

The story of Strawberry Fields, Dover's Hill and Chipping Campden... ...and why I wept like a baby in 1967...

Written by Andy Owen



This story started many years ago, at Dover's Hill...

It's not some mysterious pilgrimage place - like Lourdes, Mecca or The Wailing Wall. Or even Montreux, which WAS a pilgrimage for most of us old direct marketing liggers all those years ago, when DM was a newborn.

(That's a story I need to write one day).

Dover's Hill is actually a breathtaking area of National Trust land in the Cotswolds, just outside the wonderful town of Chipping Campden.

I found it by accident. Way back in 1966.

On Friday February 3rd 1967, I returned there with a pal.

It was to be a very special day in my life.

I was in a rock band at the time, as were a lot of kids of my age in the sixties. All of us had had our worlds turned upside down a few years before, by 4 young men from Liverpool.

The fab four.

The moptops.

The peerless Beatles.

They changed my life. They had an immense influence on me, which remains to this day – and I have no doubt, will be with me until I take my last breath.

As for many of us growing up in the UK in the sixties, life was never going to be the same again. I had been touched and influenced in the most positive of ways.

That particular Friday, it was a beautiful day. Crisp and cold. The kind of day that somehow is better in England, than anywhere on the planet.

For some reason that I cannot remember, I was not at work on that day. I met with Chris Sheppard, our bass guitarist - and we decided to go 'to the country' to chill out and write.

It turned out to be a momentous day.

The Beatles had recorded *Strawberry Fields* and were planning to release it as their next single in the coming weeks. There was much talk about the song, but no real detail had come out - and no one had an idea about what it was like.

It had never been played on the radio at all. But this was about to change. Radio London – one of the best pirate radio stations around in those days, had obtained a copy of the song. And they said they were going to play it around lunchtime.

This would be the first airplay anywhere in the world. As you can imagine, it generated huge excitement. A new Beatles single was a *massive* event.

Chris and I were swept up by the excitement and talked of very little else on the way to Dover's Hill. The radio was on and added to the build-up.

We arrived at Dover's Hill and just immersed ourselves in the magnificence of the location. It was – and still is – a wondrous place.

There's an escarpment over 220 metres high, overlooking an uninterrupted view of the Vale Of Evesham, right across to the foothills of the Welsh mountains, over 60 miles away.

There was absolutely no one around. Just Chris and I and a few sheep...

We took our guitars and slung them over our shoulders and decided to head for Lynch's Wood – around 30 minutes walk.

We arrived at the wood and found a clearing, picked a tree each to sit against and started to play some songs. The sounds of the guitars and voices were surreal and it all made for a magical setting. I can remember it like yesterday.

But it was to become even better..

As the minutes ticked by to the first-ever global airing of *Strawberry Fields*, Kenny Everett, the DJ, became ever more animated. And we became ever more excited.

With a few minutes to go, we talked about what was to come. There had been talk in the press that it was a John song and very different to anything the group had done before.

We were intrigued, of course. What would it be like?

And then, it was *there*...

John's voice delivering the now legendary opening lines "Let me take you down..."

In that ethereal setting, the effect was quite extraordinary. We both listened in total silence, just staring at each other.

I was devastated by the sheer brilliance of it. When it was over, I sobbed.

Not cried, sobbed. And the recollection of that moment is still incredibly emotional to me now, as I share it with you here.

And that was 52 years ago...

You see, we thought we were a good band. On reflection, I believe we were. But this moment identified to me that we were *nothing*.

These four working-class guys from Liverpool had just created a *masterpiece*. And it was so far ahead of anything in the world at that time, it was out of sight.

How could this be? How could these guys be this *advanced*? What was the point of us carrying on with the band?

I've looked back on that moment many times. It was, for me, an epiphany.

It inspired me. A mental marker was etched in my brain. It said to me "When you finally decide on your path in life, when your vocation becomes clear, try to be the best"

And that's what I have always tried to do.

I will always remember how I felt when I heard John's voice at the start of that song. And how I felt at the end...

Since then, in my own humble way, using knowledge, skill and passion, I have striven to move, inspire and influence people in the art of communication, the same way these 4 guys did to me, musically, all those years ago.

Now, in my music room, I play my own version of that amazing song.

And the memories and emotion flood back *every* time...