

# **Hairdressers in the UK: Time to Regulate the 'Candy Floss Profession'?**

## **Part one – the genesis of a profession and the cast of characters, real and fictional, which colours the canvas.**

**Peter Shears**

Dept. of Consumer Law and Policy, University of Plymouth, England

---

### **Key words**

Hairdressing, regulation, personal professional services

### **Abstract**

*This article considers the perhaps remarkable fact that there is no regulation, nor even compulsory registration, of the hairdressing profession in the United Kingdom. Part one includes a thumbnail history of its development, pausing to consider the colourful characters of fact and fiction which are part of the story. Part two examines the series of attempts at remedying the situation – up until the demise of the last effort – which failed because Parliament was more concerned on the day with banning foxhunting. It concludes that this apparently straightforward amendment of existing legislation is both necessary and long overdue.*

---

### **Introduction**

"My life has changed forever. My husband, family and friends are wonderful, but being bald makes a difference to the way you feel about life."<sup>i</sup>

Brenda Howe paid great attention to her hair, perhaps too much. She visited her hairdresser twice a week without fail. Blonde, red, permed, straight, long, short, highlights, lowlights: she tried them all. But now she has a permanent bald patch, caused by chemical burns from a perm that went badly wrong four years ago. She has scarring alopecia, a condition in which damage to the scalp stops the hair from growing.

"My hair was my trademark," she recalls. "If it wasn't right, I didn't feel right." For her, what happened was more than just a blow to her self-image; it drove her to the edge of a breakdown.<sup>ii</sup> She settled out of court for £25,000. Then she joined the campaign for the compulsory registration of hairdressers in the UK.

It may surprise those in other jurisdictions across the world<sup>iii</sup> and in the vast majority of EU Member States that in the UK there is no compulsory training, no licensing, no compulsory registration for hairdressers. Anyone can open up a salon and pour industrial chemicals onto the heads of unsuspecting clients. Indeed, it has been shown that most clients have no idea of the extent to which the profession is unregulated. They believe that hairdressers must be qualified, trained, licensed, registered or regulated.<sup>iv</sup>

### **Industrial chemicals?**

For colouring the chemical components are generally para-phenylenediamine to dye the hair black and ortho-aminophenol for light brown and blonde shades. They are often

mixed together. They are alkaline products containing the oxidising agent, hydrogen peroxide. To set the colour the chemicals are laid on the hair, which then sticks to the scalp taking the acidity of the skin from an average of 4.5 to 5.5, to 9 or 10. The risk of burning from overly concentrated mixtures is obvious.

For 'perming' ammonium thioglycolate is the active ingredient. It breaks down the bonds in the hair, penetrating the cortex of the hair and breaking down the structure of the strands. The hair is wrapped around a roller and a neutraliser makes the structure of the hair reform into the shape of the curls made by the roller. Thioglycolate is the chemical found in many hair removing products. If it is left on too long, or if the hair is wound too tightly around the curlers exposing the follicle on the scalp, it can cause severe burns to the skin.<sup>v</sup>

## The profession

Hairdressing is the process of cutting, cleaning, colouring, styling, and arranging hair. When hairdressing relates specifically to men and includes the grooming of beards and moustaches, it is barbering.

It has been said that "[h]airdressers have always moved among commoners and kings, but they have been most prominent at three times: shortly before the decline of Greece, just before the French Revolution - and today."<sup>vi</sup>

Boxwood combs have been found which date back to the Stone Age. Hairdressing had already begun. Cave paintings show mud, feathers, and animal skins used as hair adornment as much as for protection<sup>vii</sup> In ancient Egypt caring for hair and beards was a specialised occupation. Images of hairdressers can be found on ancient Egyptian urns, coffins, and fresco paintings The Egyptians had a "barber god" among their deities<sup>viii</sup>, Wealthy people had barbers among their household staff. Some were slaves who were beaten if there was 'a hair out of place'. Sometimes they relied on a personal barber who visited their home each day. For poorer folk there were travelling barbers who plied their trade under shady trees.<sup>ix</sup> The Bible mentions the barber's trade at the time of the prophet Ezekiel: "And thou, son of man, take thee a sharp knife, take thee a barber's razor, and cause it to pass upon thine head and upon thy beard ..."<sup>x</sup>

