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### An Oral History of British Fashion

Russell, Leslie, 1943- (speaker, male; interviewee; hairdresser)

**Collection title:** [An Oral History of British Fashion](#)

**Speaker:** [Russell, Leslie, 1943- \(speaker, male; interviewee; hairdresser\)](#)

**Speaker:** [Sandino, Linda \(speaker, female; interviewer\)](#)

**Interviewee notes:** Mother's occupation: Housewife

**Interviewee notes:** Father's occupation: Factory Worker

**Duration:** 12 sixty-minute cassettes

**Recording date:** 2003.09.03, 2003.11.26, 2003.12.10, 2004.01.22, 2004.02.11, 2004.03.24

**Recording location:** Interviewee's flat above salon 'Smile'.

**Access restrictions:** none

**Recording equipment:** Marantz CP430 and two lapel mics

**Recording notes:** Noises on tapes 3-6 consist of bulding work on neighbouring property. There are occasional interruptions from daughter. Tapes 7-9 there is a whine from central heating boiler

**Recording notes:** The following sequence is the complete range of calls for this recording: F13773-F13774, F14372-F14375, F14535-F14537, F14683-F14684, F14911-F14912

**Signal processing:** Dolby B

**Interview summary:** TAPE 1 [F13773] SIDE A. Leslie Russell (LR) born Carshalton 7 May 1943. Details siblings, working-class parents, council estate, schools. Grandfather from Le Havre, fruit and vegetable business, Grandma died when LR young. Details their progeny, servants, etc. Grandpa victim of embezzlement, to workhouse. Grandma office cleaning. LR youngest son, two younger sisters, details. Family move to Merstham council estate when LR 11. LR's reaction to locale, people etc. Going to school, cockney accent. Secondary Modern Grammar stream. In trouble from day one, always fighting. Details Albury Manor. Details playing-fields, showers, love of football, hatred of school. Failed 11+, passed 13+. Details Miss Posner, English teacher. Left school at 15. Parents unhappy together. Details fathers, mother's personalities. LR to counselling sessions after 18 years of marriage, explains. LR's interest in clothes, details. Girls and smoking. Why went into hairdressing. Description Merstham council house, garden, his room. Details music in family, Radio Luxemburg. Details family social life and food eaten. Contact with richer people, eradication of cockney accent.

**Interview summary:** SIDE B. LR aged 13, paper round, buying bicycle, details. His possessions. Shopping in Redhill. Paid 10 shillings per paper round. Details family lifestyle, smoking, drinking, talking etc. Day-trips to Brighton, Clacton. Football during school holidays. Details working-class Christmas. Age 18 earning good salary, bought presents, had car. Decision to become hairdresser. Details learning from Leslie Green [LG]. Description various techniques such as finger waves, pin curls, etc LR's preference for geometric cut for young people on Saturdays. Description salon and stylists. Croydon first salon for LR, details. Club-cutting described, hair in rollers, permanent waving, highlights etc. One year training, 2 as Improver. Details types of customer and their requirements. Apprentice system at Smile salon. Left Croydon salon age 20. Details annual hairdressing competition judged by Vidal Sassoon [VS]. LR's success with his bob cut. Details his meeting with Cathy McGowan [CM]. Her interest in journalism, his in fashion.

**Interview summary:** TAPE 2 [F13774] SIDE A. LR and friend Peter buying old cars. CM's objection to LR's male chauvinism. Details CM and her family. LR's, CM's shared interest in clothes. CM's effect on LR's focus vis-à-vis his future. Ditto LG vis-à-vis aims. Details jazz clubs, meeting girls. Details Peter Glossop's [PG] background; currently film sound engineer. LR's first time away from home, meeting CM at Butlin's Holiday Camp.

Details CM's background; mother's first impression of LR and PG. Street fashion. Details jeans, wearing in bath to shrink them. Polo neck sweaters and bomber jackets, details. Where clothes bought. Winkle picker shoes. Burton's suits on hire-purchase, detail styling. Shirts and ties described. Details male/female salon attire. Junior's duties Blue-rinsed hair. Details 'smelly' products. Schwarzkopf, L'Oreal main producers. Describes change in customer's position for shampoo. Details LG's background and personality. LR to Leonard's salon. Details LG's encouragement. Clothes LG wore. Homosexuality in hairdressers socially acceptable. Anecdote about 'thumbing a lift'. Anecdote about history teacher. Learning about sex. Details other aspects of hairdressing.

