed Paul that he would have to sign the ABKCO management agreement right there and then, as Klein had to report to his board. McCartney refused to put pen to paper, pointing out that it was Friday night anyway and, since Klein was 'a law unto himself', the board theory didn't wash. The others then told McCartney that Klein was asking for twenty per cent of their future earnings. Paul, enraged, insisted that Klein would take fifteen, since The Beatles were, with no little understatement, 'a big act'. The three accused him of stalling and walked out of the studio.

On 8 May 1969, John, Ringo and George signed the ABKCO agreement. Only three days before, The Beatles had begun recording Paul's melancholic and resigned 'You Never Give Me Your Money', a barely disguised attack on Klein. McCartney remembers that Lennon, perhaps typically, appreciated the twisted humour of the lyrical gesture.

But now, no one could even laugh about where The Beatles had ended up. 'It was,' Paul says, 'just fucking awful.'

McCartney greeted the dawning of the 1970s back in London in his St John's Wood townhouse at 7 Cavendish Avenue, within walking distance of Abbey Road. Here, Linda and Heather, still relative newcomers to England, attempted to fit back into London life.

For Linda it was a frequently claustrophobic experience, thanks to the often bitter and vicious attentions of the feral girl fans who stalked her every time she stepped outside the house, tried to trip her up, or, if she was in a car without Paul, hammered on its roof and lobbed abuse at her. They scrawled messages on the walls outside: 'Fuck Linda'. They broke into the house and stole her

photographs. They posted her cruel letters and parcels containing human turds.

For Heather, naturally reticent and in possession of an incongruous American accent, life at Robinsfield, the local private primary school in which the McCartneys had enrolled her, was equally as tough. She found it hard to make friends and often appeared sad and isolated, a situation only made worse by her elongated breaks from school as she travelled with her mum and soon-to-be adoptive dad, in an arrangement that was only to become looser as the decade progressed.

At the time, the McCartneys professed a wholly laidback attitude towards their child's education. 'I leave Heather to herself pretty much,' said Linda. 'I'm not interested in breathing over her shoulder.'

'I'm not fussy about education,' said Paul. 'Linda's not very well educated. I know a lot of people who aren't and they're still really great people. So I don't place very heavy emphasis on it.'

For Paul, returning to the capital from Scotland made him quickly realise that the destructive animosity that had set in to The Beatles was, if anything, beginning to intensify.

Business woes aside, there was still the matter of the unreleased tapes of the troubled Twickenham sessions (which had been transplanted to Apple Studios in Savile Row upon Harrison's return to the group). Throughout 1969 and into early 1970, two intensive attempts were made by producer Glyn Johns to boil down the hours of unvarnished, often sloppy takes – inspired by the bare-bones live jams of The Band – into an album that deserved to be released under the Beatles' name.

Test acetates had been found lacking in one way or another, although a mocked-up sleeve had been designed for the planned album, to be named *Get Back*. It featured The Beatles assuming the same positions and poses they'd adopted on the balcony of EMI's Manchester Square offices for their *Please Please Me* debut album six

years earlier, the four now decidedly hirsute, with Lennon the most dramatically changed of all.

Back in Beatles headspace, Paul sat in a room at Cavendish Avenue and, with fresh ears, reviewed the results of the second version of the *Get Back* LP. To his mind, the music was stark, unadorned, frighteningly bare, but ultimately thrilling.

Klein, meanwhile, bluntly deemed it 'a crock of shit' and conspired with Lennon to bring in Phil Spector, who had just overseen the rousing production of 'Instant Karma!', to rework the tapes. Unknown to McCartney, Spector booked studio time in March and began slathering strings and brass, fairytale harp and *aaahing* choir onto 'The Long And Winding Road', making it sound hopelessly corny, like a BBC orchestra backing Engelbert Humperdinck.

At this stage, however, Paul remained unaware of this development, his thoughts somewhere else entirely. Secluded in his music room at Cavendish Avenue, McCartney began recording his first solo album, without the knowledge of the others. He wheeled a cooker-sized four-track machine from Abbey Road into his home and, free of the emotional and artistic complications of the Beatles' most recent sessions, began to play, in the childlike sense of the word.