The Greeks seem to have pioneered the barber's shop. The news and gossip of the day was shared by philosophers, writers, poets, and politicians while they were shaved, curled, manicured, pedicured, and massaged. They remained popular with the Romans. Barbers were common in the market places and public baths. Wealthy Romans sprinkled gold dust on their hair to lighten the colour. Some used caustic soap to turn their hair red. Potions made of such ingredients as ashes, earthworms, and boiled walnut shells were made to prevent hair from falling out or turning white. In the Middle Ages barbers used henna, gorse flowers, saffron, eggs, and calf kidneys to bleach hair and the conditioner of choice was a lizard boiled in olive oil.

In Europe from 1163 until 1745 the local physician or surgeon doubled as the local barber. This custom began with a papal decree of 1163 that forbade the clergy to shed blood. Monks underwent bloodletting at regular intervals. This was now performed by the barbers who had been found in monasteries since 1092, when the clergy had been required to be clean-shaven. In France a royal decree of 1383 declared the King's barber to be the head of the barbers and surgeons in France. They had formed a guild in 1361. In London

the barbers were granted a charter as a trade guild in 1462 by King Edward IV. This was amalgamated with that of the surgeons in 1540 under a charter granted by Henry VIII.<sup>xi</sup> The guild of surgeons was separated from that of barbers in 1745.<sup>xii</sup> As surgeons were gradually acquiring formal professional status, they wore long robes, while the barbers, who were usually wigmakers too, were called Doctors of the Short Robe and practiced tooth pulling, bloodletting, and the treatment of abscesses. So in 1745 they were formally split from the profession of surgeons.<sup>xiii</sup> Women's hairdressing was done in the home, often by the wives and daughters of barbers. By the late 18<sup>th</sup> century hairdressers were developing into a distinct profession, largely it seems, because of the work of Legros de Rumigny, of whom more later. He was the official hairdresser to the French Court.

The craft of the barber remained stable until the 1890s when King Camp Gillette (1855-1932) developed the disposable blade safety razor with engineer William Emery Nickerson. The Gillette Company was granted a patent in 1901.<sup>xiv</sup> They produced the first safety razors and disposable blades in 1903 and, by the end of 1904, had produced 40,000 razors and over 12 million blades.<sup>xv</sup> Barbers now concentrated on cutting hair and trimming beards and moustaches. Being shaved by a professional became the privilege of the wealthy few, and those given treats as birthday presents.

The early 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the emergence of women's hairdressing salons. Finally women were enabled to have their hair done and to socialize, gossip, and be pampered in the way that men were accustomed to so many centuries before. In 1906 Charles Nestle invented the permanent-wave machine. It was an extraordinary appliance, taking as long as ten hours to complete the process of hair waving, yet this was faster than curling irons. In 1909 scientist and inventor Eugène Schueller set up the L'Oréal organisation in Paris, following his "quest for excellence through increasingly safe, imaginative and effective products"<sup>xvi</sup>

### **Hairdressers and barbers: fact and fiction**

Hairdressing is amongst the most intimate of personal services provided to individuals. Secrets are shared, gossip exchanged. Clients have close relationships with those they permit (and pay) to advise upon, create and maintain an essential element of their personal fashion statements to the world. A client's loyalty is likely to follow a hairdresser who moves from one salon to another. A satisfied, even flattered, client is a walking advertisement and recommendation. A successful hairdresser is one who 'fills a column.'<sup>xvii</sup> These things have formed the foundations of strange facts and fanciful fiction.