**Interview summary:** SIDE B. Details LR's 'mod' haircut. Changes in quality of shampoos. Technique for preparing model's hair for competition. Problems with hand-held hair-dryers. Explains ideal hair for competition purposes. Hairdresser Raymond 'Teasy-Weasy' explained. Back-combing hair and different technique for straight hair. Details skills learned on training school nights. Description perm-settings, neutralising, etc. Specialisation as colourist or cutter in Leonard's salon. Details change in use of colour in 60s. Effect of back-combing hair. Method of learning hairstyles, examples. Radical versus establishment styles. Discussing style with client, details. VS's influence. LR's instinctive understanding of cutting hair from style-drawing. LR's love of cinema, examples of favourite films. Details salary and tips, plus commission when a stylist. LR used to working with women; regarded them solely as sex objects until met CM.

**Interview summary:** TAPE 3 [F14372] SIDE A. Details neutralising permanent waving. 'Big hair' hairstyles. Ageing effect of perms. Protective clothing worn. Effect on hands when working as junior. Ammonia smell; 70s invention looser perms. Henna and its uses Hair rollers. colouring, water rinses compared to dyeing grey hair. Individual cubicles for those who preferred them. Details conversation with clients. LR comments on losing cockney accent. Calculation of salary, tipping then and now. Earnings age 18, explains why more difficult now. Details prices for men and women's hair. Allocation of juniors, list of duties, length of apprenticeship. Tips received by LR as boss's apprentice. Importance of charm.

**Interview summary:** SIDE B. Details tipping for stylists and apprentices. Why fast turnover of apprentices. Advice from hairdresser sister and LG. Type of person to make good hairdresser. LR's reasons for moving on. Value of seeing clients socially. Example of LR's training of apprentices. Abandoning use of rollers. Clients bringing photographs to illustrate specific hairstyles. Examples famous celebrities in 60s and 70s. Comments on clients in his Smile salon. Explains matching client with stylist. Details current staff at Smile, family atmosphere. Delightful well-mannered Lithuanian apprentices and how Smile came to employ them.

**Interview summary:** TAPE 4 [F14374] SIDE A. Difficulties of finding work in London's West End. Mentions Andre Bernard, Vidal Sassoon, and Leonard as most successful. Details LR's job interview at Leonard's. Explains the Denman brush. LR's friends as models and his work assessed by Leonard. Details others who trained there. Details influence on LR of pop stars. Cutting hair of Beatles' girlfriends, Vogue and Harper's fashion shows. Barbara Hulanicki a favourite client. Grand interior of Leonard's salon. Details rich North London clientele and their requirements circa 1964. Use of hair pieces. Leonard's comments on LR's haircuts. LR offered job by VS; why refused it. Description scissors used; cost and types. Comments on scissors manufacturers. Description interior Leonard's salon, reception, chairs, mirrors, etc. Details clothes worn, Leonard's suits. LR's suits by Mr Trimble, shirts by Mr Foster, kipper ties.

**Interview summary:** SIDE B. Ties from Turnbull & Asser. Products used at Leonard's, details. Size of mirrors and learning to work with whole image. Comments on right-handedness and use of scissor angles. 60s good time to be hairdresser, details celebrity friends and clients. Working-class boys' interest in fashion, influence of pop music. LR at Leonard's salon 1964 to 1969. Comments on colourists and stylists. LR's invention of 'lowlights' explained. Daniel Galvin's annoyance. 'Scrunched' hair described. Comments on famous hair styles, example Princess Diana. Comments on hair colouring. Importance of shine in hair and bad effect of bleach. Salary based on commission. LR's young pop and fashion clientele at Leonard's; Michaeljohn's upper-class clients. LR's knowledge of tinting. Being manager at Leonard's on upper floor. Details managers' meetings in Leonard's Belgrave Square home. Details LR's duties as manager. Details photographic work for Vogue.