'It was very liberating,' he says. 'But very necessary at that time, 'cause otherwise, I wouldn't have anywhere to go to get away from the turmoil.' In these solo sessions, it became clear to Paul that treating his music as therapy was yielding positive results: 'It's a bit like after an operation, where you want to rest but you've got to push it.'

He was able to record entirely alone, and even without a recording engineer, thanks to a device built by an Abbey Road technician which allowed him to plug directly into the back of the tape machine. He muffled boomy tom-toms with towels or simply moved the cymbals further away from the microphone if they sounded too loud

and splashy on the recording. 'It was brilliant, actually,' he says of this unfussy approach. 'You're talking pure sound.'

When it became clear to him that he would have to step outside his house to finish the recordings, Linda booked time for him at Morgan Studios in Willesden, north-west London, under the name Billy Martin, making explicit the necessity for secrecy.

Inside Morgan, the troubles of the outside world seemed to evaporate, as noted by the facility's house engineer, Robin Black. 'You would never have guessed that he had any problems at all, quite frankly,' he says. It was 'like a holiday', according to Paul. He and Linda would even turn up with a packed lunch: 'We'd take some sandwiches and a bottle of grape juice and put the baby on the floor.'

The sense of fun and games spilled over from Cavendish Avenue and into the Morgan sessions. One day, inspired by a TV documentary he'd watched the previous evening about the Kreen-Akrore tribe of the Brazilian Amazon region, Paul fashioned a slightly daft ethno-rock instrumental of the same name. Feeling that something was lacking from the track, he disappeared for an hour and returned from Harrods with a longbow and arrow set, which he fired at a target to add percussive effects to the recording. 'I had microphones the whole way across the studio,' says Black, 'to try and capture the sound of the release of an arrow and the swish and the thud as it hit the target.'

Home-made and hand-made, the resulting album, *McCartney*, was less the grand launch of his solo career, more an insight into Paul's creative practices, being a precursor to the lo-fi recordings that would be in vogue decades later. But without the critical input of the other Beatles or George Martin, McCartney's creativity ran rampant, and to many the record seemed too random and sketchy, especially coming off the back of the polished *Abbey Road*. In many ways, the freedom and playfulness resulted in Paul's quality control slipping. For every track with the sophistication of the dreamlike and nostalgic 'Junk' or the gold-standard McCartney ballad 'Maybe I'm

Amazed', there was the cloyingly simple snippet 'The Lovely Linda' or the throwaway one-man jam of 'Oo You'.

But before the listening public even had the opportunity to make up their minds about Paul's first solo effort, it was to provoke an almighty ruckus.

Ringo Starr stood on the doorstep of McCartney's house at Cavendish Avenue, unaware that he was about to precipitate the end of The Beatles. His tricky diplomatic mission, which he had chosen to accept in his role as the chirpy drummer, was to convince his increasingly estranged bandmate that there was an unacceptable clash of release dates between the long-delayed *Get Back* – now renamed *Let It Be* – and Paul's freshly minted eponymous solo album, which was due to be issued only a week before.

With him, he had a letter, dated 31 March 1970, handwritten by John Lennon and co-signed by George Harrison. It read: 'Dear Paul, We thought a lot about The Beatles and yours [*sic*] LPs – and decided it's stupid for Apple to put out two big albums within 7 days of each other. So we sent a letter to EMI telling them to hold your release date 'til June 4th (there's a big Apple-Capitol convention in Hawaii then). We thought you'd come round when you realised that The Beatles album was coming out on April 24th. We're sorry it turned out like this – it's nothing personal. Love, John and George.'

Paul – his patience already strained, his temper on a hair-trigger – invited his friend inside and very quickly absorbed this information. Then he erupted.

'I told him to eff off,' Paul says. 'Everyone, to my mind, was completely treating me like dirt. It was kind of like, "We're the big guys, we're the grown-ups." And I said, "No way, man. Get out."'