An early example of the flamboyant (and easily satirised) male hairdresser and stylist was Monsieur Champagne in the days of Louis XIV. An impulsive artist, he was in great demand for his monumental productions. However, and as with modern day celebrity chefs, he often lost his temper and flounced out, leaving his patrons with half-done hairdos. As a result, many women turned to Canillat and LeBrun, both of whom were wives of wigmakers. This was a profession coming into its own in the mid-seventeenth century, at the height of Champagne's fame.

About a hundred years later peruke<sup>xviii</sup> makers were engaged to make long rolled curls like the ones they incorporated into men's wigs. One of the first was Frison, who in 1763 established the first Ladies' Hairdressers' Guild. Legros de Rumigny, (who was originally a baker) published a book called 'l'art de la Coiffure des Dames' in 1765 and

opened an Academie de Coiffure in 1769.<sup>xix</sup> There ladies' maids and valets could practice hairdressing on paid models. Marie Antoinette donated generously to the family of Legros, upon hearing that he had been crushed in the crowds at her wedding celebrations. Her first hairdresser was Larseur, but she 'moved' to Leonard. Her loyalty was such that she let Larseur style her hair first, then had it combed out and restyled by Leonard. She is said to have entrusted her jewellery to him for safe keeping during the Revolution. After the flamboyance before the Revolution came the short-cropped "coiffure a la victime" - a fashion inspired by the events at the guillotine in 1793. Here the hair was cut short and worn intentionally wild and with a dishevelled appearance.

The self regard of those hairdressers and the internecine rivalry between them and the barbers is visible in statements made during a legal action between them: "[w]hat are the duties of barbers but to shave heads and purchase severed hair to give the needful plait by means of fire and iron on locks that are no longer living?" The art of hairdressing requires at once the talents of poet, painter, and sculptor. It requires an intelligence which is not common and a tact which must be inborn. The art of the "coiffure des dames" is therefore an art bordering upon genius and consequently is a free and liberal art."<sup>xx</sup>

Over the years, hairdressing, and particularly organised training for hairdressers, developed and it became recognisable as a profession. There was increased and more general interest in the quality of cutting and styling women's hair. The regular and repeated same cut and style was the province of the barber. It was workmanlike haircutting. This new status of artist-hairdresser was no more clearly seen than in the 1920s and Antoine de Paris.

Antoine, or Antek Cierplikowski, was Polish. He was once apprenticed to his village barber-surgeon where he pulled children's teeth and shaved the heads of the sick. He was later apprenticed in the city salon owned by his uncle, Pavel Lewandowski of Lociz., In his autobiography<sup>xxi</sup> he claims that his first notable coiffure was designed, at the age of seventeen, for the Honourable Stanislawowa Ginsberg of the House of Wielmonza when he was called upon to do her hair because his uncle was too drunk to make the appointment. He says that she was amazed with the results: 'You are a great artist indeed ... This coiffure is brilliant... I have never looked so well in my life This boy is a genius'.<sup>xxii</sup> Perhaps inevitably, he eventually moved to Paris where he developed his salon into a theatrical experience to which women were prepared to go to be pampered. By 1937 he was employing 150 and he had opened a branch in New York. His most famous client was Wallis Simpson, the Duchess of Windsor. (She was to be part of the 'Hairdressers regulation' story.) Her hair was styled by the master himself on her wedding day. Antoine was one of the first hairdressers to deliberately style himself as a genius on a par with the great couturiers of the time such as Coco Chanel and Madeleine Vionnet, seeing hairdressing as an art form like sculpture.

Paris remained the centre of the hairdressing world until the 1950s. As the post Second World War austerity began to wear off British hairdressers began to share the stage. The most famous was Pierre Raymond Bessone - far better known as Teasie Weasie Raymond.