**Interview summary:** TAPE 5 [F14374] SIDE A. Recording 10 December 2003. Value of photographic work, learning from models what women want in haircuts. Models and their make-up. Details Young Idea work for Vogue magazine. Examples good photographers. Details David Putnam's first television commercial. Pros and cons of working on commercials. Session work and working on wigs. Lists session work

clients. Details Putnam's photographic agency and career. Details attaching wigs and hairpieces, three-quarter wigs; how hair pieces made. Wig Creations. Back-combing for certain look, popularity of chignons in late 60s. Wedding hair styles. Details Young Idea photo sessions. Comments on models' attitude, black and white photos from 60s, David Bailey, importance of lighting, etc. Comments on hair styles in period films. LR sharing Putney flat with Keith and brother. Driving to work, going to clubs, Hungry Horse pies. Clothes LR wore at Leonard's and for session work. Details food and drink during session work, etc. Breakfast, coffee. Tea-lady at Leonard's. Instant coffee.

**Interview summary:** SIDE B. Hair styles for shoots, names of haircut styles given by press, e.g. Mary Quant, Purdy. LR's father's comment on seeing Sandie Shaw's hair. Importance of width of fringe; layering technique. Teaching people how to take care of their hair. Description Quant and Purdy hair styles. Examples Vogue's dual readership in 60s. Attending several clients simultaneously, standing appointments, busy days, opening hours, etc. LR's move from family home when 21. First of family to do so before marriage. Mother's reactions. Home for Sunday lunch, Sunday family routine. Details LR's lifestyle. Comments on chauvinistic background. Living like a student, details. Drinking and driving in those days. Sexual freedom. Description Smile salon interior. Father's response to design of Smile interior. Cultural and social changes. Clothes LR wore when visiting parents. Shops with 'right' clothes, Chelsea boots. Mother's pride in son having own salon. Details opening publicity. How LR learned diplomacy.

**Interview summary:** TAPE 6 [F14375] SIDE A. Details contacts made. Details Putney flat owned by and rented from client. Description layout, furniture, etc. LR work orientated, not interested in interior design until had own salon. Saturday evening cooking, meals out, details. Taking pretty girls to lunch, demise of male chauvinism. Girlfriends did not cook, cold buffet parties. Marijuana. Cost of eating out. Effects of drug-taking, dealers, prevalence in music and fashion industry. Details contraception, girlfriends on the Pill. Buying condoms from chemists, and how barbers offered condoms to clients. Sexual freedom for women. Cooling relationship with CM, friendship with her family. Friendship with Cilla Black and husband. More about friendship with CM. Her current fashionable image, haircut, etc. Anecdote about 'Mods' on drive back from Brighton, effect on LR of CM's fame. CM's level-headedness, details. How CM chosen to represent Ready, Steady, Go. Their Holborn studio. Beatles causing huge mob. Details Brian Epstein's Christmas show at Rainbow Theatre. Why Beatles stopped live-performances and became recording artists. Details CM's clothes and 60s shape. Biba. Boots. CM thrown out of Ritz, anecdote. Details methods for straightening curly hair.

**Interview summary:** SIDE B. Details men's haircutting at Leonard's, famous clients. Making wigs for Allen Jones' sculptures [AJ]; details. Taking daughter Katie to Royal Academy [Pop] Art Exhibition, comments. Lack of appreciation then. Influence of Pop Art on graphics. Being working-class in 60s. Description designing wigs with AJ. Meaning of 'art' for LR, details. Details artist clients. Grayson Perry making sandwiches and teas for Smile salon, his transvestite alter ego Claire, his Turner Prize award. Smile's commissioned Christmas cards story. Transvestite client story. Details Smile's clients, their hairstyles, clothes, etc. Artist's concern with image, examples. Zandra Rhodes' coloured hair. Nicky Haslam's background and his wish for new image. Description men's section at Leonard's, managed by Keith Wainwright [KW]. How this led to 'unisex', disagreement and firing from Leonard's, details. Salon hairdressing for men compared with barbers' 'short back and sides'. Examples famous male clients at Leonard's.