Ringo swiftly departed with the sound of Paul's fury ringing in his ears. McCartney refused to budge and his solo album was released on 17 April 1970, forcing *Let It Be* back another two weeks to 8 May.

It was the moment when Paul McCartney finally gave up on The Beatles, the point where he mentally quit the group. Interview-phobic as he was at the time, when it came to promoting *McCartney*, Paul sidestepped face-to-face encounters by inserting a press release-cum-self-interview with the review copies of the album.

In the mock questionnaire, however, he sounded sulky, revealing more of his unhappy state of mind than perhaps even the most probing interviewer might have been able to. Was it true that Allen Klein and ABKCO weren't to be involved in the manufacturing or distribution of the new album? Not if Paul could help it. Was he planning any new records with The Beatles? No. Due to 'personal differences, business differences, musical differences'. Did he see himself writing songs together with John in the future? No. What were his plans now? 'My only plan is to grow up,' he wrote.

Not that anyone could tell from the tone of the pseudo-interview, which was stroppy and childish. Later, McCartney said it made him shudder to look back at it.

The news exploded across the front pages of the world's newspapers. The *Daily Mirror* in Britain, on the morning of 10 April 1970, was the first to break the news of the band's split, with the unfussy words: 'Paul Quits The Beatles'. In the days that followed, a wave of outrage began to build, with fans and reporters alike stunned that McCartney would dare to walk out on their beloved Fabs. Lost in the roar was the fact that at no point in the 'interview' had McCartney actually stated that he was walking out on the band.

Overwhelmed by the reaction, Paul thought, 'Christ, what have I done?', as he vainly attempted to back-pedal. Forced to break his year-long British press silence, he asked Derek Taylor to arrange an interview with a trusted journalist, Ray Connolly of London's *Evening Standard*. The pair met for lunch, along with Linda, at a packed seafood restaurant in Soho. It was apparent that Paul was desperate to set the record straight.

'It was all a misunderstanding,' he protested. 'I never intended the

statement to mean "Paul McCartney quits Beatles". I didn't leave The Beatles. The Beatles have left The Beatles, but no one wants to be the one to say the party's over.' He went on to spend much of the remainder of the interview venting and moaning: about Klein, about the previous flounce-offs by Ringo and George, about how John had demanded a divorce from The Beatles, about how this 'trial separation' wasn't working.

If Paul was trying to redirect the finger of blame towards John, then it suited Lennon fine, since he was fuming that Paul had broken the news. John had in fact told Ray Connolly the previous December that he had left the band, but asked the writer not to print the story, since Klein didn't want the news to leak until after the release of *Let It Be*.

Now, of course, Lennon was furious that McCartney had beaten him to it. Ray Connolly would later wonder whether Lennon had attempted to set him up with the Beatles Split exclusive, figuring the journalist wouldn't be able to resist printing it and that John could shruggingly walk away from the band, blaming the writer for letting the cat out of the bag.

McCartney, meanwhile, now viewed Klein with out-and-out contempt. On 14 April 1970 he wrote him a flinty letter, addressing what he saw as the vandalising of 'The Long And Winding Road', informing him that 'in future no one will be allowed to add to or subtract from a recording of one of my songs without my permission', though only going as far as to insist that the orchestration be toned down. Menacingly, though, he ended it with a threat: 'Don't ever do it again.'

But Klein was no pushover. For the US release of *McCartney*, he further incensed Paul by taking out ads in *Rolling Stone* provocatively proclaiming that the album was being released by Apple, 'an ABKCO-managed company'. The battle, it seemed, was on.

In the fall-out, the McCartneys once again ran away to Scotland. But Klein continued to haunt Paul. He would appear in his dreams

as a demented dentist, chasing after him with a hypodermic needle, determined to, as he imagined, 'put me out'. McCartney confessed his fears to those close to him and they laughed. 'No,' Paul insisted, 'it's really fucking scary.'

For the first time in his life, he noticed grey in his hair. He gritted his teeth and read the music-press reports of how he had apparently stitched up the other Beatles and about how, vain and reclusive, he was 'sitting up in Scotland, looking into his mirror, admiring his own image'.