He was born in 1911 in Soho, London. His mother was French. His father was an Italian barber, from whom he learned the basics of his trade. After being sacked by his father for accidentally cutting off a customer's earlobe whilst trimming her hair, he worked

in, walked out of or was fired from various salons in London, Later he wrote: “[a]ny man wanting to enter the trade was viewed with suspicion by his family but was happily visited by female clients, who had come to expect gay male confidants to cut their hair. Hairdressers developed strategies to cope with these popular notions, realising that the majority of women thought that unless you were both queer and French you could not possibly be a good hairdresser.”<sup>xxiii</sup> Accordingly, he permed his hair, wore open sandals displaying painted toenails, varnished his fingernails and adopted an extravagant French accent. He became a partner in a Paris salon so that he could bill himself as Raymond of London and Paris. His staff answered to French names and were taught to copy his bogus camp persona, even though they were all born and brought up in London. There were many television appearances throughout the 1950s and 1960s. He was a household name and he was stock joke material for the likes of Norman Wisdom and Benny Hill.<sup>xxiv</sup>

Hollywood’s inevitable interest is seen no more clearly than in ‘Shampoo’ – a 1975 film set in 1968, giving the audience an advantage over the characters in that they knew about the Nixon election victory and the Watergate scandal that were to come. We find hairdresser George Roundy riding his 500cc Triumph Tiger 100 motorcycle from client to client in the Californian sunshine. His ambition was to own a salon of his own. He is frank about his work: “What the hell I'm a gonna tell you about what they got against you. Christ, they're women aren't they? You ever listen to women talk, man? Do you? Cos' I do till its running outta my ears! I mean I'm on my feet all day long listening to women talk and they only talk about one thing how some guy f\*\*\*\*\* 'em over, that's all that's on their minds that's all I ever hear about! Don't you know that?”

It is fairly clear that the lead character was based on a hairdresser called Jay Sebring (one of the murder victims of the Manson Family). It has been suggested that the story is loosely based on "The Country Wife," a Restoration comedy written in 1675 by William Wycherley, whose protagonist, Horner, pretends to be impotent in order to be allowed into the company of married women, whom he then seduces. George in "Shampoo" might have been considered non-threatening by some because of the stereotype that hairdressers are gay – but not by most of his clients, who were made very well aware that he was not.<sup>xxv</sup>

In this twilight world between fact and fiction, even such a superficial look as this would be incomplete without mention of Sweeny Todd. This is a wonderful collection of asserted fact and admitted fiction.

Peter Haining has written extensively on the topic. He tells this story: Sweeney Todd was born on October 26, 1756, in Brick Lane, East London. His young parents were part time silk workers and full time drunks. He was once apprenticed to a cutler called John Crook of Holborn who specialised in razors. He was jailed for five years in 1770 for petty theft, although his crime is not recorded. He entered Newgate prison aged 14 and was employed as an assistant by a man called Plummer, the prison barber. He was released in the autumn of 1775. He is said to have murdered a customer for telling a lascivious story about a woman Todd recognised as his wife. He later moved his business to 186 Fleet Street, beside St Dunstan's Church in direct line and linked by underground passageways to Bell Yard on the other side of the church where a pie shop thrived. He paid £125 for the lease and advertised his dual role of barber and surgeon with a white pole striped in red.

His second killing was said to have been committed in Fleet Street. He may also have killed four others outside his shop, but inside he now had the means to kill and rob with greater certainty - his revolving chair. At about this time he took up with a widow called Mrs Lovett who ran the pie shop, and began dismembering and filleting the corpses of the victims he had dispatched to his cellar with slit throats. He took the meat along the tunnels to Lovett's bakery beneath her shop. There it was made into the pies that were so popular with her customers. The bones were left to rot in a disused family vault under the church where the smell eventually attracted the Bow Street Runners.<sup>xxvi</sup> Todd and Lovett were arrested. She soon committed suicide. Todd was charged at the Old Bailey with the single murder of one Francis Thornhill, who had been paid to deliver a string of pearls worth £16,000 to a young woman in London. On his way he went into Todd's shop to be shaved and was never seen again. Todd later pawned a string of pearls for £1,000. It is claimed that clothing for 160 people was found in Todd's shop and that a leg bone found in the church vaults belonged to Thornhill. Todd was convicted and hanged outside Newgate prison on the morning of January 25, 1802, in front of a crowd of thousands. He was 46 years old. Ironically, but not unusually, his body was taken to the Royal College of Surgeons in the Old Bailey for dissection.<sup>xxvii</sup>