**Interview summary:** TAPE 7 [14535] SIDE A. Recording 21 January 2004. Description Christmas with daughters Katie and Lucy. Comments about New Year. Finding out why Katie [KR] didn't want to go to school. Their education and relationship as sisters. Details Lucy's childhood friends, her dyslexia, personality, 'A' Levels. Differences between the sisters. Lucy's decision to read Italian at Sussex University. Her year in Perugia, the oral exam. Details Katie R's musical talent, her student production at Northcott Theatre, Exeter with pop-idol Will Young, and sharing flat with him. LR's daughters' friends. Comments on good behaviour and motivation of daughters. Effect of LR's divorce, counsellor's advice. Details activities with daughters on weekend visits. Comments on their differing ages and interests. Benefit to LR of counselling. Comments on wife's mid-life crisis; events leading to divorce. Details decision to attend counselling; details sessions with counsellor Elizabeth Rockefeller.

**Interview summary:** SIDE B. Discussing marriage problems with family and friends. Good atmosphere at Smile. Qualities and skills needed in hairdressing; trial employment period at Smile. Details division of responsibilities between LR and KW. Complexity of relationship with clients, need for discretion. Self-image of male/female clients, celebrities, examples. LR's attitude to daughters' boyfriends. How they learned about sex. Details LR's interviewing prospective staff. Poor quality of applicants

from Job Centre. Comments on early publicity, KW's credit on Roxy Music Album. Ethnic diversity in hairdressing trade, examples of racial mixture. KW's disagreement with Leonard over music played in salon.

**Interview summary:** TAPE 8 [F14538] SIDE A. Decision to open Smile salon with KW. Borrowing money, choice of location, premises; inviting Paul Owen [PO] into partnership, planning finances. Description Knightsbridge salon, designer John Cairns [JC], first 'unisex' salon. Publicity from Anna Wintour, Adam Faith, press, etc. Etiquette observed when alerting clients in former salon of opening of Smile. Informing Leonard of decision to leave. Leonard suing LR and KW. Smile compared with other leading salons, details. Why hairdressers do not work out their notice. Details plans for layout and style of new salon. Comments on music played, flooring, mirrors, chairs, flexible layout. Explaining practical requirements to JC. JC's working drawings. Salon cleaners.

**Interview summary:** SIDE B. Details design of gowns, towels, laundry, and number of staff. Description clothes worn by LR and staff. Background details of receptionist Carol, her duties How clients made bookings. Explains tinting record cards, hair colour spectrum charts. Description choosing appropriate colour, highlights, etc. Products used Wella, L'Oreal, and Schwarzkopf. LR's innovative use of crazy hair colours. Example Anna Wintour's hairstyle. Working with fashion photographer Steve Hyatt, details. Public relations and Lynne Francks. Details of launch of Smile's own hair products in 70s. Smile's innovative blow-drying method and styles. Description hair brushes and their functions. LR's comments on clients doing their hair themselves between appointments

**Interview summary:** TAPE 9 [F12537] SIDE A. Development of hairdressing tools, hair tongs, various scissors, effects, etc. Permanent waving and Smile's 'natural' look perm. Suppliers Salon Services Ltd. Technological development in brushes described. Details LR's preferences. His technique for straightening hair. Description types of comb and varying functions. LR's speculation about possible technological developments in hairdressing. Tools for trainees, cordless tools, electric clippers. Comments on Channel 4's television history of and other hairdressing programmes. American origin of Whaal clippers, details. Details hair-washing habits, types of shampoos and conditioners. Research into new hair products. Explains failure of Smile's own hair products. Similarly Biba's own make-up products. Remarks about public relations, celebrity circuit, fame, etc. Proposal to open salon in Los Angeles, 1975, explains and why idea abandoned. Lengthy critique of film 'Shampoo' starring Warren Beatty.

