

5 July 2000

Sad news today from Liverpool:

### TRAGEDY OF LORD WOODBINE AND WIFE

A MAN who was a part of the early Beatles scene died in a house fire today. Harold Phillips - better known as Lord Woodbine - was found dead at his Toxteth home this morning. He was 72. His wife Helen, believed to be 60, also died in the blaze. He was one of the first promoters to book the Beatles - then still known as the Silver Beatles - and also toured with them in Hamburg. A spokesman for



the Beatles said today: "All of the guys will be shocked to hear this tragic news about Lord Woodbine. It is a great loss." The couple were pronounced dead at the Royal Liverpool University Hospital today. Firefighters broke into the house in Carlingford Close after smoke alarms alerted neighbours. Mike Harris, of Merseyside Fire Brigade, said: "It appeared that they were trying to escape but did not make it because of the smoke." Mr Phillips was found in the bedroom, and his wife on the landing. It is thought the blaze started in the lounge of the terraced house. Mr Phillips was of Trinidadian origin, and was known by his nicknames of either Lord Woodbine or Woodie, which he was originally given because of his love of the cigarette of the same name. He was originally involved in the Royal Caribbean Steel Band, and went on to open the New Colony Club in Berkeley Street. He booked the Silver Beatles to appear there a couple of times in 1960 for afternoon sessions. He was involved in a number of ventures, some including the band's first manager Alan Williams. He opened a club with Williams in Upper Parliament Street, and had a stripshow in the cellar. According to legend, a stripper called Janice insisted on backing musicians and the Silver Beatles were called in, and paid ten shillings each for playing two twenty-minute slots a night. Woodie was also part of the team who first helped get the Beatles into Germany on their first trip to Hamburg. More recently, he was one of the subjects of a Radio Merseyside documentary about his return to Trinidad, and island he left on the merchant ship Windrush fifty years earlier. Following the trip, he rediscovered a sister, nieces and nephews he had lost touch with who had settled in the USA. He was a former RAF man, who married his wife Helen while in the forces, and later worked as a railway engineer. Police cordoned the Carlingford Close off and the cause of the fire is being investigated today. Mavis Hamoud, who lives two doors away from the couple raised the alarm this morning. She said: "I got up about 5.30am and a man who was going to work knocked on my window and said there was a fire. I came out and looked and saw all the smoke so I phoned the fire brigade. "I looked through the letter box and started shouting but all I could hear was the smoke alarm. I tried to open the front door but that didn't do any good so I went round and started to smash the back kitchen window but that was all locked - then the fire brigade arrived and they evacuated us all. "I still can't believe what has happened - it's sickening. I've known the couple for about 19 years. They were very quiet people." Other neighbours described how Woodbine was a real local character who at one time ran a second hand shop on Granby Street. One neighbour, Eugene Lamb, said everyone knew Mr Phillips as Lord Woodbine. He said: "He toured with the Beatles and was known as Lord Woodbine. He went to Hamburg at the same time as them and was into the music scene. "He used to be on the skiffle scene and he was also an RAF pilot in the Second World War. "He was from the Caribbean but he came over here during the war. I used to see him nearly every day - he was a really fit old fellow and used to ride a bike. "I was really shocked when I heard what had happened." Another neighbour, Gary Whelan, said: "He was a real gentleman who was always smartly dressed. He used to ride a racing bike and was very fit for his age. "It is very sad to hear about the fire. He was such a nice man."