

With The Beatles

Tony Simpson

Jane Asher and Paul McCartney visited Bertrand Russell twice in 1966, on Saturday 18 June and the following Monday. This is according to Edith Russell's appointment diary in which she recorded their arrival at 4pm and, on the Monday, that they stayed 'till 6.30!' Evidently, this was an extended teatime with their young visitors. Paul was celebrating his 24th birthday on 18 June.

McCartney recalls his meeting with Russell in his bestselling book, *The Lyrics*, published in 2021. 'I'd read a few things by him' he writes, 'and had always been impressed by his dignity and how well he put across an idea.' 'A friend of a friend' had given McCartney Russell's address in Hasker Street, Chelsea, and he went and knocked on the door. This was the 'freewheeling sixties' when you could apparently do such a thing. Paul and Jane were invited in and McCartney recounts how Russell was the 'first person to tell me about what was going on in Vietnam', whilst describing what the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation was doing. 'He explained that it was an imperialist war supported by vested interests.' After tea, McCartney recalls going back to the recording studio and telling John Lennon and the others about what Russell had said. At the time, The Beatles were finishing the *Revolver* album, prior to their final world tour, which culminated with 19 shows in the United States and Canada in August 1966. Their next project was the landmark studio album, *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*.

'A lot of us had friends who were going to Vietnam – or were trying to avoid going to Vietnam' says Paul. 'It was our age

group, our peer group; the fact that Americans of our age group were going there brought it home to us.’

In a recent interview, McCartney mentioned how The Beatles were touring in Britain when they heard that President Kennedy had been murdered in Dallas, on 22 November 1963. Those of us alive then well remember the sombre news — the BBC played Chopin’s *Funeral March* instead of broadcasting its scheduled programmes. In 1966, Mark Lane, the US lawyer who challenged the findings of the official Warren Report on the President’s murder, came to London to finish *Rush to Judgment*, his bestselling book about the assassination, which was published in August that year. Was Mark Lane the ‘friend of a friend’ who passed on Russell’s Chelsea address to Paul? Lane had apparently met McCartney at a party in London. Documentary filmmaker Emile de Antonio collaborated with Lane in translating *Rush to Judgment* to the cinema screen, which can now be found on YouTube. There was talk that Paul might write some music for the film, which noticeably has none.

One of Russell’s last letters, dated 18 January 1970, a few days before his death, was to thank John Lennon and Yoko Ono for the Christmas hamper they had sent to the Russells. In 1969, Russell had encouraged John and Yoko in their public opposition to the wars in Vietnam and Biafra, which included the celebrated Bed-ins for Peace in Amsterdam and Montreal. A ‘War is Over’ Christmas card was inscribed ‘Thank you for your good wishes – it helped a lot! With love, John Lennon + Yoko Ono Lennon’ and illustrated with self-portraits.

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Dear Mr Russell

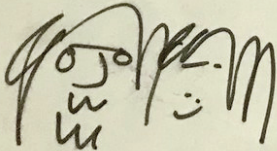
Thank you for your
good wishes - it helped
a lot!

with love

John Lennon

+

Yoko Ono Lennon

A stylized, overlapping handwritten signature of John Lennon and Yoko Ono. The letters are interconnected and written in a cursive, flowing style.

**WAR
IS
OVER!**

IF YOU WANT IT

Happy Christmas from John & Yoko

Source: Bertrand Russell Archives, McMaster University