**Interview summary:** TAPE 9 SIDE B IS BLANK

**Interview summary:** TAPE 10 [F14683] SIDE A. Recording 11 February 2004. Description cluster headaches. Organisation for the Understanding of Cluster Headaches [OUCH]. Lecture by Professor Goadsby, Head of National Neurological Institute, details. Comparison with migraine, effect on LR's life, benefit of support from OUCH. Details check-ups at Chelsea & Westminster Hospital. Details homeopathic treatment and diet. Comments on trigger attacks, gender bias etc. Effect on LR's social life. Hereditary aspect. LR's smoking habit, giving up for one year following Alan Carr's advice in his book 'The Easy Way to Stop Smoking'. Why started smoking again, anecdote. Comments on addictive behaviour. Cost to him of smoking, details. Both daughters are smokers. Smoking in hairdressing salons, comments. Smoking outside in Los Angeles in 70s and in London now. Comments on smoking and passive-smoking. Details visit to non-smoking McGowan family at Christmas. Story about giving up drinking for a year.

**Interview summary:** SIDE B. More about giving up drink, explains why. Reactions from friends, pressures, etc. Describes symptoms of hypoglycaemia, diagnosis by his general practitioner, diet recommendations. Medical prejudice about hypoglycaemia. Describes attack. Benefit of diet, importance of sugar levels, mood swings. Compliments Dr Brian Piggott on his holistic medical care. Importance of self-help in health care. Describes treatment of homeopath Dr Charles Innes. Story of friend's migraine and chocolate cravings. Lists foods he must avoid. Describes daily meals, sinus problems. Details Dr Innes' approach. Amazing results from deleting dairy products. Details newspapers and magazines LR reads, his comments. Comments on football coverage, cancer scares, poor grammar, etc.

**Interview summary:** TAPE 11 [F14684] SIDE A. LR's attitude to his clients. Takes Sunday Times and Time Out for good listings. Reasons for buying Evening Standard. Broadcast news and journalism preferences. Political comment including discussions with daughter Lucy, details. LR's current loss of faith in political solutions. Explains his involvement in Research into Ovarian Cancer [ROC]. Details development of blood test, award, and funds raised. Details LR's housework, cleaning lady, his tidiness. Eating at local restaurants, organic foods, and favourite restaurants. Details regular dinners with daughters. LR's relationship with Keith W. Visiting Allen Jones' exhibition. Attending client Barbara Minto's birthday party in Venice, details. More details of success of partnership with KW. Details KW's artist friends, interests, division of responsibilities, and decision-making with LR. Non-celebration of

birthdays. Christmas. Social life.

**Interview summary:** SIDE B. Comments on various books (listed) taste in reading, location when reading; bookshop. Holiday destinations, dislike of long-haul flights, travel activities. Benefits of golfing holidays, details. Comments on his NLSC [National Life Story Collection] recording. LR living over the shop since split with wife, anecdote. Compares with commuting from Barnes. Loves living in centre. Acquiring premises in King's Road, details. Comments on KW's warehouse home in Southwark and his former home in Barnes. Minimal interior design, Sky television, his frugal approach to living. Clothes and where bought, details.

**Interview summary:** TAPE 12 [F14911] SIDE A. Recording 24 March 2004. Description work of Smile Management [SM] 1984-2004 as agency for photographers, stylists, etc. Reasons why formed. Names partner Kim Sion [KS] and lists others involved. Development and success of SM. Description of KS, her reasons for closing business. Details her career and interest in fashion. Industry's response to closure of SM. Resurgence of interest in 1970s style and benefits for photographers Ellen Unsworth and Steve Hyatt, details. Details SM advertising campaigns. KS's work routine, travelling and skills in the trade, details. Details employment of SM staff. Lists SM clients. Current trend in changing careers. Final winding down of SM. Financial benefits for 'sleeping partners' in the business. Subjects discussed at SM partners' meetings, details. LR compares current free-lance practices in photographic session work with his early experiences with Vogue. Comments on success, beauty and skills of Unsworth. Importance of rapport with Smile's clients and comments on professions, gender and age.

**Interview summary:** SIDE B. Description atmosphere at Smile, relationship with KW and staff. Ditto with clients. How dealt with rare dissatisfied client. Importance of understanding a person's image, example Michael Parkinson, explains. Comments on prospect of retirement and on future of Smile. Details of scheme in 1970s to introduce profit-sharing at Smile and reason for failure. His satisfaction in work. Freehold asset of King's Road premises. Legal and accountants' advice. Influential lawyer clients. Number of Smile's clients. Description training junior, Razza, at Smile. Reflections on NLSC recording.

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