Other views exist: " ...the facts about his case are remarkably poorly documented, both in terms of newspaper reports and court documents. ... At the time there should have been extensive transcripts recorded by clerks of any case brought before a court ... there are no such transcripts concerning Sweeney Todd ... if he did exist he didn't meet his end at the gallows. ... There is also no record of him being sent to Newgate prison as a teenager. ... Furthermore the only newspaper of the day which mentions anything resembling him by name was the 'Newgate calendar' the Newgate Calendar wasn't a newspaper to be trusted, many of its stories were exaggerated or simply fictitious, the other newspapers at the time never run any stories concerning our demon barber, this is unusual, the newspapers at the time would have been expected to pick up such a sensational story and run with it as they did with other villains."<sup>xxviii</sup> The 'Proceedings of the Old Bailey' contain no record of the trial.<sup>xxix</sup> The tunnels under the church do exist, but Todd and Lovett may never have existed to use them.

In fifteenth century France there was a children's song about a demon barber who cut his clients' throats, dumps them into his cellar before turning them into pies. The story may have 'moved' to England and entered folk lore. Martin Chuzzlewit, Charles Dickens' novel published in 1844 includes: 'Upon my word thought Tom, quickening his pace "I don't know what John will think has become of me. He'll begin to be afraid I have strayed into one of those streets where the countrymen are murdered; and that I have been made meat pies of, or some such horrible thing.'" Between November 1846 and March 1847 "The String of Pearls: A Romance" was published as a penny part serial (a 'penny dreadful').<sup>xxx</sup> The main character is Sweeney Todd. The story is set in 1785. It tells of the strange disappearance of a sailor named Lieutenant Thornhill, last seen entering Sweeney Todd's establishment on Fleet Street. Thornhill was bearing a gift of a string of pearls to a girl named Johanna Oakley on behalf of her missing lover Mark Ingestrie, who is presumed lost at sea. Eventually, Todd's activities are uncovered when the dismembered remains of hundreds of his victims are discovered in the crypt underneath St. Dunstan's church.

Whether the tale is fact, fiction, folk lore or a mixture of all three remains unclear. What is not in doubt is that it has provided the material for 6 films, 5 stage plays and musicals, 3 radio plays, a ballet and a song performed by Stanley Holloway.<sup>xxxi</sup> Further, in England the tale had become so notorious by the 1940s that even the appellation 'barber' had become besmirched. The writer E S Turner encouraged teachers to encourage their pupils only to use the term 'hairstylist'.<sup>xxxii</sup>

In the second part of this article we will look at the profession today and the attempts that have been made to regulate it over the years.

<sup>i</sup> Quoted by Cohen, J. DAILY MAIL, December 29 1998, p.46

<sup>ii</sup> Hicks, C. THE INDEPENDENT, October 28 1997, p.17

<sup>iii</sup> For example, in Queensland Australia: <http://www.activehandstraining.com.au/index.php?id=15> and <http://www.deir.qld.gov.au/workplace/subjects/hairstyling/guide/index.htm> and across the United States: <http://www.finallywhatyouneed.com/stateboards.html>

<sup>iv</sup> A survey by the Good Salon Guide in 1994, for example, demonstrated that 85% of clients were of this opinion.