It drove him back to the bottle. One evening, in front of his wife, Lee Eastman and another unnamed guest, Paul began swigging whisky and jabbering, mumbling repeated phrases to himself: 'Fuckers . . . fucked me up . . . fucking carve-up.'

Eventually Linda led him to bed. Again, it was down to her to straighten out her husband's head. 'If I'd been doing that on my own,' Paul says, 'I'm not sure I'd have got out of it.'

Come summer, Lennon and McCartney entered into an odd correspondence, in an attempt to untangle the legal binding of The Beatles. First, Paul sent a twelve-page document to his bandmate, listing his many dissatisfactions. The gist was: 'I want to leave.' John artily responded with a photograph of himself, upon which he'd drawn a speech bubble containing the words 'How and why?' Paul wrote back saying he wanted the band's partnership to be officially dissolved because there was no partnership left. John sent him a curt postcard: 'Get well soon. Get the other signatures and I will think about it.'

The words 'I will think about it' unsettled Paul. For the first time, he considered the sickening notion that he might have to resort to legal action. It was something that had already occurred to Lee Eastman, the 60-year-old legal veteran, music publisher and expert in copyright law. Eastman senior had a reputation as a strong-headed negotiator himself and had already lost his composure in meetings with Klein. In June, he wrote an official letter to his adversary

seeking the dissolution of the Beatles' partnership. Klein didn't reply. Eastman could read the signs that this had all the makings of a dirty fight.

For their part, the other Beatles had their reasons for being distrustful of McCartney and the Eastmans, particularly given the superior, almost Kennedy-like air of the latter. During the carving-up of the Beatles' business affairs between the two New Yorker factions, Lee Eastman had furtively advised Paul to buy up extra shares in the band's publishing company, Northern Songs, in an effort to strengthen his bargaining power. Upon his discovery of this, Lennon flew at Eastman, attempting to thump him.

Amid all of this viciousness and spite, a touch ludicrously, US promoter Sid Bernstein chose this moment to publicly offer The Beatles $1 million to perform at a music festival in Holland in August 1970. If at that time it seemed to McCartney that a reunion had never been less likely, in fact it wasn't quite as ridiculous a concept as it appeared.

Suddenly concerned that he had inadvertently slit the throat of his golden goose, in October Klein was behind a sneaky attempt to bring the band back together, when he tried to trick McCartney into returning to the fold. He instructed John to call Paul and say, 'We're recording next Friday, are you coming?' Dutifully, John did just that, having been advised by Klein that any signs of détente might limit Paul's powers in being able to legally extricate himself from the group.

Paul simply didn't show up. The three others then proceeded to work on a song called 'Early 1970', sung by Ringo and set to become the B-side to his subsequent single, 'It Don't Come Easy'. The loping, light-hearted number addressed each of the other Beatles in the first three verses, before mocking Ringo's own musical limitations in the final stanza. In the opening lines, concerning Paul, Starr noted that his estranged friend not only lived on a farm but, in addition, apparently had 'plenty of charm'.

If it was any kind of serious attempt at reconciliation, it was too

little, too late. That same month, the McCartneys travelled to New York to 'get away from everything', not knowing that both Harrison and Lennon were coincidentally to be in the city at the same time.

While there, John arranged a meeting with Paul. McCartney cancelled, and Lennon later claimed that he hadn't planned to turn up anyway. Paul and George did meet, however, though their conversation quickly turned argumentative. McCartney stressed that he wanted off Apple. 'You'll stay on the fucking label,' Harrison hissed, before reflexively adding, 'Hare Krishna'.

And so McCartney's mind was set, even if, torn and procrastinating, he let the situation drift on for another couple of months before making his final move.

That December, back in Argyll, on a bright, cold day, McCartney stood high on a hill overlooking Skeroblin Loch, at the end of a long walk and deep conversation with Lee Eastman, in which, Paul says, 'we'd been searching our souls'. There was no other way, he concluded.

Surveying this peaceful scene, he decided that it was time to sue his bandmates, to legally kill The Beatles.