<sup>v</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>vi</sup> A Short History of Hairstyling, *Women's Issues*, April 22<sup>nd</sup> 2008 accessed at <http://www.girlygang.net/articles/1145/1/A-Short-History-of-Hairstyling/Page1.html>

<sup>vii</sup> Drawn in part from <http://littlelonghairs.com/longhairs/content/history-hair>

<sup>viii</sup> 'Tu-aur'

<sup>ix</sup> Sherrow, V. (2006) *Encyclopedia of Hair* ( p.112 , p.163) Greenwood Press

<sup>x</sup> Ezekiel: Chapter 5, Verse 1

<sup>xi</sup> The members of the joint corporation were to be known as "Master" - thus 'Mister' - the title still used by British surgeons rather than 'Doctor'.

<sup>xii</sup> The Royal College of Surgeons did not receive its charter until 1800.

<sup>xiii</sup> See generally: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/52840/barber>

<sup>xiv</sup> patent US775134

<sup>xv</sup> <http://www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/images/I048/10316807.aspx>

<sup>xvi</sup> [http://www.loreal.com/\\_en/\\_ww/HTML/our-company/history-of-l-oreal.aspx](http://www.loreal.com/_en/_ww/HTML/our-company/history-of-l-oreal.aspx)

<sup>xvii</sup> An expression used in the industry to indicate that the vertical list of timed appointments in a salon's booking diary will be full

<sup>xviii</sup> a wig for men that was fashionable in the 17th and 18th centuries

<sup>xix</sup> <http://littlelonghairs.com/longhairs/content/history-hair>

<sup>xx</sup> A Short History of Hairstyling,(2008, April 22) *Women's Issues*, accessed at <http://www.girlygang.net/articles/1145/1/A-Short-History-of-Hairstyling/Page1.html>

<sup>xxi</sup> *Antoine* by Antoine, 1946, p.19. London, W. H. Allen

<sup>xxii</sup> Quoted in Cox,C. (1999) *Good Hair Days*, p.82. Quartet Books

<sup>xxiii</sup> Raymond, P. (1976) *The Outrageous Autobiography of Teasie Weasie* p.66. London: Wyndharn Publications. quoted in Cox, C. (1999) *Good Hair Days*, p.94. Quartet Books.

<sup>xxiv</sup> Vidal Sassoon began his career as one of Teasie-Weasie's staff and obviously aimed to outstrip his master. In 1956 Diana Dors had caused press hysteria by flying Teasie-Weasie to the USA for a £2,500 shampoo and set. Twelve years later Sassoon flew to the US to give a \$5,000 cut to Rosemary's Baby star Mia Farrow. <http://www.donnaletal.com/2009/07/mr-teasie-weasie.html>

<sup>xxv</sup> See: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0073692/> and <http://www.allmovie.com/work/44074>

<sup>xxvi</sup> The Bow Street Runners were London's first professional police force. They were founded in 1749 by the author Henry Fielding. They worked from the Bow Street magistrates' office.

<sup>xxvii</sup> drawn from: Haining,P. (2007) *Sweeney Todd: The Real Story of The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, Robson Books

<sup>xxviii</sup> <http://www.grooming-health.com/demon-barber.htm>

<sup>xix</sup> [http://www.oldbaileyonline.org/search.jsp?foo=bar&form=\\_divs&\\_divs\\_fulltext=Todd+1801&start=160](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org/search.jsp?foo=bar&form=_divs&_divs_fulltext=Todd+1801&start=160)

<sup>xxx</sup> 'The String of Pearls: A Romance' was published in eighteen weekly parts, in Lloyd, E. THE PEOPLE'S PERIODICAL AND FAMILY LIBRARY, issues 7-24. 21 November 1846 to 20 March 1847 [http://www.victorianlondon.org/mysteries/sweeney\\_todd-01.htm](http://www.victorianlondon.org/mysteries/sweeney_todd-01.htm)

<sup>xxxi</sup> a list at: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sweeney\\_Todd](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sweeney_Todd)

<sup>xxxii</sup> Turner, E.S. (1948) *Boys Will Be Boys: The Story of Sweeney Todd, Deadwood Dick, Sexton Blake, Billy Bunter, Dick Barton, Etc.*, Michael Joseph.